Digital Cooperation Organization

SHAPING THE DIGITAL ECONOMY THROUGH COOPERATION





THE DIGITAL SPACE ACCELERATORS

Digital Cooperation Organization

2024-2025

REPORT

#14
Roundtables

DSA in Numbers



340+
Participants

80
Number of female participants

50+
Meetings with experts

6315
Surveys Responses

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PREFACE

The Digital Space Accelerators (DSA) Final Report is a testament to the collective efforts of policymakers, industry leaders, and digital economy experts who are shaping the future of inclusive and sustainable digital transformation. As the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) continues to champion digital growth among its Member States, this report serves as a strategic guide for advancing regulatory harmonization, digital trade facilitation, AI ethics, and startup ecosystem development.

The DSA methodology was established to address the pressing challenges and opportunities of the digital economy, offering a framework that promotes collaborative policymaking, regulatory foresight, and cross-border digital integration. From combating misinformation and ensuring ethical AI deployment to accelerating SME participation in digital trade and fostering innovation-driven entrepreneurship, this report highlights actionable recommendations that will drive socioeconomic resilience and long-term digital prosperity.

This report would not have been possible without the insights, expertise, and collaboration of DCO Member States and global stakeholders. Their contributions have ensured that the DSA framework remains dynamic, adaptable, and impactful.

As we move forward, the DCO reaffirms its commitment to empowering nations, businesses, and individuals to harness the full potential of the digital economy while maintaining sustainability, equity, and global cooperation at the core of its initiatives.

We hope this report serves as both a reference and a catalyst for policymakers, innovators, and digital economy leaders, inspiring new collaborations, informed decision-making, and the continuous evolution of digital governance.

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01

FOREWORD



Deemah AlYahya

Secretary-General
The Digital Cooperation Organization

By equipping governments, businesses, and communities with the tools and frameworks to navigate digital disruption, we are ensuring a future where economic growth is not only rapid but also equitable and secure.

As the world undergoes rapid digital transformation, the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) remains steadfast in its mission to foster a more inclusive, sustainable, and innovation-driven digital economy. This Digital Space Accelerators (DSA) Final Report serves as both a testament and a roadmap—capturing the collective intelligence, collaboration, and forward-looking policies that will define the future of entrepreneurship, trade, and governance in the digital era.

With over 4,000 participants from across 20 countries and insights from more than 1,800 businesses, the DSA initiative stands as one of the most extensive multi-stakeholder digital consultations globally. The findings reflect a clear mandate: to reduce regulatory fragmentation, empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and embed ethical and human-centric principles into the design and deployment of emerging technologies.

The depth of engagement across such a broad constituency underscores the urgency of collective action and the value of digital cooperation in addressing shared challenges.

These initiatives are not solely about technology they are about building resilient societies. The DSAs have demonstrated how agile policymaking, inclusive dialogue, and knowledge exchange can enhance digital preparedness and foster trust. By equipping governments, businesses, and communities with the tools and frameworks to navigate digital disruption, we are ensuring a future where economic growth is not only rapid but also equitable and secure.

At the DCO, we firmly believe that the digital economy must work for everyone. Anchoring our work in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we strive to ensure that the digital transformation leaves no one behind. Digital inclusion, ethical governance, and cross-border cooperation are not optional—they are foundational pillars for achieving long-term stability and prosperity.

I extend my deepest appreciation to our Member States, partners, and all contributors who have made this pioneering work possible. Your dedication has not only strengthened the DCO's position as a global convener for digital cooperation but has also paved the way for an inclusive digital future—one defined by opportunity, resilience, and shared progress.



Alaa Abdulaal

Chief of Digital Economy Foresight

The Digital Cooperation Organization

The Digital Space Accelerators (DSA) represent a groundbreaking approach to shaping future-proof digital policies that promote economic resilience, regulatory alignment, and technological inclusivity.

The Digital Space Accelerators (DSA) represent a groundbreaking approach to shaping future-proof digital policies that promote economic resilience, regulatory alignment, and technological inclusivity. At the DCO Digital Economy Intelligence Unit, we are dedicated to anticipating global digital trends, identifying emerging challenges, and developing agile policy solutions that enable our Member States to thrive in an evolving digital landscape.

As we move forward, our focus will remain on scaling best practices, strengthening cross-border collaboration, and ensuring that digital policies are inclusive, future-ready, and innovation-driven. The insights presented here are not just recommendations; they are a call to action for all stakeholders to work together in shaping a digital economy that is more open, secure, and human-centric.

This report underscores the transformative potential of the DSA framework, particularly in AI ethics, misinformation mitigation, digital trade, and startup ecosystem development. It provides a clear roadmap for policymakers, regulators, and industry leaders to foster sustainable digital growth, bridge regulatory gaps, and unlock new opportunities for businesses and communities alike.

02

EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Digital Space Accelerators (DSAs) are an innovative mechanism bringing together thought leaders, subject matter experts, and decision-makers from governments, the private sector, international organizations, academia, and civil society. These accelerators provide a collaborative platform to address key challenges in the digital economy and offer policy recommendations for a sustainable and inclusive digital economy.

In 2024, the DSA emerged as a pivotal mechanism within the DCO's vision, focusing on challenges such as online misinformation, startup ecosystem development, digital trade barriers, AI governance, and electronic waste management. Through stakeholder engagement, global benchmarking, and policy innovation, these accelerators are shaping regulatory frameworks, fostering investment ecosystems, and aligning digital transformation strategies with global sustainability goals.

This report synthesizes insights, strategies, and impacts generated across the DSA Journey sections, highlighting key motivations, progress made, and actionable pathways for future growth. With global digital adoption accelerating, the need for cohesive frameworks to address strategy, policy, and regulatory diversity, promote innovation, and foster inclusivity has never been more critical.

Key Challenges and Solutions Addressed by DSAs

Cultural Values and Misinformation Mitigation

Misinformation is a pervasive global challenge, with 70% of users encountering false information weekly, particularly affecting youth and eroding societal trust[1]. DCO survey results indicate that 80.3% of respondents acknowledged that misinformation contributes to public uncertainty, further exacerbating trust deficits[3]. Moreover, research shows that false information spreads six times faster than accurate information on digital platforms[3]. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the dangers of misinformation, as false narratives about vaccine safety delayed adoption and undermined public health efforts[4]. Emotional triggers such as fear and anger significantly accelerate the spread of false narratives[5]. AI-driven content verification and narrative-based media literacy campaigns are central recommendations[6].

Model Startup Act

Startups face numerous hurdles, with over 50% failing within their first five years due to regulatory complexities, funding gaps, and limited market access[7]. Complex business registration processes and fragmented support systems further impede entrepreneurial growth. Streamlining business registration can reduce startup launch times by 60%, while fostering regional collaboration and establishing innovation hubs can boost startup survival rates by 30%[8].

Digital Trade

Digital trade remains constrained by significant barriers, with 60% of SMEs citing regulatory diversity as a major obstacle to cross-border operations (i.e., in data protection, different requirements across countries present the biggest challenge at 60%, followed by data security concerns (53.4%), complex procedures (53.2%), and high compliance costs) [9]. Data localization requirements and fragmented e-payment systems further exacerbate these challenges [10]. Harmonizing regulations, adopting Single Window Systems, and streamlining customs processes have been shown to significantly reduce compliance costs and times. For instance, New Zealand's Trade Single Window implementation led to a 20–50% reduction in import compliance costs and a 50% reduction in import compliance times. Additionally, reducing customs clearance times can increase SME participation in cross-border trade, as a one-day delay decreases the likelihood of SME exports by 3.5% [11, 12].

Ethical AI

AI regulation is a growing concern, with 40% of organizations expressing concerns about algorithmic bias and a lack of transparency in AI systems [13]. Additionally, disparities in AI readiness among DCO Member States further compound the challenge, as 44% remain in the initial stages of AI policy development, resulting in governance gaps that exacerbate risks associated with the use of the technology. Moreover, domain-specific challenges emerge in high-stakes sectors. For instance, in healthcare, AI-powered diagnostics risk misdiagnosis without human oversight. In finance, AI-driven credit scoring models have disproportionately excluded underprivileged groups. In law enforcement, AI-based surveillance tools may exacerbate discriminatory profiling. As such, the Ethical AI DSA was initiated to address these challenges by providing solutions that emphasize an ethical human rights-driven approach to AI governance.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

Global e-waste volumes are projected to exceed 82 million tons by 2030, with less than 20% currently recycled [14]. This disparity has profound environmental and public health implications, as e-waste contains hazardous materials like mercury and cadmium, which can contaminate soil and water if improperly managed [15]. Effective e-waste management, including circular economy frameworks and smart tracking technologies, can increase recycling rates by 25% and reduce reliance on primary resource extraction[16–20]. The Cross-Border E-Waste Management leverages circular economy principles and digital tracking solutions to drive sustainable e-waste management, aligning with regional frameworks like the GCC's E-Cycle-in-Action and promoting Public Private Partnerships [21]. Repurposing second-hand devices can also bridge the digital divide, fostering inclusion and advancing global environmental goals. More than 5 billion mobile phones were thrown away in 2022, yet 40% of the low-income population worldwide could not afford basic ICT products and services.

The findings and recommendations in this report align with international best practices, referencing reports from the WTO, OECD, UNDP, and World Economic Forum, while ensuring local adaptability for DCO Member States.

Recommendations for Member States

Cultural Values and Misinformation Mitigation

Governments may incorporate culturally adapted content verification strategies, emphasizing empathy-driven corrections and narrative-based fact-checking techniques. Multilingual verification methods and community-trusted content ecosystems should be developed to counter misinformation effectively across diverse populations. Support for local news agencies and multilingual resources is critical to strengthening community-trusted information ecosystems[22–24].

Model Startup Act

Streamlined regulatory frameworks, access to markets, capacity building, access to funding, financial incentives, and innovation hubs are essential to empowering startups. Member States are encouraged to reduce regulatory barriers like startup registration times and provide targeted funding mechanisms to promote entrepreneurial growth. Regional collaboration can support cross-border scalability and foster a thriving startup ecosystem[25–26].

Digital Trade

To address regulatory diversity, Member States should embrace peer learning and technical assistance to adopt informed frameworks in areas like AI and cybersecurity while fostering transparent dialogue to align objectives on contentious issues such as data localization. By harmonizing standards in overlapping domains like e-payments and paperless trade, they can simplify cross-border compliance and accelerate digital integration. Ultimately, leading by example through cooperative solutions will demonstrate how diverse nations can turn regulatory challenges into global benchmarks for inclusive, sustainable digital growth [11].

Ethical AI

Member States endorsed the DCO Principles for Ethical AI, which provide a shared foundation for a human rights-based approach to AI governance. While the DCO AI Ethics Evaluator serves as a supportive tool to integrate ethical considerations into the design, development, and deployment of AI systems, the primary objective remains the widespread adoption of these principles to ensure consistent ethical standards across the DCO ecosystem [25-33].

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

E-waste management is hindered by various challenges, including limited public awareness of existing policies, inconsistent enforcement mechanisms, and the prevalence of informal recycling methods that pose serious environmental and health risks. To address the growing challenge of e-waste, Member States should adopt circular economy frameworks and deploy smart tracking technologies to improve recycling rates. Engaging public-private partnerships can support sustainable waste management solutions, while education campaigns can raise awareness and drive behavioral change to reduce environmental impacts [21].

"The future of digital transformation hinges on bold action, sustainable innovation, and an unwavering commitment to environmental and social responsibility."



03

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Context and Purpose

In an increasingly interconnected world, digital transformation presents both challenges and opportunities that require global cooperation. The Digital Space Accelerators (DSAs) serve as a collaborative mechanism for policymakers, private sector leaders, and technology experts to co-create strategies that enhance economic resilience, regulatory alignment, and digital trade facilitation. Strengthening cross-border collaboration in AI governance, cybersecurity, misinformation mitigation, and digital inclusion is critical to shaping a sustainable and inclusive digital future.

With rapid advancements in technology and increasing global interconnectivity, Member States face a mix of unprecedented opportunities and challenges. From combating online misinformation to advancing digital trade, empowering startups, and managing e-waste, the DSAs address critical areas that are shaping the future of digital transformation, which is essential for the growth of the digital economy[34].

The purpose of the DSA Journeys is to provide actionable frameworks tailored to the unique needs of DCO Member States. By aligning with global development goals and prioritizing local relevance, the DSAs aim to create a cohesive digital ecosystem that supports economic growth, societal well-being, and environmental sustainability.



Methodology for DSA Journeys

The development of DSA Journeys followed a structured, multi-phase methodology to ensure inclusivity, collaboration, and data-driven decision-making:

Research and Analysis

- Comprehensive desk research was conducted, benchmarking global standards and studying successful initiatives such as Tunisia's Startup Act and Singapore's digital literacy programs. The analysis focused on identifying best practices and tailoring them to the contexts of DCO Member States.

Stakeholder Engagement

Expert Contributions:

Consulting experts provided deep technical and thematic expertise, ensuring the findings were accurate, relevant, and aligned with global best practices.

Collaborative Workshops:

Stakeholders from governments, private sector, and civil society contributed insights through roundtables and surveys, fostering inclusive policymaking.

Framework Co-Creation

- Collaborative efforts were undertaken to design scalable and actionable solutions. Each DSA framework integrates international benchmarks while addressing local challenges to ensure practical applicability.

Implementation Pilots

- Test frameworks in pilot Member States to validate their effectiveness and scalability.
- Incorporate learnings from pilot implementations to enhance DSA strategies and recommendations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Key performance indicators (KPIs) were developed to track progress and refine initiatives over time, enabling continuous improvement of the DSAs' impact.



01

Research and Analysis

60% of SMEs cite regulatory diversity as a major obstacle to cross-border operations.

02

Stakeholder Engagement

Multiple roundtables highlighted AI governance as a key priority

03

Framework Co-Creation

Morocco's Co-Creation Policy Hackathon and Ethical AI framework integrating human rights considerations.

04

Implementation Pilots

Circular economy e-waste initiative in two Member States.

05

Monitoring and Evaluation

Bar charts and dashboards tracking KPIs like recycling rates or misinformation resilience.



2024-25

August, 2024

Bangkok Roundtable
Strategies for inclusive digital literacy and equitable technology adoption to combat online misinformation

September, 2024

Geneva Roundtable
Digital Trade discussions on SME challenges and regulatory alignment.

October, 2024

Singapore Roundtable
Explored regional best practices for effective e-waste management, ethical AI governance, and tackling online misinformation.

September, 2024

Riyadh Roundtable
Ethical AI governance and misinformation resilience were prioritized.

November, 2024

Cape Town Roundtable
Focused on startup scalability, funding mechanisms, and regional innovation corridors.

August, 2024

Release of Startup Act Benchmark Report
Highlighted case studies of successful Startup Act implementations and identified the key pillars and provisions that have driven the growth of dynamic startup ecosystems. It offers valuable examples of how legal frameworks can effectively support and foster startup ventures. The insights gathered provide practical recommendations and best practices to assist in the creation or refinement of Startup Acts to foster entrepreneurial growth across Member States.

November, 2024

GCC Roundtable
Convened public, private, and social sector stakeholders in various dedicated sessions aimed at addressing the startup ecosystem, misinformation mitigation, and e-waste management practices.

December, 2024

IGF Roundtable
Explored e-waste management practices as well as strategies for embedding ethical principles in AI systems, featuring the DCO AI Ethics Evaluator as a key tool.

December, 2024

London Roundtable
Convened public, private, and social sector stakeholders from across the United Kingdom to address critical challenges in e-waste management, with a primary focus on identifying enablers to support effective and sustainable e-waste management systems.

December, 2024

Morocco Policy Co-Creation Hackathon
Engaged stakeholders to co-design startup-friendly policies, focusing on regulatory streamlining, capacity building, and fostering innovation to support entrepreneurial growth in the region. A white paper was produced capturing key insights and outcomes.

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Morocco Policy Co-Creation Hackathon
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January, 2025

Geneva Roundtable
Brought together DCO Member State ambassadors, international organizations, and trade experts to explore how to strengthen cross-border digital trade by reducing regulatory fragmentation and fostering information-sharing among Member States.

November 2025

Nigeria Roundtable
Brought together stakeholders from policymaking bodies, the private sector, international organizations, and civil society to examine how cultural values can shape effective responses to misinformation.

04

CULTURAL VALUES AND **MISINFORMATION MITIGATION**



CULTURAL VALUES AND MISINFORMATION MITIGATION

With misinformation spreading faster than factual content online, societies face trust deficits and distorted public discourse[35]. The Cultural Values and Misinformation Mitigation DSA emphasizes digital literacy, multi-stakeholder cooperation, and transparent content governance across diverse cultures. Empowering citizens to distinguish fact from fiction fosters stable, informed societies, which are crucial for sustainable development within different cultural contexts. For an in-depth discussion on this topic, we encourage readers to listen to the dedicated podcast episode recorded during the roundtable. This episode features key insights from expert panelists on misinformation mitigation strategies.

Framing the Challenge

Misinformation—false or misleading information shared regardless of intent—has become a widespread challenge in digital spaces. Its impact on decision-making, public trust, and information credibility necessitates robust verification strategies and cross-sector collaboration. Misinformation has emerged as one of the key challenges of the digital age, a pervasive issue that disrupts trust, fractures societies, and undermines the foundations of governance. Social media platforms, news aggregators, and streaming services have inadvertently become vehicles for misinformation, amplifying its reach and impact[1–3].

The consequences of misinformation are wide-ranging, spanning public health, politics, and economic stability. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation about vaccine safety delayed adoption, jeopardizing global recovery efforts[4]. In political contexts, online misinformation may contribute to the distortion of electoral electoral processes by polarizing public opinion and sowing distrust in institutions. Economically, misinformation has tarnished corporate reputations, leading to financial losses and regulatory scrutiny.

To that effect, a large-scale survey conducted by DCO across 20 countries with responses from over 4,000 participants revealed that misinformation is a significant concern across all demographics[2]. The findings highlight varying levels of trust in news sources, the role of social media in spreading false information, and the need for localized fact-checking interventions The survey gathered views from diverse regions, and examined the levels of trust individuals place in various information sources, such as government entities, religious leaders, traditional media, social media platforms, and peer networks. Participants across age groups were surveyed to identify generational divides in media consumption habits, digital literacy, and tendencies to verify information. The survey explored the emotional impact of misinformation, communication preferences, and behavioral trends. Key survey findings demonstrate that:

Trust Dynamics:

High-power-distance societies, exhibit strong trust in authoritative sources like government and religious leaders. Conversely, low-power-distance cultures rely more on peer-reviewed research and decentralized information.

Generational Differences:

Younger, digitally adept individuals are more likely to verify information online, whereas older generations tend to trust traditional media and oral communication.

Emotional Triggers:

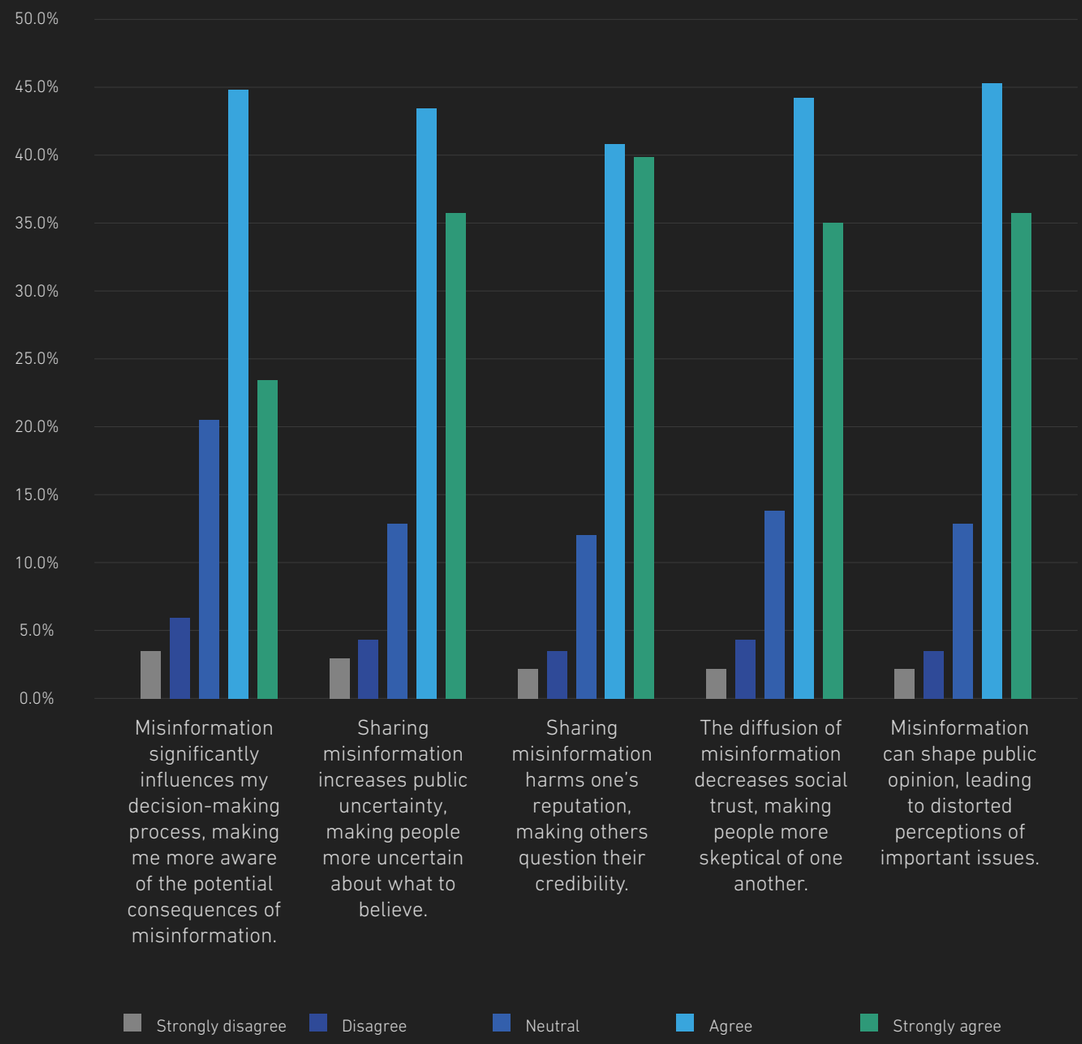
Fear and anger were identified as significant accelerators of misinformation spread, with respondents noting that emotionally charged content is more likely to be shared without verification.

Preferred Communication Styles:

Narrative-driven and culturally resonant messages were found to be more effective in addressing misinformation in high-context societies like Qatar compared to data-heavy, analytical approaches preferred in low-context cultures such as the U.S.

Understanding these dynamics underscores the importance of designing misinformation strategies that align with cultural values, generational behaviors, and trust mechanisms. A holistic approach integrating education, technology, and regulation tailored to specific societal contexts is essential to build resilience against misinformation while fostering informed decision-making and social trust.

Figure 1: Chart of perception of the Consequences of Misinformation



Roundtable Insights

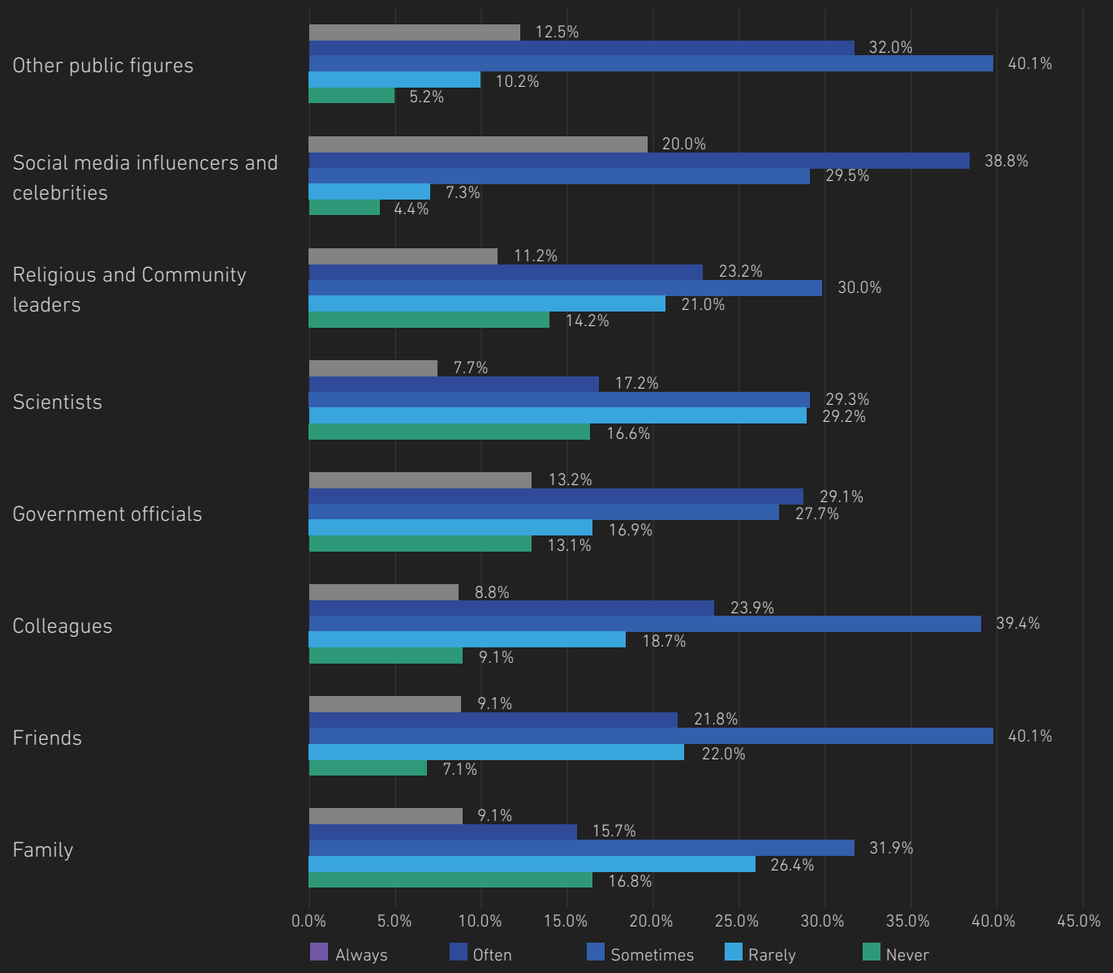
The Cultural Values and Misinformation Mitigation DSA Roundtables convened policymakers, researchers, media professionals, NGOs, international organizations, fact-checkers, and civil society, including youth leaders, to explore the dynamics of misinformation. Insights incorporated into this section stem from multiple roundtables, including sessions held in Riyadh, Singapore, , Bangkok, and Abuja providing a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, technological, and societal factors influencing misinformation[40–42]. The discussions offered deep insights into cultural, technological, and societal dimensions of this global issue.

Key Insights from Discussions

1. Cultural Contexts and Drivers of Misinformation:

Misinformation operates differently across cultures, with societal norms and values influencing its spread and acceptance. In collectivist societies, individuals may refrain from questioning narratives endorsed by authority figures, allowing false information to gain unchallenged traction. Offline gatherings—such as family sessions or community events—can further amplify rumors when trusted community members inadvertently share inaccurate content. Conversely, individualist cultures often experience

Figure 2: Chart of encountering false information from different sources



fragmented information ecosystems, where echo chambers reinforce existing biases. Examples include misinformation about election outcomes in the US and Europe, which exploited social divisions and cultural narratives to sow discord.

2. Role of Technology in Misinformation:

Technology plays a dual role in the misinformation landscape. On the other hand, it has allowed false narratives to gain significant visibility. On the other hand, technological tools, such as AI-driven content verification systems, offer powerful solutions for misinformation detection. Reverse image searches and natural language processing algorithms can identify manipulated content and fact-check claims at scale. Additionally, the DCO's proposed technology-centered tool outlines requirements for a misinformation correction mechanism that includes automated bots designed to generate culturally tailored corrections. These bots leverage metadata from fact-checking organizations to issue timely and context-sensitive interventions. However, participants emphasized the need for human oversight to ensure that these tools consider cultural and contextual nuances, including dialectical variations for older or rural populations.

3. Impacts on Public Trust and Governance:

Misinformation erodes trust in institutions and undermines public governance. Participants highlighted instances where misinformation delayed critical crisis responses, such as evacuation efforts during natural disasters, due to self-censorship among individuals who, overwhelmed by conflicting narratives, may refrain from following evacuation efforts by authorities. In the context of public health, false claims about diseases or treatments have jeopardized public safety, while political misinformation has disrupted electoral processes, undermining social norms. These examples underscore the urgent need for robust frameworks to counteract misinformation's societal impacts. Additionally, a lack of direct engagement with social media platform owners was noted as a key gap, prompting the recommendation to establish strong channels of communication and protocols for swift, coordinated responses to viral falsehoods.

> *"To understand misinformation, we must explore the ecosystems that enable its creation and spread."*



Development Journey of the Cultural Values and Misinformation Framework

The Cultural Values and Misinformation Framework was developed through a structured and multi-phase approach integrating research, data collection, expert engagement, and stakeholder collaboration. Below is a streamlined infographic journey design that highlights the key milestones in the framework's development.

1. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, focusing on existing theories, studies, and cultural values models. and their impact on perceptions and actions. The findings from this thorough review were a critical step in identifying high-level predictions regarding how online misinformation is shaped within different cultural contexts.

2. A survey was carried out by the General Secretariat to assess the impact of cultural values on the perception of online misinformation across diverse cultures. Over 4,000 participants from 20 countries contributed valuable data on the implications of cultural values in shaping online misinformation.

3. The General Secretariat also completed an analysis of nine (9) cultural models, including Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, Hall's Cultural Context Model, and the GLOBE Model, which provided valuable insights into cultural variations. These models detailed different sets of cultural values, such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and leadership approaches, maintaining practical relevance for tackling misinformation in diverse cultural contexts.

4. A Case Study Report was published, synthesizing the project's findings on a set of culture values, and their impacts on online misinformation. This report cross-referenced insights from the literature review and survey results.

5. The General Secretariat prepared a Product Requirements Document (PROD), outlining how digital technology tools can address online misinformation while considering societal cultural values. The document has been shared as part of the appendix.

6. The General Secretariat organized three (3) Global Digital Space Accelerator (DSA) Roundtables: Bangkok on August 2024, Singapore on October 2024, and Riyadh on December 2024, and Abuja on November 2025 These roundtables were instrumental in incorporating valuable input for the development of the DCO Cultural Values and Misinformation Framework.

7. The Cultural Values and Misinformation Framework was developed based on insights gathered from the Roundtables, the survey, the Case Study, and the PROD.

8. The General Secretariat organized eight (8) virtual sessions with the National Focal Points nominated by Member States and Observers, to gather feedback on the Framework and associated documents.

9. A dedicated virtual session with a delegation from the State of Kuwait was held on November 21 to receive additional feedback, which was incorporated into the finalization of the Framework and associated documents.

Phase 4

Finalization & Rollout (Completion)

- **Framework Development** – Integrated insights from roundtables, survey, case study, and PROD into the final Cultural Values and Misinformation Framework.
- **Final Refinements & Publication** – Implemented stakeholder feedback, ensuring the framework is robust, adaptable, and culturally inclusive.

Phase 3

Stakeholder Engagement (Refinement & Validation)

- **Global Roundtables (DSA Events)** – Held in Bangkok (Aug 2024), Singapore (Oct 2024), and Riyadh (Dec 2024) and Abuja (Nov 2025) to gather expert input.
- **Virtual Consultations with National Focal Points** – Engaged DCO Member States and Observers in eight virtual sessions to refine the framework.
- **Dedicated Session with Kuwait Delegation (Nov 21, 2024)** – Collected specific national feedback for final refinements.

Phase 2

Synthesis & Insights (Building the Framework)

- **Case Study Report** – Cross-referenced findings from literature, surveys, and cultural models to understand misinformation patterns.
- **Product Requirements Document (PROD)** – Defined digital technology solutions tailored to cultural values for misinformation mitigation.

Phase 1

Research & Data Collection (Foundation)

- **Literature Review** – Examined theories, studies, and cultural models to understand how cultural values shape misinformation.
- **Global Survey** – Conducted across 20 countries with over 4,000 participants to assess cultural perceptions of online misinformation.
- **Cultural Models Analysis** – Studied 9 models, including Hofstede's Dimensions, Hall's Context Model, and GLOBE, to identify key cultural influences.

Key Outcomes

The DCO identified transformative initiatives to address misinformation through cultural adaptation, technological innovation, and global partnerships.

1. Cultural Values and Misinformation Framework

The Cultural Values and Misinformation Framework is a comprehensive, culturally sensitive approach designed to combat the pervasive issue of online misinformation [5]. Grounded in interdisciplinary research, global surveys, and stakeholder consultations, the framework addresses the ways cultural norms, trust dynamics, and communication styles influence how misinformation spreads and is perceived. It provides actionable strategies tailored to diverse societies, emphasizing cultural relevance, ethical technology use, and collaborative policymaking. Below are the key pillars that define the framework:

Cultural Values Setting:

This pillar focuses on understanding how cultural dimensions, such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and communication preferences, shape trust in information sources. By aligning messaging with cultural norms and leveraging trusted community figures, interventions can resonate more deeply and build credibility within local contexts.

Misinformation Risk Assessment:

Societal vulnerabilities to misinformation often stem from emotional triggers, uncertainty avoidance, and cultural traditions. This pillar highlights the importance of targeted strategies to mitigate these risks, such as embedding corrective messaging in familiar cultural practices and reducing emotional responses through neutral, evidence-based content.

Strategies and Policy Development:

Effective policy frameworks require balancing global standards with regional cultural sensitivities. This pillar emphasizes co-creating policies with community input, adapting international strategies to local contexts, and ensuring regulations respect cultural nuances while addressing harmful misinformation.

Culturally Informed Community Interventions:

Empowering communities to actively participate in combating misinformation is central to this pillar. By strengthening local trust networks, promoting group accountability, and engaging through workshops or mobile apps, communities can collectively verify and disseminate accurate information.

Technology Integration and Trust:

Advanced digital tools, such as AI-powered fact-checkers, must be culturally adaptable and transparent to gain public trust. This pillar stresses designing tools that align with local languages and cultural norms while incorporating ethical standards to prevent algorithmic biases.

Cultural Empowerment Through Media Literacy:

Enhancing media literacy equips individuals to critically assess and verify information. This pillar promotes integrating cultural narratives into education, developing critical thinking skills, and fostering informed decision-making to reduce susceptibility to falsehoods.

Cultural Values-Based Resources

Harnessing traditional knowledge and community practices can strengthen misinformation strategies. This pillar involves using indigenous expertise for verification, creating culturally relevant educational tools, and fostering collective verification rituals that reinforce shared responsibility.

This framework serves as a dynamic tool, evolving with cultural and technological shifts to effectively address misinformation while fostering trust and resilience in digital ecosystems.

2. Technology-Based Solutions

Technology serves as a cornerstone in combating misinformation[22]. AI-powered tools are essential for identifying and managing false content:

Content Verification Tools:

Advanced algorithms can detect manipulated media, including deepfakes and doctored images, while natural language processing systems analyze text for factual accuracy.

Systems for Real-Time Monitoring

AI-enabled data tracking systems allow for the continuous monitoring of misinformation flows, offering actionable insights that help organizations respond promptly. Direct partnerships with social media platform owners should be established to expedite the removal or flagging of widely circulating falsehoods

Proposed Misinformation Correction Tool:

Developed by the DCO, this tool leverages AI-driven bots to generate culturally tailored corrections to misinformation. Member States are encouraged to adopt this tool to deliver timely and context-sensitive interventions while rebuilding trust in digital ecosystems[23, 24].

3. International Knowledge Exchange Platforms

Global collaboration is essential for addressing misinformation effectively. Insights from the Riyadh, Singapore, and Bangkok roundtables underscored the need for a centralized platform for sharing tools, strategies, and case studies to enhance the capacity of all stakeholders:

Best Practices Repository:

A shared repository includes examples such as Finland's national media literacy programs and Singapore's AI-driven misinformation detection systems.

Cross-Border Collaboration:

Member States can form coalitions to pool resources and expertise, fostering unified approaches to combating misinformation. Within these coalitions, specialized discussions about influencer responsibility and offline rumor management can be highlighted to match local contexts.

4. Youth-Focused Digital Literacy Campaigns

Young people are disproportionately affected by misinformation due to their reliance on social media. Insights from the Singapore roundtable highlighted the necessity of equipping youth with digital literacy skills tailored to their cultural and technological realities. Targeted digital literacy campaigns can empower youth to critically evaluate the information they consume, ensuring they are better prepared to navigate the complexities of misinformation.

Educational Programs:

Schools and universities can integrate curricula that teach critical thinking and fact-checking skills. Outreach strategies for older learners, such as adult education workshops, can bridge generational gaps.

Influencer Partnerships:

Collaborating with social media influencers ensures that misinformation awareness campaigns reach younger audiences in relatable and engaging ways. Authorities are also encouraged to partner with local religious or community leaders who have credibility among older demographics.

"From cultural adaptation to technological innovation—combating misinformation requires a multifaceted, global response."

Recommendations for Member States

Cultural Values Setting

Understanding cultural dynamics, such as power distance and communication preferences, is essential for tailoring misinformation strategies. In high-power-distance societies, trust in hierarchical authorities like governments or religious leaders shapes how information is received, whereas in low-power-distance cultures, decentralized sources like academic research hold greater influence.

Misinformation Risk Assessment

Recognizing emotional triggers and cultural traditions that influence responses to misinformation can help mitigate risks. High-uncertainty-avoidance cultures may demand stricter regulatory measures, while low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures may favor flexible strategies.

Strategies and Policy Development

Policies should balance global standards with local cultural norms, ensuring both adaptability and effectiveness. Co-creating regulations with community input enhances acceptance.

Culturally Informed Community Interventions

Leveraging trusted community networks and encouraging collective accountability can strengthen resilience against misinformation.

Technology Integration and Trust

Culturally adaptable AI tools and ethical technology use are key to addressing misinformation effectively. Member States are encouraged to adopt the DCO's Proposed Misinformation Correction Mechanism to deliver timely, culturally tailored interventions against misinformation and enhance trust in digital ecosystems [23].

Cultural Empowerment Through Media Literacy

Empowering individuals with media literacy enhances their ability to critically evaluate information and reduces susceptibility to falsehoods.

Cultural Values-Based Resources

Harnessing traditional knowledge and cultural tools can enhance misinformation mitigation efforts by grounding them in community identity.

Pillars	Dimensions	Actions	Stakeholders
1.Cultural values setting	Trust dynamics	Establish culturally aligned trust-building campaigns.	Community leaders, influencers, civil society organizations, local media outlets
	Perception of authority	Leverage respected figures for fact-check dissemination.	Religious authorities, government spokespersons, media personalities
	Communication preferences	Adapt message formats to cultural preferences.	Graphic designers, content creators, social media platforms
2.Misinformation risk assessment	Uncertainty avoidance	Provide clear, transparent corrective mechanisms.	Fact-checking organizations, public institutions, IT developers
		Develop user-friendly guides on misinformation correction tools.	NGOs, digital literacy trainers, content strategists
	Emotional triggers	Minimize emotional manipulation in corrective content.	Psychologists, content creators, social media moderators
		Develop campaigns to reduce emotional reactions to misinformation.	Behavioral scientists, mental health professionals, community groups
	Cultural traditions	Embed corrections in traditional storytelling or cultural formats.	Folklore experts, local artists, community elders
		Use traditional festivals or events to promote fact-checking.	Event organizers, cultural committees, local governments

Pillars	Dimensions	Actions	Stakeholders
3.Strategies and policy development	Policy co-creation	Involve local communities in policy drafting.	Local governments, civil society organizations, grassroots activists
		Host focus groups with diverse stakeholders for inclusive policy creation.	Policy experts, community representatives, academic researchers
	Global versus local alignment	Customize global strategies to fit local contexts.	International organizations, local governments, think tanks
		Facilitate workshops to adapt international frameworks locally.	NGOs, local policymakers, cultural experts
	Regulatory frameworks	Implement culturally sensitive regulatory measures.	Lawmakers, human rights organizations, cultural advisors
		Conduct public consultations to refine regulatory approaches.	Legal experts, advocacy groups, citizens
4. Culturally informed community interventions	Community trust networks	Strengthen local misinformation monitoring systems.	Community volunteers, local NGOs, social media analysts
		Establish regional fact-checking centers.	Media organizations, academic institutions, local governments
	Group accountability	Promote collective fact-checking initiatives.	Community leaders, youth organizations, educational institutions
		Create community pledges to promote factual information.	Religious groups, cultural associations, social clubs
	Engagement practices	Design interactive community workshops.	Educators, workshop facilitators, civic engagement organizations
		Develop mobile apps for community-driven misinformation reporting.	Tech developers, local app users, municipalities

Pillars	Dimensions	Actions	Stakeholders
5.Technology integration and trust	Cultural adaptability of tools	Localize digital tools for diverse cultures.	Software developers, designers, cultural consultants
		Test tools with diverse user groups to ensure usability.	Beta testers, local communities, tech companies
	Trust in digital solutions	Promote transparency in algorithm use.	Data scientists, regulators, advocacy groups
		Publish reports on the effectiveness of digital tools.	Research institutions, tech firms, media outlets
	Ethical use of AI	Ensure AI respects cultural boundaries.	AI ethics boards, cultural researchers, developers
		Conduct regular audits of AI systems.	Independent auditors, tech firms, policymakers
6. Cultural empowerment through media literacy	Cultural narratives	Integrate cultural stories into media literacy programs.	Teachers, media literacy trainers, local authors
		Develop culturally relevant video tutorials on misinformation.	Videographers, educators, social media platforms
	Critical thinking skills	Offer culturally sensitive critical thinking exercises.	Educational institutions, cognitive scientists, curriculum developers
		Conduct school-based critical thinking competitions.	Schools, student organizations, academic mentors
	Informed decision-making	Empower individuals with localized decision-making frameworks.	Local NGOs, government agencies, training providers
		Distribute decision-making guides in local languages.	Translators, publishers, community leaders

Pillars	Dimensions	Actions	Stakeholders
7.Cultural Values-Based Resources	Traditional knowledge	Incorporate indigenous knowledge in content verification.	Indigenous leaders, historians, educators
		Archive traditional knowledge for reference in verification efforts.	Librarians, archivists, cultural heritage organizations
	Cultural tools	Develop region-specific misinformation detection kits.	Product designers, cultural experts, tech companies
		Create educational games based on cultural contexts.	Game developers, teachers, cultural organizations
	Community practices	Foster collective verification rules.	Religious groups, community elders, event organizers
		Encourage the sharing of best practices through local networks.	Community groups, NGOs, social workers

Lessons Learned

Key takeaways from the DSA emphasize the importance of tailored approaches, technological solutions, and collaborative efforts. Through the implementation of strategic interventions, this initiative not only fosters digital inclusion but also strengthens the global response to misinformation by ensuring verified content, promoting digital literacy, and enhancing cross-sector collaboration. These insights were drawn from multiple roundtables, including those held in Riyadh, Singapore, and Bangkok, which highlighted the need for culturally sensitive interventions, cross-border partnerships, and the integration of advanced technological tools to address misinformation effectively.

1. Misinformation Requires Contextual Solutions

Misinformation dynamics vary across cultural contexts, influenced by trust in institutions, media consumption habits, and community-driven verification practices. Addressing misinformation effectively requires localized approaches that align with regional cultural values and communication patterns. For example, misinformation about health crises requires interventions that consider local healthcare systems and cultural attitudes toward medicine. Offline rumor chains and generational gaps must be included in risk assessments, ensuring that older demographics are not overlooked.

2. Technology is a Tool, Not a Panacea

AI tools are critical for scaling efforts but must be paired with human oversight to ensure cultural and contextual relevance. This human-AI collaboration enhances the accuracy and impact of interventions. Moreover, direct collaboration with platform owners can exponentially enhance detection and takedown efforts.

"Building resilient societies begins with equipping citizens to identify, question, and resist false narratives."

3. Collaboration is Essential

Unified efforts across governments, media platforms, and civil society enhance the reach and effectiveness of mitigation strategies. Global challenges require global solutions, emphasizing the importance of cross-border partnerships. Local influencers—online and in community networks—play an equally pivotal role.

"Misinformation is a global challenge—but with collective responsibility, it is also a solvable one ."



Stakeholders Engaged

- **Daniel McFarlane**
  Director, The Centre of Digital Technology and Society
- **David Schiller**
  Chief Sales Officer, Qeedio
- **Felix Cheung**
  CEO, ATech Solution Limited
- **Jeff Hu**
  Founder & CEO, Turing Space Inc.
- **Jidapa Vattanapakdee**
  Managing Director, Digital Dialogue
- **Kasititorn Pooparadai**
  Senior Executive Vice President, Digital Economy Promotion Agency
- **Kawin Boonyapredee**
  Co-Founder and Advisory Board, Singapore and Thailand CIO Network
- **Norapat Phaonimmongkol**
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  Riyadh - GCC
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  Riyadh - GCC
- **Noora AlSharif**
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  Riyadh - GCC
- **Ameera Al Mutairi**
  Riyadh - GCC
- **Badria Al Amria**
  Riyadh - GCC
- **Mohammed Alwahaibi**
  Riyadh - GCC
- **Mubarak Alrajhi**
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- **Maher Al Saleh**
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- **Saud Abu saq**
  Riyadh - GCC
- **Ibrahim Al Fawzan**
  Riyadh - GCC
- **Alhanouf Al Babtin**
  Riyadh - GCC
- **Maha Alsharhan**
  Riyadh - GCC

** The names of stakeholders are non-exhaustive and only includes those who have explicitly agreed to have their names shared*



05

MODEL
STARTUP ACT

MODEL STARTUP ACT

Startups and MSMEs form the backbone of economies but often lack coherent frameworks linking growth to sustainability. The DCO Model Startup Act aligns incentives, regulatory simplicity, and capacity-building with SDGs, enabling entrepreneurs to create sustainable and socially beneficial innovations, tapping into global impact investor networks.

Framing the Challenge

Startups are at the heart of innovation, driving economic resilience and fostering job creation in an increasingly competitive global economy. However, startups often face significant barriers, including complex regulatory frameworks, limited access to funding, and challenges in scaling internationally. To address these issues, the DCO Model Startup Act was conceived as a comprehensive legal framework aimed at empowering startups through simplified regulations, targeted incentives, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [43].

The startup landscape is shaped by diverse cultural, economic, and legal contexts. In many regions, there is a need for harmonized policies that not only support entrepreneurial ventures but also integrate global sustainability objectives. Many emerging economies face unique regulatory and infrastructural challenges that require tailored policy interventions to ensure digital transformation benefits all stakeholders equitably. Startups operating in fragmented ecosystems face additional challenges, such as navigating cross-border legalities, accessing skilled labor, and competing for limited venture capital in nascent markets.

Moreover, talent acquisition and advanced digital skills shortages frequently hinder startup growth—particularly in emerging markets. Youth and underserved demographics often lack access to specialized training or mentorship. Gender gaps in funding and leadership further limit the potential of women-led ventures. Diaspora engagement also remains an underexplored avenue for injecting expertise and capital into the local ecosystem.

The development of the Model Startup Act is a response to these challenges, integrating insights from stakeholders and benchmarking studies to build a framework that promotes entrepreneurship, fosters innovation, and ensures sustainability[8]. By addressing these systemic barriers, the Act seeks to position startups as catalysts for transformative change, unlocking their potential to drive economic diversification and regional cooperation.





Kingdom of Bahrain

Focus Area

Inclusive and Sustainable growth

Incentives

Regulatory Sandbox

Established by the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) in 2017, this initiative allows FinTech companies to test innovative models in a controlled environment, covering areas like Open Banking, Crypto- assets, and Robo-Advisory.

Solar Financing Scheme

Launched in 2020 by Tamkeen and local banks, this scheme helps businesses acquire solar panels, reducing energy costs through a Build-Own - Operate - Maintain (BOOM) model under a 20-year contract.

Golden License Initiative

A national program offering significant benefits to companies employing over 500 Bahrainis or investing more than $50 million, aimed at boosting R&D in industries like steel and aluminum.

Key Initiatives

Export Bahrain promoting international market access and job creation.

Targeted SDGs Related to the Initiatives

SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)
SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure)
SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Impact

Potential creation of 24 million jobs globally by 2030 (ILO estimate). Focus on entrepreneurship, innovation, and strategic partnerships.



Regulatory Sandbox
covering areas like Open Banking, Crypto- assets, and Robo-Advisory.

Golden License Initiative
benefits to companies employing over 500 Bahrainis or investing more than $50 million



24 Million jobs



United Arab Emirates

Focus Area | National Green Agenda Alignment

Incentives

Corporate Green Tax Benefits
Green building taxation, Renewable resource tax breaks, Environmental compliance tax credits.

Funding
Funding for companies to implement water efficiency initiatives (Water Efficiency Awards and Water Efficiency Fund).

Telemedicine and Health Tech Grants

National Food Security Strategy 2051
Incentives include funding for research and development in sustainable agriculture; subsidies: Farmers receive a 50% subsidy on seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides.

Women-owned Businesses
Reduced fees for businesses owned and operated by women.

Key Initiatives
Align with the national "Green Agenda" for environmental sustainability.

Targeted SDGs Related to the Initiatives
SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

Impact
16% increase in green tech startups globally from 2019 to 2022 (GEM report). Encourages development of eco-friendly solutions.

Green Tax
Benefits

Telemedicine
Grants

Health Tech
Grants

50% Subsidy
on seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides

Green Agenda

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

16% Increase
in greentech startups



The Republic of Singapore

Focus Area | Building Sustainability Capabilities

Incentives

Enhanced R&D Deduction
Provides up to a 400% tax deduction on the first SGD 400,000 of qualifying R&D expenditures incurred from YAS 2024 to 2026, with a 250% deduction for expenditures beyond that. A 100% deduction is available for qualifying overseas R&D projects.

RISC and FSTI 3.0 Cash Grants
Government cash grants like the Research Incentive Scheme for Companies (RISC) and FSTI 3.0 co-fund qualifying R&D expenses for setting up innovation labs and developing talent in technology sectors.

Intellectual Property Development Incentive (IDI)
Offers a reduced corporate tax rate of 5% or 10% on qualifying IP income derived from R&D activities during the incentive period.

Refundable Investment Credit (RIC)
Awarded based on qualifying expenditures for eligible projects, with support covering up to 50% of expenditure categories. Unused credits can be refunded in cash, qualifying as Qualified Refundable Tax Credits (QRTCs).

Key Initiatives
Enterprise Sustainability Program (ESP).

Targeted SDGs Related to the Initiatives
SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)
SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

Impact
Supported over 5,000 companies;
72% reported increased resource efficiency, leading to cost savings and improved profitability.

400% Tax Deduction
on the first SGD 400,000

250% Tax Deduction
for expenditures beyond that.

100% Tax Deduction
for qualifying overseas R&D projects.

ESP

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Supported over
5,000 Companies



The Republic of India

Focus Area | Streamlining Compliance and Empowering Women

Incentives

Deductions for contributions for R&D
100% tax deduction.

100% tax deduction -Deductions for expenditure on scientific research by manufacturing entities
100% tax deduction for qualifying revenue and capital expenditure.

Funding for R&D activities in technology
Cash grants, loans, and financial support.

Customs duty exemption and concession
Tax exemption and reduced tax rates.

Key Initiatives

Self-certification for labor and environmental laws Women Entrepreneurship Programs.

Targeted SDGs Related to the Initiatives

SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth)
SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)

Impact

Simplified compliance saves startups 20-30 hours/year. Expected 10-15% increase in new startup registrations. Women-led startups could see significant growth.



100% Tax Deduction

Cash Grants

Financial support

Entrepreneurship Programs

5 GENDER EQUALITY
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

expected
10-15%
increase in new startup



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Focus Area | Ocean Sustainability and Environmental Balance

Incentives

Incentives through the National Industrial Center (National Industrial Center)
Tax exemptions including personal income, sales, and land and property tax relating to renewable energy projects as well as providing low- cost industrial sites, exemption from export duties and facilitation for labor requirements, all relating to renewable energy projects for companies.

Mutajadeda (SIDF)
Providing financing for renewable energy projects in the private sector with financing given up to 75% of project costs.

Sustainable Agriculture Rural Development Program (MEWA)
Providing financial support for the development of sustainable agriculture activities in specific sectors such as fruit production and beekeeping.

Public Investment Fund (PIF)/Green Finance Framework (PIF)
A framework developed by the Public Invest - ment Fund to classify green projects and issue various types of green financing instruments including green bonds, Sukuk and loans to encourage the development of green projects. PIF has committed to investing over $10 billion by 2026.

Key Initiatives

WAVE is the latest collective action platform, led by HRH Princess Reema Bandar Al- Saud, and is powered by the Future Investment Initiative (FII) Institute, and in partnership with the Ministry of Energy, focusing on:

- Raising awareness on ocean pollution and sustainability.
- Establishing a digital information hub to connect stakeholders and share knowledge.
- Accelerating innovations in ocean-related technology.
- Supporting scientific research on ocean health.
- Building global partnerships to address ocean pollution and achieve environmental balance.

Targeted SDGs Related to the Initiatives

SDG 14 (Life Below Water)
SDG 13 (Climate Action)
SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Impact

- Improved global awareness and education on ocean health and pollution.
- Enhanced technological and scientific innovations for sustainable ocean management.
- Strengthened international collaboration to protect and restore ocean ecosystems.



Various Tax exemptions

Financing up to **75%** of project costs.

Commited to invest over
$10 billion
by 2026

WAVE

13 CLIMATE ACTION
14 LIFE BELOW WATER
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Sustainable ocean management.



The Kingdom of Sweden

Focus Area | Sustainable Innovation Ecosystems

Incentives

Reduced Social Security Contributions for R&D
This incentive offers a reduction in the employer's social security contributions for employees involved in qualifying research and development activities.

Expatriate Tax Regime for Foreign Experts
Provides a tax exemption for 25% of the salary and benefits of foreign experts, specialists, and key personnel working in Sweden, along with exemptions for certain moving and travel expenses.

Key Initiatives

Strategic Innovation Programs
Vinnova (Swedish Innovation Agency) finances 17 programs aimed at developing sustainable solutions to global challenges, boosting Sweden's global competitiveness.

Ignite Sweden
A Vinnova- funded initiative connecting startups with the Swedish industry, resulting in 230 commercial collaborations since 2017.

Industry Stimulation
Support extends to existing industries, promoting sustainability transitions in companies like Oatly and HYBRIT.

Targeted SDGs Related to the Initiatives

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)
SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)
SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)
SDG 13 (Climate Action)
SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Impact

- 230 commercial collaborations facilitated by Ignite Sweden since 2017.
- 17 strategic innovation programs driving sustainable solutions and enhancing Sweden's international competitiveness.
- Significant contributions to the €25.2 billion aggregate value of startups in Sweden, particularly through innovative companies like Oatly and HYBRIT.
- Vinnova's funding and support have played a crucial role in positioning Stockholm as Europe's fourth most valuable startup hub.

Tax exemption for 25% of the salary

IGNITE
POWERED BY SISP

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

230 collaborations

€25.2 billion
Startups value

Roundtable Insights

The Model Startup Act Journey has been shaped by insights from multiple roundtables, including those held in Riyadh, Cape Town, and a policy hackathon in Morocco. These sessions brought together policymakers, entrepreneurs, investors, and ecosystem enablers to discuss the challenges and opportunities inherent in building sustainable startup ecosystems[44–46].

Key Insights from Discussions

1. Cultural Contexts and Ecosystem Diversity

- The GCC roundtable in Riyadh highlighted the importance of aligning startup policies with local cultural and economic priorities. For instance, GCC Member States emphasized regulatory simplification and talent development as critical for fostering entrepreneurship. Participants noted that cultural norms in the region favor risk-averse behavior, which can deter potential entrepreneurs. Tailoring policies to encourage calculated risk-taking and entrepreneurship through education and mentorship was identified as a solution.
- In Cape Town, participants discussed the unique challenges faced by African startups, such as fragmented markets and limited infrastructure. African entrepreneurs often encounter logistical barriers, including unreliable transport and inconsistent internet access. Emphasis was placed on regional collaboration to unlock opportunities for cross-border growth, creating unified markets that allow startups to scale efficiently.

2. Legal Frameworks

- The GCC session underscored the necessity of legal clarity. Simplified processes for startup registration, tax incentives, and intellectual property protection emerged as vital components of a supportive ecosystem. Participants highlighted that regulatory bottlenecks often discourage innovation, with many startups unable to sustain operations due to the time and financial costs of compliance.
- Examples like Tunisia's Startup Act demonstrated how robust legislative frameworks could stimulate investment and innovation by reducing administrative burdens. The Act's focus on incentivizing startup growth through tax benefits and streamlined regulatory procedures served as a model for other regions.

3. Critical Resource Requirements for Startups

Access to Financing

- Dedicated funds, venture capital incentives, and guarantees for startup investments ensure financial sustainability by addressing the critical funding gaps faced by early-stage businesses. National startup funds and investor tax incentives encourage private sector involvement, while guaranteeing schemes de-risk investments, making it easier for startups to secure capital. Additionally, fostering partnerships with international financial institutions and diaspora networks can expand funding opportunities and enhance startups' access to global markets.

Ecosystem Support

- Public-private partnerships, incubators, and innovation hubs provide essential resources for startups to scale by fostering collaboration, offering mentorship, and ensuring access to critical infrastructure. These ecosystems act as accelerators for growth, connecting startups with investors, skilled talent, and technological resources. Regional innovation hubs and cross-border collaboration further enable startups to expand into new markets, while localized support ensures that underserved communities and emerging entrepreneurs can access vital resources.

"Legal frameworks tailored to local contexts can be the catalyst for vibrant, resilient startup ecosystems."

4. Integrating SDGs into Startups' Business Models:

- Across all roundtables, there was a consensus on embedding SDGs into startup policies. Startups addressing critical issues like clean energy, health innovation, and gender equality were identified as key drivers of sustainable development. For example, renewable energy startups in North Africa have attracted significant investment by aligning with global sustainability objectives.
- Case studies from Singapore and Bahrain showcased how aligning startups with SDGs could attract global investors and foster sustainable business practices. Singapore's Enterprise Sustainability Program has effectively integrated SDG-aligned startups into its innovation ecosystem, serving as a benchmark for other nations.

Figure 4: Startup Policy Priorities by Country

Criteria	Bahrain	India	Singapore	Greece	Pakistan
Year of Enactment	2013	2016	2017	2020	2017
Collaborative Development	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Regulatory Support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus on Innovation	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Comprehensive Ecosystem Support	✓	✓	✓		✓
Talent attraction		✓		✓	✓
Dedicated Funding	✓	✓	✓		✓
Tax Incentives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Inclusion of SDGs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Impact Monitoring & Evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key Outcomes

To address the challenges identified, the DCO has outlined strategic initiatives under the Model Startup Act. These initiatives are designed to empower startups through regulatory simplification, financial incentives, and international collaboration [43].

1. Simplified Regulatory Frameworks

One-Stop Registration Platforms

Establishing digital portals for business registration simplifies processes and reduces bureaucratic delays. Startups can complete licensing and tax registrations in one location, significantly lowering entry barriers. An example of this success is Tunisia's digital labeling process for startups, which provides official recognition and streamlines compliance.

Startup-Specific Legal Structures

Introducing tailored legal forms, such as convertible equity and simplified compliance standards, accommodates the unique needs of startups. These structures enable startups to access capital without incurring unsustainable debt and promote transparency in investor relations.

2. Access to Funding

Dedicated Seed Funds

Regional innovation funds can bridge the funding gap for startups, particularly those in early stages or operating in underserved sectors. Nigeria's Startup Investment Seed Fund has demonstrated how targeted financing can spur innovation while creating jobs and fostering economic growth.

Tax Incentives for Investors

Providing tax breaks for angel investors and venture capitalists incentivizes investment in startups. Italy's tax credits for R&D investments highlight the effectiveness of such policies in fostering high-growth industries.

3. Talent Development and Retention

Startup Visa Programs

Streamlining visa processes for international entrepreneurs attracts global talent and enhances knowledge exchange. Bahrain's entrepreneur visa initiatives have positioned the country as a hub for innovation in the region.

Youth-Focused Entrepreneurial Training

Embedding entrepreneurship modules into school and university curricula fosters a culture of innovation from an early age. Programs that combine mentorship with practical experience are particularly effective in preparing the next generation of entrepreneurs.

4. Digital Infrastructure and Innovation Corridors

Setting up regional tech corridors, co-working spaces, and R&D labs to nurture startups. Co-location fosters peer learning, links with academia, and facilitates mentorship.

Public-Private Partnerships

Building robust digital infrastructure—broadband access, e-government services—for frictionless startup operations.

5. International Market Access

Cross-Border Collaboration Platforms

Facilitating access to regional and international markets enables startups to scale more efficiently. GCC-wide export promotion strategies and initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area provide templates for creating unified markets.

Global Trade Forums

Participating in international trade exhibitions/ forums allows startups to showcase their innovations to global audiences, attracting investment and partnerships.

"Legal frameworks tailored to local contexts can be the catalyst for vibrant, resilient startup ecosystems."

Figure 5: Morocco's Startup Ecosystem: Growth, Insights, and Innovation Opportunities

Morocco's Dynamic Startup Ecosystem Provides Key Insights and Opportunities to Foster Innovation and Sustainability

Morocco's growing startup ecosystem exemplifies the DCO's vision, with notable growth, innovation, and strategic potential. Key insights from the DCO "As-Is" Morocco report highlight these developments.

254
Active Startups in 2024

291.6%
Funding Growth (2021–2023)

70th
Global Innovation Index (2023)

92nd
Global Startup Ecosystem Index (2024)

Notable progress and outcomes

Green & Sustainable Ventures

Bidaya Social Social Green Tech Incubator supported over 40 startups since 2015.

SwitchMed Green Entrepreneurship incubated 15 projects in an 8-month program for sustainable ventures.

Capacity Building

Through Switchers Training Program:

- Certified 73 trainers (47% women) in sustainable business model development.
- Trained 106 experts across five countries, countries, including Morocco.

Policy & Strategy

Morocco's strategic framework AMBITION 2035 focuses on growth in entrepreneurship through supportive policies and sustainability.

Startup Support

Launch of Startuphubmaroc.ma, a national digital platform introduced by Morocco's Digital Development Agency to enhance ecosystem collaboration and organization.

While Morocco's dynamic startup ecosystem is a promising example, there is still significant potential to further enhance innovation policies, particularly for green startups. A unified legal framework and streamlined regulatory processes could unlock even greater innovation and sustainable growth.

Recommendations for Member States

Tailor Frameworks to Local Contexts

Adapt Policies

Customizing the DCO Model Startup Act to reflect national priorities and cultural dynamics ensures relevance and effectiveness. For instance, Bahrain's focus on fintech and Nigeria's emphasis on agritech demonstrate how aligning policies with sectoral strengths can maximize impact.

Promote SDG Integration

Targeted Incentives

Providing financial and technical support for startups addressing SDG priorities fosters innovation in critical sectors like clean energy and healthcare. Singapore's Enterprise Sustainability Program offers a model for incentivizing sustainable ventures.

Strengthen Regional Collaboration

Shared Platforms

Developing GCC-wide governance frameworks harmonizes policies and facilitates cross-border scaling. Bahrain's integration into regional innovation networks exemplifies the benefits of coordinated strategies.

Monitor and Evaluate

Data-Driven Tracking

Regularly measure startup growth and survival rates, job creation, diversity in leadership, and cross-border expansions.

KPI Dashboards

Public-facing portals comparing Member States' progress in launch times, funding volumes, gender inclusivity, and other relevant indicators.

Lessons Learned

Collaboration is Critical

Insights from the Riyadh and Cape Town roundtables highlight the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders—from policymakers to entrepreneurs—to ensure frameworks address real-world challenges. These collaborative efforts foster trust and create ecosystems where innovation thrives.

Flexibility in Implementation

Policies must be adaptable to accommodate evolving economic conditions and technological advancements. For example, iterative policy reviews and stakeholder feedback mechanisms ensure that startup ecosystems remain dynamic and responsive.

Focus on Impact Metrics

Regular monitoring and evaluation of policy outcomes are essential for measuring success and refining strategies. Metrics such as startup survival rates, job creation, and investment inflows provide actionable insights for continuous improvement.

"Effective startup ecosystems are built on collaboration, adaptability, and a focus on measurable impact."

Stakeholders Engaged

- **Rachid Balla**
  Wisapay
- **Ismael l Belkhayat**
  Founder & CEO, chari.ma
- **Abdelouahid Benlamlih**
  Partner, EmergingTech Ventures
- **Mouttadi Hassan**
  In replacement of Tarik, AZUR PARTNERS
- **Eric Asmar**
  CEO, Happy Smala
- **Nasser Kettani**
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06

DIGITAL TRADE **ACCELERATION**

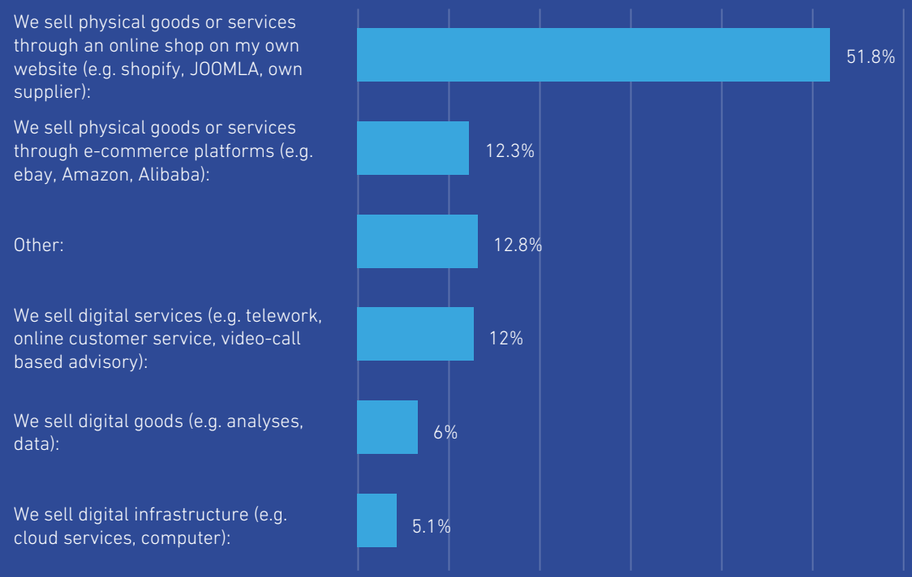
DIGITAL TRADE ACCELERATION

While global e-commerce growth is exponential, divergent policies hamper seamless digital trade flows. The Digital Trade Acceleration DSA leverages comprehensive regulatory assessments, in-depth stakeholder consultations, and interactive roundtables across Member States to encourage cooperation and alignment on digital trade policies. The aim is to facilitate a cohesive understanding of the digital trade landscape to accelerate digital transformation and create prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable digital economies across its Member States.

Figure 6: Primary Online Revenue Channels by Contribution Percentage

How Much do Different Channels Account for Your Online Revenues?

Percentage Contributed by Each Channel to Total Online Revenue



1833 valid responses.

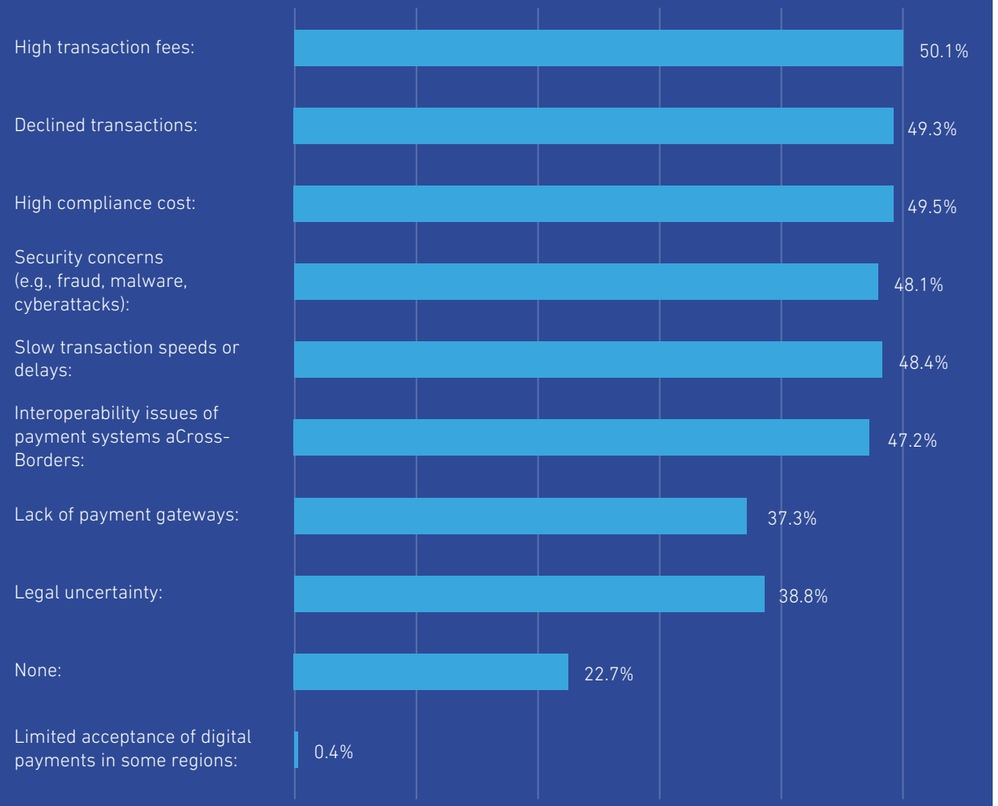
Framing the Challenge

Digital trade has emerged as a cornerstone of global economic growth, enabling seamless cross-border transactions and fostering innovation. However, its potential is hindered by diverse regulatory approaches, gaps in digital infrastructure, and barriers to market access—especially for SMEs. These challenges are particularly pronounced in regions with varying stages of digital readiness, where inconsistent e-signature standards, data localization laws, and a lack of unified shipping and customs protocols further complicate cross-border digital operations. Meanwhile, trust remains a critical issue: consumers and businesses alike require data security, reliable e-payment systems, and user-friendly digital identity solutions to confidently engage in cross-border transactions.

Figure 7: Top Obstacles to Electronic Payments in International Online Business

International – What Obstacles Does Your Online Business Face in Using Electronic Payments?

Percentage of Respondents



1833 valid responses.

According to the Digital Trade Landscape Report[9], The DCO Member States exhibit diverse digital economies across four key dimensions: digital economy size and activities, digital infrastructure and connectivity, digital skills, and digital government. Our analysis examines each dimension using a range of indicators, highlighting the spectrum of digital advancement within the DCO region. In particular, the proportion of youth and adults with basic digital skills varies significantly. The share of youth and adults able to copy or move a file or folder ranges from 5.1% to 73.1%, averaging 44.9%. Eight DCO Member States exceed 50%, while two fall below 20%.

Moreover, business surveys and regulatory assessments conducted under the Digital Trade Acceleration Initiative (DTAI) reveal that high compliance costs, fragmented e-payment systems, and barriers to cross-border data transfers are among the most pressing obstacles. Furthermore, despite growing investment in digital infrastructure, disparities persist due to uneven broadband penetration, limited access to affordable connectivity, and regulatory fragmentation. These challenges disproportionately impact rural and underserved regions, where infrastructure deployment costs remain high, limiting digital adoption rates. Addressing these challenges requires harmonized frameworks, strategic partnerships, and actionable steps to create an inclusive, seamless digital trade ecosystem.

The Digital Trade DSA Journey aims to address these obstacles by providing an unprecedented base of information on the digital trade ecosystem and the digital regulatory environment across the DCO region. It aggregates the findings of the Regulatory Assessment Reports written for each DCO Member State, building on over 2,500 official sources on digital regulation and input from over 1,800 firms. This information empowers the DCO Member States to address regulatory diversity – one of the core challenges for digital trade. Insights from the Geneva Roundtable, Digital Trade Landscape Report, and other stakeholder consultations highlight the urgency of creating a cohesive digital trade ecosystem that balances economic growth with inclusivity and trust.

"Digital trade offers unparalleled opportunities, but unlocking its full potential requires collaboration, alignment, and trust."

Roundtable Insights

The Digital Trade Landscape Report was informed by a series of expert roundtables, stakeholder interviews, and regulatory assessments across DCO Member States. These discussions highlighted key barriers, best practices, and collaborative strategies, providing a foundation for the validation process. The structured approach ensured that all insights were rigorously examined before formal integration into policy recommendations. This validation process ensured that the findings are contextualized, increasing ownership, trust, and alignment among stakeholders. Member States appreciated the approach as a mechanism to foster transparency and collective agreement on priorities[11].

Key Insights from Discussions

Leveraging DEAs

Digital Economy Agreements (DEAs) were identified as a pivotal tool to harmonize regulations, reduce barriers, and create structured pathways for collaboration. DEAs can address regulatory diversity by establishing shared principles in areas such as data protection, electronic payments, and consumer protection, while also enabling greater interoperability across Member States' digital ecosystems.

Regulatory Diversity as an Opportunity

Regulatory diversity was identified as both a challenge and an opportunity during the Geneva Roundtable. While different regulatory stages can create compliance burdens, they also present an opportunity for cross-learning. Where DCO Member States are in different stages of their regulatory journey, the DCO can provide technical assistance in the development of such regulatory frameworks. DCO Member States that are yet to regulate a given policy area can build on a strong foundation by learning about different approaches and experiences of their DCO peers. The DCO can provide technical assistance to its Member States that are developing their data protection, electronic transactions, and cybersecurity regimes. In addition, the DCO Member States can engage in collective learning regarding novel policy areas, such as AI regulation. This approach fosters alignment on core principles like data protection and consumer trust, while respecting each nation's unique journey.

SMEs and Digital Inclusion

SMEs were highlighted as key drivers of the digital economy but are disproportionately affected by barriers to market entry. The Digital Trade Landscape Report, whose findings were discussed thoroughly during the roundtables, emphasized the importance of targeted capacity-building initiatives and accessible financial incentives to help SMEs overcome technical and regulatory hurdles. Strengthening digital inclusion ensures SMEs can participate fully in cross-border digital trade, enhancing their contribution to economic growth.

Cross-Border Data Flows and Trust

The Digital Trade Landscape Report confirms that 13 DCO Member States have established data transfer regimes, while three have yet to implement such regulations. The adoption of standard contractual clauses has emerged as a primary method for ensuring secure cross-border data flows. Regulatory inconsistencies in data protection, e-signatures, and localization were cited as significant barriers. In addition, opaque shipping/customs procedures can deter smaller merchants from expanding internationally.

As digital trade expands, some governments are enforcing stricter data localization mandates to protect national security interests, enhance cybersecurity resilience, and support domestic digital industries. However, regional agreements like the African Union's Data Policy Framework, as highlighted in the Digital Trade Landscape Report, demonstrate how governments can balance data sovereignty with cross-border data flows, fostering regulatory interoperability while ensuring national security.



Need for Unified Logistics and E-Payment Ecosystems

Despite the rapid growth of digital payments, adoption remains uneven due to multiple barriers. These include high transaction costs, lack of interoperability between payment systems, cybersecurity concerns, and inconsistent financial regulations across jurisdictions. Strengthening regional cooperation on digital financial standards could accelerate adoption and improve financial inclusion. End-to-end solutions that unify e-payments and logistics tracking, including real-time customs clearance updates, have been shown to reduce processing delays significantly.

Figure 8: Key Internet Access Barriers for Online Businesses

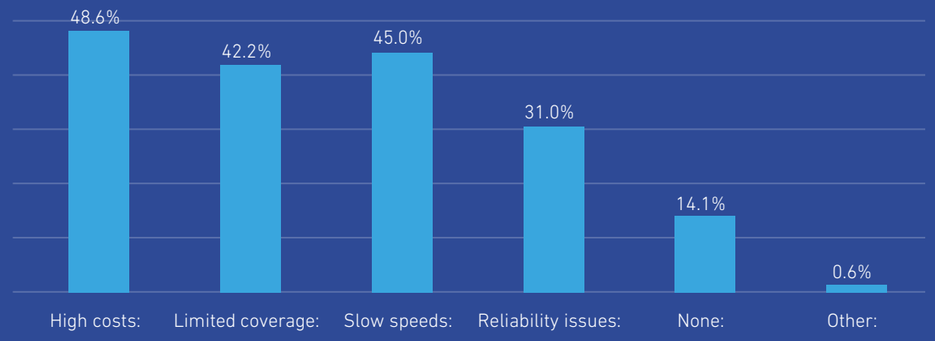
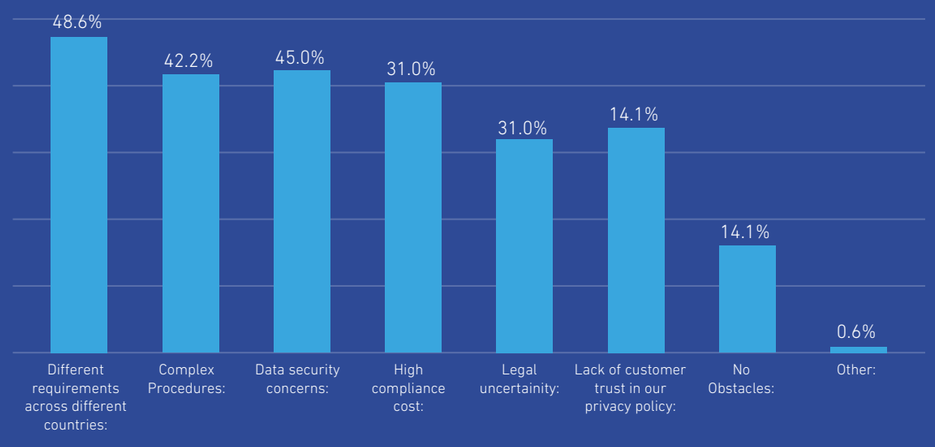


Figure 9: Top Data Privacy Obstacles for Online Sales ACross-Borders



Key Outcomes

The Digital Trade DSA outlines strategic initiatives aimed at fostering regulatory coherence, enhancing infrastructure, empowering key stakeholders (particularly SMEs), and integrating shipping and logistics into the digital trade ecosystem.

1. Harmonizing Digital Trade Frameworks

Regional Interoperability Agreements

The role of regional agreements in shaping digital trade policies continues to grow. The Digital Trade Landscape Report highlights several agreements that are setting precedents for harmonized regulatory frameworks, fostering greater cross-border digital collaboration.

Regulatory Sandboxes

These controlled environments enable governments to test innovative solutions, such as AI-driven compliance tools, before full-scale implementation. Regulatory sandboxes foster innovation while minimizing risks, providing startups with a space to develop and test solutions within existing legal frameworks.

2. Strengthening Digital Infrastructure

Single Window Systems

Promote the adoption of Single Window systems to streamline trade documentation and reduce administrative burdens by providing traders with a single-entry point for submitting necessary data. This reduces redundancy and ensures faster clearance processes.

Integrated Customs Management Systems (ICMS)

Enhance ICMS to accelerate cross-border trade through automated customs procedures, efficient duty calculation, and seamless goods clearance, minimizing delays and operational costs.

Interoperability

Foster interoperability among Member States' digital trade systems by aligning protocols, data-sharing standards, and integration mechanisms to ensure seamless cross-border transactions and reduce complex compliance for businesses.

Cross-Border E-Commerce Platforms

Regional platforms integrating logistics, payment gateways, and market access tools simplify cross-border transactions for SMEs. Morocco's national e-commerce marketplace serves as a model, offering SMEs global visibility while addressing logistical and financial barriers.

Digital Identity Systems

Implementing interoperable digital identity systems can enhance transaction security and efficiency. Systems like India's Aadhaar and Estonia's e-Residency have demonstrated significant impact by simplifying authentication and reducing transaction friction, fostering trust in digital ecosystems.

3. Supporting SMEs in Digital Trade

Capacity-Building Programs

Training initiatives focused on digital marketing, e-commerce management, and regulatory compliance equip SMEs with essential skills. Collaborations with chambers of commerce and international organizations amplify these programs, ensuring broader reach and impact. Bahrain's SME Development Initiative exemplifies the success of such efforts.

Subsidized Access to Digital Tools

Providing SMEs with financial support to adopt advanced tools like cloud computing and AI-driven analytics reduces entry barriers. By enhancing their competitiveness, such subsidies drive innovation and efficiency in digital trade practices.

4.Integrating Shipping and Customs

Unified Shipping Protocols

Develop standardized electronic documents (e.g., e-waybills, e-invoices) recognized across Member States, reducing administrative overhead.

Smart Customs Systems

Promote digital customs declarations, automated duty calculations, and real-time tracking, allowing SMEs to predict shipping times and costs accurately. For instance, single-window clearance systems significantly reduce cross-border friction.

5.Public-Private Partnerships

Co-Creation

Collaborate with the private sector to innovate and deploy scalable digital trade solutions that address regulatory and logistical challenges. Engaging industry leaders enables the co-creation of technologies and systems tailored to regional needs.

Cross-Border Partnerships

Facilitate partnerships for building infrastructure and supporting digital payment systems to ensure secure, reliable, and interoperable networks that bolster cross-border trade.

Infrastructure Investment

Leverage industry expertise to address barriers such as compliance costs, fragmented e-payment ecosystems, and limited access to international markets. Encourage collaborative efforts to develop trade facilitation tools, scalable e-commerce platforms, and integrated payment solutions.

"Building trust and lowering barriers are critical to unlocking the full potential of digital trade."



Recommendations for Member States

Foster Policy Alignment

Develop Harmonized Trade and Data Policies

A harmonized approach to data governance and trade policies will minimize compliance burdens for businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions. Member States should work toward regional interoperability in data transfer regulations, taxation frameworks, and consumer protection laws.

Establish Cross-Border Regulatory Sandboxes

Member States should adopt cross-border regulatory sandboxes to test new digital trade policies and fintech solutions in a controlled environment. These sandboxes allow startups, payment providers, and regulatory bodies to collaborate on refining frameworks before full-scale implementation.

Mutual Recognition of Digital Identity Systems

To streamline cross-border trade and reduce friction in digital transactions, Member States should establish mutual recognition frameworks for digital identity systems. Enabling quick authentication and contract signing through eID interoperability will facilitate smoother trade and regulatory compliance. Countries like Estonia and Singapore have successfully implemented digital identity ecosystems that reduce verification delays and improve transaction security

Invest in Digital Skills Development

National Upskilling Programs

Upskilling initiatives targeting youth and SMEs should prioritize practical skills like data analysis, cybersecurity, and cross-border trade management. Singapore's SkillsFuture program demonstrates the value of targeted training grants in building a digitally skilled workforce.

Logistics and Customs Education

Educate SMEs about the complexities of cross-border shipping, integrated customs clearance, and real-time tracking solutions.

Facilitate Cross-Border Collaboration

Regional innovation corridors

Establishing hubs that incubate startups and foster cross-border collaborations can drive scalable solutions. The Geneva Innovation Hub exemplifies how such platforms encourage knowledge exchange and co-creation among stakeholders.

Public-Private Partnerships

Partner with major shipping couriers, payment processors, and eID tech providers to build a cohesive digital trade backbone.

Infrastructure Investment

Connectivity Initiatives

Expand broadband and mobile coverage to enhance access to digital trade, particularly in underserved areas where connectivity gaps limit participation in global markets. Enhanced internet infrastructure will support seamless digital transactions, remote working, and broader e-commerce engagement.

Digital Platforms

Develop national platforms tailored to SMEs, integrating features such as payment gateways, logistics support, and marketing tools. These platforms can enable small businesses to engage with domestic and international markets by simplifying access to e-commerce opportunities and cross-border trade.

Establish Clear Metrics for Data and Consumer Trust

Data Flow Security and Consumer Trust Indices

Track the volume of cross-border data transfers, security breaches, and consumer confidence scores.

Shipping Efficiency KPIs

Measure average delivery times, customs clearance rates, and shipping cost reductions to gauge the real-world impact on SMEs

Lessons Learned

Collaboration is Essential

Open dialogue among governments, shipping/ logistics stakeholders, payment providers, and civil society is key for effective digital trade cooperation. Partnerships in the style of the Geneva Roundtable produce scalable solutions.

Tailored Approaches Yield Results

Instead of a strictly regional approach, the initiative emphasizes a globally adaptable framework that allows for customized policy integration while maintaining international best practices. For instance, adapting digital identity frameworks to local languages and legal systems fosters trust.

Measurable Impact Matters

Regularly tracking metrics like cross-border e-payment volumes, shipping clearance times, data flow security incidents, SME participation, and user satisfaction scores ensures accountability. A transparent KPI dashboard can prompt timely policy refinements.

"A dynamic digital trade ecosystem is built on collaboration, contextualization, and a commitment to measurable impact."



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07

ETHICAL **AI**



ETHICAL AI DSA JOURNEY

Fragmented AI governance frameworks not only limit the economic potential of AI-driven solutions by increasing compliance complexity and reducing investment incentives but also pose significant risks due to the lack of consistent ethical standards. A shared approach to AI governance is essential to mitigate these risks, ensuring responsible AI deployment while fostering cross-border innovation and regulatory clarity [13]. Furthermore, one of the primary barriers to ethical AI adoption is the lack of ethical considerations in the AI development and deployment lifecycle. Without built-in accountability mechanisms, AI-driven decisions may lead to unintended biases, unfair hiring practices, and regulatory non-compliance. The Ethical AI DSA uses a baseline assessment to guide Member States toward a framework based on human-centric values that encourages responsible AI use.

Framing the Challenge

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a cornerstone of modern technological advancement, promising transformative opportunities for economic growth, societal progress, and sustainable development. From revolutionizing healthcare through AI-driven diagnostics and rapid drug development to optimizing public services and enhancing education systems, AI holds the potential to address critical global challenges.

However, alongside its benefits, AI also presents significant ethical challenges, mandating efforts toward harmonizing governance both regionally and globally. The integration of AI into daily life continues to raise complex questions about data privacy, algorithmic fairness, accountability, and other human rights protection priorities. These questions have become particularly urgent as AI systems continue to impact decision-making in sensitive areas such as justice, employment, taxation, and healthcare[25].

AI regulatory readiness varies across DCO Member States. While some countries have introduced comprehensive AI governance frameworks, others are still in the early phases of formulating national AI policies or establishing regulatory oversight mechanisms, highlighting the need for tailored support and knowledge-sharing initiatives.



In addition to these broad disparities, AI readiness is also shaped by factors such as digital infrastructure, access to computational resources, workforce skills, and research capabilities. Cultural and regional considerations further influence AI adoption and governance, with local norms, language differences, data sovereignty laws, and socioeconomic inequalities all playing a role in shaping national AI strategies and ethical standards. Consequently, effective AI governance requires adaptable frameworks that can be applied to diverse local contexts while remaining grounded in commonly agreed-upon principles. This approach ensures that AI policies are flexible enough to accommodate national priorities yet aligned with global standards for ethical and responsible AI deployment.



The ethical risks of AI are both systemic and sector-specific, requiring targeted interventions at multiple levels. For example:

Data Privacy

The extensive use of personal data in AI systems raises concerns about privacy violations and the risk of surveillance. In healthcare, for instance, AI models rely heavily on patient data for diagnostics, yet inadequate safeguards can compromise confidentiality and patient trust.

Bias and Discrimination

AI systems trained on biased datasets can perpetuate existing societal inequalities. In recruitment, AI-powered tools may unintentionally favor certain demographics, reinforcing discriminatory hiring practices. Similarly, in taxation, automated audits can disproportionately target marginalized communities if algorithms are not rigorously assessed for fairness.

Freedom of Expression

AI tools used for content moderation and misinformation detection must strike a delicate balance between preventing harm and upholding digital rights, such as freedom of expression.

Moreover, domain-specific challenges emerge in high-stakes sectors:

Healthcare

Biased diagnostics or misdiagnosis can have life-or-death consequences.

Finance

Credit scoring algorithms may exclude certain demographics if not rigorously audited.

Law Enforcement

AI-based surveillance risks disproportionately targeting marginalized communities without strict oversight.

Beyond algorithmic bias, key ethical risks include, but are not limited to, data privacy vulnerabilities, misinformation amplification, lack of human oversight in automated decision-making, and transparency challenges in AI-driven public services.

Effectively tackling these risks calls for cross-sector collaboration to establish responsible AI governance mechanisms. Member States must focus on building institutional capacity, promoting knowledge sharing, and designing adaptive frameworks that are both locally relevant and globally aligned. AI governance cannot be approached in isolation—it necessitates a multi-stakeholder process involving policymakers, private sector innovators, technical experts, and civil society organizations to ensure ethical, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes.

Building responsible AI is not just about technology—it is about upholding trust, equity, and human dignity in every decision AI enables.

Roundtable Insights

The Riyadh AI and Human Rights Roundtable at the GAIN Summit and the Building Ethical AI Tools Roundtable at IGF represented significant milestones in the DCO's efforts to advance discussions on ethical AI governance. They underscored the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in identifying AI's societal risks and opportunities. These engagements convened leaders from government, the private sector, civil society, and experts to explore the intersection of AI and human rights, identify specific risks and opportunities, and foster collaboration to ensure a human rights-based approach to AI development and deployment[13, 30-33].

One of the central themes emerging from the roundtables was the need to prioritize human rights considerations in AI governance. Participants identified four core risks:

Privacy

Participants from the Riyadh and Singapore roundtables identified privacy as a cornerstone of ethical AI governance. Concerns centered on data protection, informed consent, and mitigating invasive surveillance practices.

Algorithmic Bias and Fairness

Discussions highlighted how biases in AI systems perpetuate discrimination, particularly in recruitment and healthcare. Fairness audits and diverse datasets were recommended to address these issues.

Freedom of Expression

Automated content moderation systems pose risks to free speech. Transparent moderation practices that respect cultural nuances were emphasized as crucial safeguards.

Capacity Development

Differences in infrastructure and expertise among Member States impact the implementation of AI governance. To support broader adoption, training initiatives and knowledge-sharing platforms have been prioritized to enhance capabilities.

The discussions were further enriched by sector-specific insights gathered through breakout sessions:

Healthcare

AI's potential to improve diagnostics and treatment outcomes is immense. However, without adequate safeguards, it risks deepening existing healthcare inequalities, particularly in underserved regions. Participants called for policies that ensure equitable access to AI-powered medical tools while protecting patient privacy.

Taxation

In the realm of automated taxation audits, AI tools must be explainable and rigorously tested for fairness to avoid unjust targeting of individuals or businesses. Transparent AI systems are critical to maintaining public trust.

Recruitment

AI-powered hiring tools can streamline recruitment processes but must include human oversight to identify and address algorithmic biases. Participants emphasized the importance of explainability and ethical training for AI systems used in recruitment.

Key Outcomes

To address the challenges and opportunities highlighted during the roundtable discussions, the DCO has prioritized key initiatives To address the challenges and opportunities highlighted during the roundtable discussions, the DCO has prioritized key initiatives aimed at operationalizing AI governance. These initiatives are designed to provide Member States with the principles, tools, frameworks, and capacity to develop AI systems that are transparent, accountable, and aligned with human rights principles.

1. DCO Principles for Ethical AI

The DCO Principles for Ethical AI offer policy guidance for the responsible development, deployment, and use of AI systems across Member States. These principles emphasize aligning AI technologies with human rights, societal values, and sustainability goals while fostering innovation and trust. Rooted in international best practices, the principles provide a consistent yet adaptable foundation for ethical AI governance, ensuring that AI serves humanity's best interests. Below are the core principles summarized:

Accountability

AI entities must establish clear responsibilities for system outcomes, ensuring reliable performance, transparent oversight, and mechanisms to address risks. This includes assigning ownership for decision-making and maintaining robust governance frameworks to uphold ethical and societal standards.

Transparency and Explainability

AI systems should clearly communicate their operations, data usage, and decision-making processes to all stakeholders. Transparency ensures users understand when they interact with AI and what data is being processed, while explainability provides accessible explanations of how and why decisions are made, fostering trust and informed engagement.

Fairness and Non-Discrimination

AI must treat all individuals equitably, avoiding biases and ensuring inclusive access to benefits. This involves proactively identifying and mitigating algorithmic biases, designing systems that reflect diverse societal contexts, and ensuring fairness in outcomes across demographics.

Privacy

Protecting individuals' data and autonomy is paramount. AI systems should incorporate privacy-by-design principles, minimize data collection, and implement robust safeguards for data storage, processing, and usage. Respect for informed consent and transparency in data handling are critical.

Sustainability and Environmental Impact

AI systems must minimize their ecological footprint through energy-efficient designs and practices. Additionally, AI should be leveraged to advance sustainability initiatives, such as climate action and resource optimization, aligning technological progress with environmental stewardship.

Human-Centered Development and Social Benefit

AI systems should enhance human well-being by aligning innovations with ethical standards and societal needs. This principle emphasizes empowering communities, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring that AI augments human capabilities rather than replacing them.

Human Autonomy and Oversight

AI must preserve human agency, ensuring users retain ultimate control over decisions. This includes integrating safeguards for human oversight, designing systems that prevent undue influence or manipulation, and maintaining the capacity for meaningful human intervention in AI-driven processes.

These principles also serve as the foundation for the DCO AI Ethics Evaluator, which provides structured assessments to help organizations implement responsible AI practices in alignment with accountability, transparency, fairness, privacy, sustainability, and human-centered development.

2. DCO AI Ethics Evaluator Tool

The DCO AI Ethics Evaluator is a comprehensive tool designed to help organizations systematically assess and address ethical risks associated with AI systems. Rooted in human rights-based principles, the Evaluator enables AI developers and deployers to evaluate and mitigate these risks effectively.

By combining a structured risk assessment framework with practical recommendations, the tool ensures that AI technologies align with ethical standards, enhance transparency, and promote responsible innovation. Tailored for diverse contexts, the Evaluator supports DCO Member States in embedding ethics into AI development and deployment. Below are the key components of the tool summarized:

Risk Assessment Framework

The Evaluator's foundation is its risk assessment mechanism, which evaluates AI systems based on six core ethical dimensions: accountability, transparency, fairness, privacy, sustainability, and human-centered development. These dimensions ensure comprehensive coverage of human rights risks and ethical considerations.

Role-Specific Guidance

The tool provides tailored pathways for AI developers and deployers, recognizing their distinct responsibilities. Developers focus on building safeguards into system design, while deployers receive guidance for operational controls and impact monitoring.

Severity and Likelihood Scoring

Users assess risks by rating their severity and likelihood on a structured scale, generating overall risk scores. This approach prioritizes areas requiring immediate action and ensures risks are addressed proportionally to their impact.

Visualization and Reporting

The Evaluator presents risk analysis results in an interactive and visual format, including heat maps and radar charts. These tools allow organizations to quickly identify priority areas and generate downloadable reports for integration into governance workflows.

Scalable Recommendations

Based on assessed risks, the Evaluator offers tiered recommendations that scale in intensity, ranging from verifying existing controls for low-risk scenarios to implementing comprehensive safeguards for high-risk cases.

Continuous Monitoring and Improvement

The tool emphasizes iterative evaluation, enabling organizations to revisit and refine their practices as AI systems evolve. This ensures that ethical compliance adapts to technological advancements and changing societal expectations.

3. Capacity-Building Programs

A recurring theme during the roundtables was the need to address capacity gaps in terms of limited technical expertise and institutional readiness. To that effect, the DCO has planned to deliver a capacity-building program that will provide learners from diverse backgrounds with a practical, in-depth understanding of the evolving AI landscape and its ethical implications, with a strong focus on the intersection of AI systems and human rights.



DCO AI Risk Assessment Framework

Categories	Risks	Human Rights
Accountability & Oversight	• Inadequate human verification of critical decisions • Insufficient response to system failures • Gaps in audit trails and responsibility tracking	• Right to effective remedy • Right to equality before the law
Transparency & Explainability	• Inability to explain critical decisions to users • Technical complexity preventing understanding • Impact on user rights due to lack of transparency	• Right to information • Right to participate in public affairs
Fairness & Non-Discrimination	• Discriminatory impact on vulnerable groups • Performance disparities across demographics • Use of discriminatory proxy variables	• Right to non- discrimination • Right to equality before the law • Right to freedom of opinion and expression
Privacy	• Insufficient data • protection and security controls Unauthorized collection and processing of sensitive information	• Right to privacy
Sustainability & Environmental Impact	• Excessive energy consumption • Infrastructure capacity limitations • Unnecessary resource usage	• Right to health • Right to adequate standard of living • Right to a healthy environment
Human-Centred Development & Social Benefit	• Misalignment with actual user needs • Risk of negative impact on wellbeing • Degradation of human expertise/ capabilities	• Right to work • Right to participate in cultural life • Right to liberty • Right to education • Right to self- determination

System Architecture & Development

- Building/implementing robust safety mechanisms
- Ensuring appropriate human oversight capabilities
- Establishing clear system boundaries and fail-safes

Validation & Testing

- Comprehensive testing of system behaviour
- Monitoring performance across different groups
- Detecting and addressing potential issues

Data Management

- Securing sensitive data processing/storage
- Implementing data minimization practices
- Maintaining proper data governance controls

Operational Controls

- Establishing clear oversight mechanisms
- Creating effective incident response procedures
- Implementing monitoring and control processes

Documentation & Reporting

- Maintaining comprehensive system documentation
- Tracking decisions and their impacts
- Creating clear audit trails and reports

Continuous Evolution

- Integrating stakeholder feedback
- Updating based on performance monitoring
- Improving safety and effectiveness measures

Recommendations for Member States

The roundtable discussions underscored the need for actionable, country-specific recommendations to help Member States develop AI governance frameworks that are both effective and adaptable. These recommendations address gaps in capacity, policy alignment, and implementation while ensuring that AI systems are developed to be transparent, inclusive, and aligned with internationally recognized ethical principles [47].

1. Governance and Policy Development

Establishing robust governance and policy frameworks is fundamental for embedding ethical AI practices into national and regional contexts. Member States are encouraged to align their AI strategies with global principles, such as those outlined by the OECD and UNESCO, while tailoring them to address local cultural, economic, and technological nuances. This approach ensures that policies uphold human rights, enhance fairness, and promote accountability across all AI applications[47].

Align National Strategies

Adopt AI policies that integrate global principles, ensuring alignment with international frameworks while reflecting local priorities.

Embed Human Rights

Design regulatory frameworks that explicitly incorporate human rights.

Promote Inclusivity

Develop inclusive governance approaches that engage diverse stakeholders, including underrepresented groups.

2. Capacity Building

Capacity building is critical to bridging the knowledge and skills gaps within Member States. By launching training programs tailored for policymakers and developers, DCO can help Member States with emerging AI ecosystems to better understand and implement ethical AI principles. Providing platforms for knowledge-sharing and best practices further fosters a collaborative learning environment that enhances governance capabilities.

Training Programs

Develop workshops and courses for policymakers and developers, focusing on ethical AI principles.

Knowledge Sharing

Establish platforms for sharing best practices between Member States.

Skill Development

Provide training on AI assessment tools, such as the DCO AI Ethics Evaluator.

3. Adoption of Tools

Encouraging the use of tools like the DCO AI Ethics Evaluator will allow Member States to ensure accountability of AI systems and, in turn, foster public trust.

Promote the Evaluator

Advocate for widespread adoption of the DCO AI Ethics Evaluator for structured risk assessments.

Sector-Specific Guidance

Develop tailored guidelines for industries such as healthcare, recruitment, and taxation to address unique challenges.

Responsible AI leadership requires vision, collaboration, and action—at national, regional, and global levels.

Lessons Learned

The DCO's roundtable series provided invaluable insights into the complexities of AI governance and the actions required to ensure AI systems align with human rights principles. The lessons learned emphasize the need for collaboration, adaptability, and sustained capacity-building to drive responsible AI development.

1. Address the Trust Deficit

The skepticism expressed by civil society and the public reflects a broader trust deficit in AI systems. Building trust requires:

a. Greater transparency in AI development and deployment, including the use of explainable AI models that provide clear and understandable outputs.
b. Establishing oversight mechanisms to ensure that AI systems are assessed for fairness, accuracy, and accountability.

2. Bridge Capacity Gaps

Policymakers in emerging economies face significant challenges in regulating AI due to limited technical expertise and institutional resources. Addressing these capacity gaps requires:

a. Investment in capacity-building and training programs to build the skills needed to govern AI effectively.
b. Collaboration with international organizations to provide tools, resources, and technical assistance for AI capacity development.

3. Ensure Adaptable Governance Models

AI governance must be flexible and adaptable to national priorities while aligning with universal ethical principles. This means:

a. Designing governance frameworks that reflect cultural, economic, and technological contexts.
b. Ensuring that policies remain responsive to evolving technologies and emerging risks.
c. Incorporating regular reviews and updates to governance models based on stakeholder feedback and international best practices.

4. Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The complexity of AI governance requires input from governments, civil society, private industry, and academia. Inclusive collaboration ensures:

a. Balanced AI policies that reflect diverse perspectives and address societal concerns.
b. Partnerships that promote innovation while prioritizing safeguards for human rights.
c. Mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and feedback to improve AI systems and policies over time.

5.Transition from Discussion to Implementation

The need for action-oriented frameworks emerged as a critical takeaway. Moving beyond theoretical discussions requires:

a. Clear tools and strategies that enable practical implementation of ethical AI principles.
b. Sustained investments in capacity-building, knowledge sharing, and institutional readiness.
c. Monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of AI governance policies and ensure accountability.

AI governance is not a fixed destination—it is a continuous journey of learning, adapting, and implementing for a sustainable future.

Stakeholders Engaged

- **Sarah Lessing**
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  Managing Director, Atomionics Pte Ltd
- **Bo GAO**
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- **Dennis Yap**
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- **Diwakar Kaushik**
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** The names of stakeholders are non-exhaustive and only includes those who have explicitly agreed to have their names shared*



08

CROSS BORDER **E-WASTE MANAGEMENT**

CROSS-BORDER E-WASTE MANAGEMENT DSA JOURNEY

By 2030, global e-waste production is projected to exceed 80 million tons, making it one of the fastest-growing waste streams. The European Union reports that less than 40% of e-waste is recycled, exacerbating environmental concerns. At the same time, more than 5 billion mobile phones were discarded in 2022, while 40% of the world's low-income population remains unable to afford basic ICT products and services—highlighting a major digital economy challenge[14–20].

The Cross-Border E-Waste Management DSA promotes circular economy models, harmonized regulations, and capacity-building measures that turn e-waste from an environmental hazard into a springboard for green industries and decent work. Addressing cross-border e-waste challenges is crucial for improving recycling rates and minimizing environmental risks[21].

Framing the Challenge

Electronic Waste (e-waste) represents one of the fastest-growing waste streams globally, posing significant environmental, economic, and health challenges. E-waste includes all discarded products containing circuitry or electrical components powered by electricity or batteries.

Improper disposal of e-waste has severe environmental and health consequences. Hazardous materials such as lead, cadmium, and mercury, when mismanaged, can contaminate soil, air, and water, leading to significant public health risks. At the same time, e-waste holds considerable economic potential: recycling valuable components like rare earth metals and precious minerals can generate new revenue streams, reduce reliance on primary resource extraction, and create a foundation for circular economies.

Equally critical is the social opportunity presented by responsible e-waste management. Repurposing and reusing second-hand devices can provide affordable technology to underserved communities, thereby bridging the digital divide. However, challenges persist:

Informal Waste Sectors

In many regions, unregulated and informal e-waste collection dominates the market, creating health risks and preventing value recovery.

Fragmented Value Chains

Segmented e-waste collection, processing, and recycling systems undermine operational efficiency.

Cross-Border Complexities

Limited collaboration on transboundary e-waste management hampers efforts to optimize resource recovery and manage hazardous materials.

Incentive programs

Lack of economic incentives for investment and infrastructure development.

Several global challenges are faced in E-Waste management, including but not limited to the lack of awareness of existing policies on E-Waste, the lack of public sector enforcement of such policies, and informal E-Waste management activities. Addressing these challenges requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, technological innovation, and the establishment of robust governance frameworks.

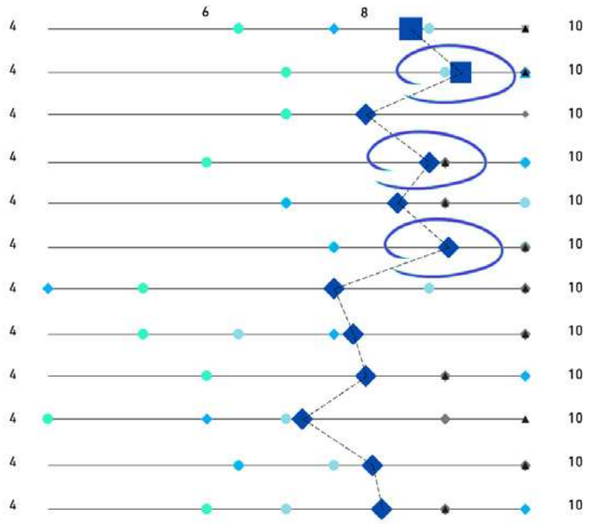
> *"E-waste management is not just about reducing waste—it is about creating opportunities for circular economies, innovation, and bridging the digital divide."*

Cross-Border E-Waste Management DSA Journey



Figure 9: E-Waste Management Opportunities in GCC: Priorities for Collaboration, Redeployment, and Reporting

These poll responses also identified potential opportunities for e-waste management, with international collaboration, redeployment and transparent reporting emerging as priorities



Legends

- Oman
- Kuwait
- Bahrain
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Average

Additional Opportunities

National

OMAN: Build strategies and policies to manage the e-waste in the country, to add "in country value"

OMAN: Develop restricting rules and regulations for exporting electronic devices to recycle them according to their expected lifespan

National **Opportunities**

- Increasing the volume of e-waste which is collected and recycled
- Enhancing international collaboration to support e-waste treatment
- Transferring the cost of e-waste collection and treatment to private actors
- Improving transparency of the fate of e-waste i.e. rates of recycling and reuse
- Attracting and securing inward investment in e-waste collection, treatment and recycling
- Redeployment of used electronics to address the digital divide

Cross- Border **Opportunities**

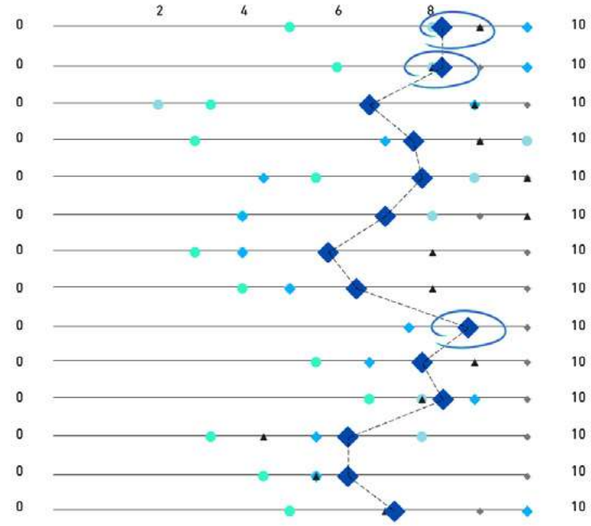
- Pooling investment
- Levelling the playing field to ensure all countries have equal potential to manage e-waste successfully
- Working collectively to address knowledge gaps
- Working collectively on policies and regulatory system
- Easing exports of e-waste for treatment
- Collaborating on the deployment of electronics to address the digital divide

There is appetite to develop local and regional capabilities and economic opportunities to consolidate and streamline e-waste management, leveraging international collaboration to build capacity and at the same time address the digital divide

Source: DCO Poll Responses, Kearney

Figure 10: Top E-Waste Challenges in GCC Member States: Insights on Awareness, Infrastructure, and Regulatory Gaps

Five GCC Member States evaluated key challenges in managing e-waste. Results revealed common priority issues centered on lack of awareness, insufficient formal systems, and limited resources for cross-country collaboration.



Legends

- Oman
- Kuwait
- Bahrain
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Average

Additional Challenges

National

OMAN: Lack of an entity to regulate e-waste specifically

KUWAIT: Lack of public awareness

Cross-border

OMAN: Lack of specific e-waste rules with classification of the items

National **Challenges**

- Behavior and awareness and education of final users in respect to collection and recycling of e-waste
- Commercial viability of operating high quality recycling infrastructure
- Export of products and materials to other countries
- Lack of appropriate systems to collect e-waste
- Appropriate skills for e-waste recycling & treatment, and to support redeployment of electronics
- Illegal waste management
- Capacity gaps at the government or regulatory level
- Data security fears prevent end users from releasing electronics at the end of life

Cross- Border **Challenges**

- Time and resources
- Resource inequalities
- Capacity in government /regulators
- Basel Convention or other existing regulatory barriers
- Reputational risks
- Perceived value/not a priority

Key challenges that the GCC Member States will have to address are the society's awareness on e-waste, the formal collection system capacity and the ability of the government to enforce policies and regulations

Source: DCO Poll Responses, Kearney

Overview of Current State Assessment Findings, per country

The maturity of e-waste legislation across the GCC Member States varies, but there is a common emphasis on developing domestic infrastructure and growing private involvement in the sector



Kingdom of Bahrain

Drivers

- Strict governance including licensing and reporting obligations for e-waste actors

Stakeholders

- Both gov't3 and private companies provide e- waste management services
- NGOS support the informal sector

Product

- Limited e-waste data available; low collection rates reported

Enablers

- Limited recycling infrastructure, with the application of basic technologies

Location

- Reliance on exports due to limited capacity of domestic e-waste recycling infrastructure

1. Extended Producer Responsibility; 2. Public Private Partnerships; 3. Overseen by Bahrain's Supreme Council for the Environment; 4. Policy development is overseen by Kuwait Environment Public Authority, while the Ministry of Public Works oversees infrastructure development and waste management projects; 5. The Ministry of Municipality and Environment are responsible for policies and regulations; 6. The Ministry of Environment, Water, & Agriculture is responsible for general environmental policy, while the National Center for Waste Management for waste-specific legislation; 7. Led by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Source: Current State Assessment, Kearney





State of Kuwait

Drivers

- Legislation mandating e-waste treatment
- Govt funding for e- waste infrastructure development

Stakeholders

- Infrastructure owned by private sector who partners with gov't[4] to provide collection and recycling services

Product

- E-waste generation has declined since 2019
- Data on collection and recycling is not publicly available

Enablers

- Recycling infrastructure is immature but is developing with financial support from govt

Location

- Ban on e-waste imports, and exports allowed only if the necessary infrastructure is not available domestically

1. Extended Producer Responsibility; 2. Public Private Partnerships; 3. Overseen by Bahrain's Supreme Council for the Environment; 4. Policy development is overseen by Kuwait Environment Public Authority, while the Ministry of Public Works oversees infrastructure development and waste management projects; 5. The Ministry of Municipality and Environment are responsible for policies and regulations; 6. The Ministry of Environment, Water, & Agriculture is responsible for general environmental policy, while the National Center for Waste Management for waste-specific legislation; 7. Led by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Source: Current State Assessment, Kearney



Sultanate of Oman

Drivers

- Waste regulations and circular economy strategy exist, however e-waste specific regulation are lacking

Stakeholders

- Waste management is overseen by government-owned Be'ah and EGRH, with limited licensed private actors

Product

- <1% of e-waste generated is collected
- Capacity exists for ~20% of generated e- waste, which is underutilized

Enablers

- The Evergreen Gulf Recycling Hub (EGRH) provides infrastructure but low collection rates limit feedstock

Location

- Oman imports and exports e-waste, likely due to poor collection rates

1. Extended Producer Responsibility; 2. Public Private Partnerships; 3. Overseen by Bahrain's Supreme Council for the Environment; 4. Policy development is overseen by Kuwait Environment Public Authority, while the Ministry of Public Works oversees infrastructure development and waste management projects; 5. The Ministry of Municipality and Environment are responsible for policies and regulations; 6. The Ministry of Environment, Water, & Agriculture is responsible for general environmental policy, while the National Center for Waste Management for waste-specific legislation; 7. Led by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Source: Current State Assessment, Kearney



The State of Qatar

Drivers

- Legislative framework exists and govt trying to incentivize further action

Stakeholders

- Environmental NGOs raise awareness about e-waste recycling
- Gov't[5] oversees waste mgmt, but infrastructure is privately owned

Product

- High consumption rates of electronics
- Collection rate seem extremely low, although data is lacking

Enablers

- Collection points are available, and a range of processing technologies are used

Location

- Reliance on exports due to limited capacity of domestic e-waste recycling infrastructure

1. Extended Producer Responsibility; 2. Public Private Partnerships; 3. Overseen by Bahrain's Supreme Council for the Environment; 4. Policy development is overseen by Kuwait Environment Public Authority, while the Ministry of Public Works oversees infrastructure development and waste management projects; 5. The Ministry of Municipality and Environment are responsible for policies and regulations; 6. The Ministry of Environment, Water, & Agriculture is responsible for general environmental policy, while the National Center for Waste Management for waste-specific legislation; 7. Led by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Source: Current State Assessment, Kearney



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Drivers

- Strong legislative framework, large investment in recycling and awareness building

Stakeholders

- Gov't[6] oversees waste mgmt. and owns the largest recycler
- Environmental NGOs raise awareness

Product

- High overall e-waste generation
- Data on collection and recycling is not publicly available

Enablers

- Mid-term sustainability vision defined in Saudi Vision 2030, innovation and recycling capacity increasing

Location

- Reliance on exports due to limited capacity of domestic e-waste recycling infrastructure

1. Extended Producer Responsibility; 2. Public Private Partnerships; 3. Overseen by Bahrain's Supreme Council for the Environment; 4. Policy development is overseen by Kuwait Environment Public Authority, while the Ministry of Public Works oversees infrastructure development and waste management projects; 5. The Ministry of Municipality and Environment are responsible for policies and regulations; 6. The Ministry of Environment, Water, & Agriculture is responsible for general environmental policy, while the National Center for Waste Management for waste-specific legislation; 7. Led by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Source: Current State Assessment, Kearney



United Arab Emirates

Drivers

- Mature, e-waste specific legislation and strategy, including EPR[1]
- PPPs[2] incentivize private involvement

Stakeholders

- Gov't[7] oversees policy and waste mgmt.systems
- Collection and recycling are offered by public and private players

Product

- High consumption rates of electronics, with comparatively low quantities of e-waste collection

Enablers

- Infrastructure exists, and more advanced technologies are being developed
- Online platform supports exchange of waste

Location

- UAE is a net exporter, but also imports large quantities of e-waste

1. Extended Producer Responsibility; 2. Public Private Partnerships; 3. Overseen by Bahrain's Supreme Council for the Environment; 4. Policy development is overseen by Kuwait Environment Public Authority, while the Ministry of Public Works oversees infrastructure development and waste management projects; 5. The Ministry of Municipality and Environment are responsible for policies and regulations; 6. The Ministry of Environment, Water, & Agriculture is responsible for general environmental policy, while the National Center for Waste Management for waste-specific legislation; 7. Led by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment Source: Current State Assessment, Kearney

Key Outcomes

To operationalize the insights gathered during the DSA, the E-Waste Management Program (EMP) was launched as a flagship DCO initiative. It aims to develop a comprehensive e-waste framework that incorporates cross-border e-waste regulations, harmonized disposal standards, and data-sharing agreements among DCO Member States. The framework is undergoing validation in two pilot Member States, ensuring adaptability and scalability across different regulatory landscapes. The following initiatives were identified to drive sustainable e-waste management[21]:

1. E-Waste Management Framework

- Develop a comprehensive framework offering guidance on national-level e-waste governance and cross-border management.
- Integrate components for regulatory enforcement, digital tracking systems, incentive programs, and extended producer responsibility (EPR).

2. Technology Adoption Programs

- Promote the adoption of mechanical and chemical recycling technologies to improve material recovery efficiency.
- Support the development of smart sensors and AI-driven inventory management systems to reduce waste from unsold electronic products.

3. Cross-Border Collaboration Models

- Facilitate partnerships between exporting and importing nations to optimize resource recovery.
- Develop bilateral agreements for refurbishment and recycling infrastructure, ensuring compliance with international e-waste standards.

4. Capacity-Building Workshops

- Conduct training sessions for policymakers, waste management operators, and industry leaders on best practices in e-waste governance.
- Promote public awareness campaigns to encourage responsible disposal and recycling habits.

The E-Waste Management Project (EMP)

The E-Waste Management Project (EMP) is a strategic initiative aimed at transforming e-waste management through a structured, scalable, and country-agnostic framework. It is built upon insights from eight globally recognized e-waste management frameworks and five circular economy models, drawing expertise from leading institutions such as UNITAR, WEF, ITU, and EACO. The EMP provides governments, industries, and stakeholders with a practical roadmap to address the growing challenge of electronic waste while harnessing opportunities for sustainability, economic development, and digital inclusion.



Regulations, Policies and Strategies

Establishes a clear governance structure for e-waste management, combining legislative and voluntary mechanisms to ensure compliance, safety, and sustainable practices. This pillar also emphasizes international cooperation, enabling member states to align with global best practices and regional agreements, such as the Basel Convention on transboundary e-waste movement.

Financial Instruments

Introduces a comprehensive financial framework to support e-waste management through tax incentives, investment schemes, and grant programs. By fostering public-private partnerships (PPPs) and stimulating private sector investment, this pillar helps create sustainable funding mechanisms to scale recycling infrastructure and promote innovation.

Human Capital and Awareness

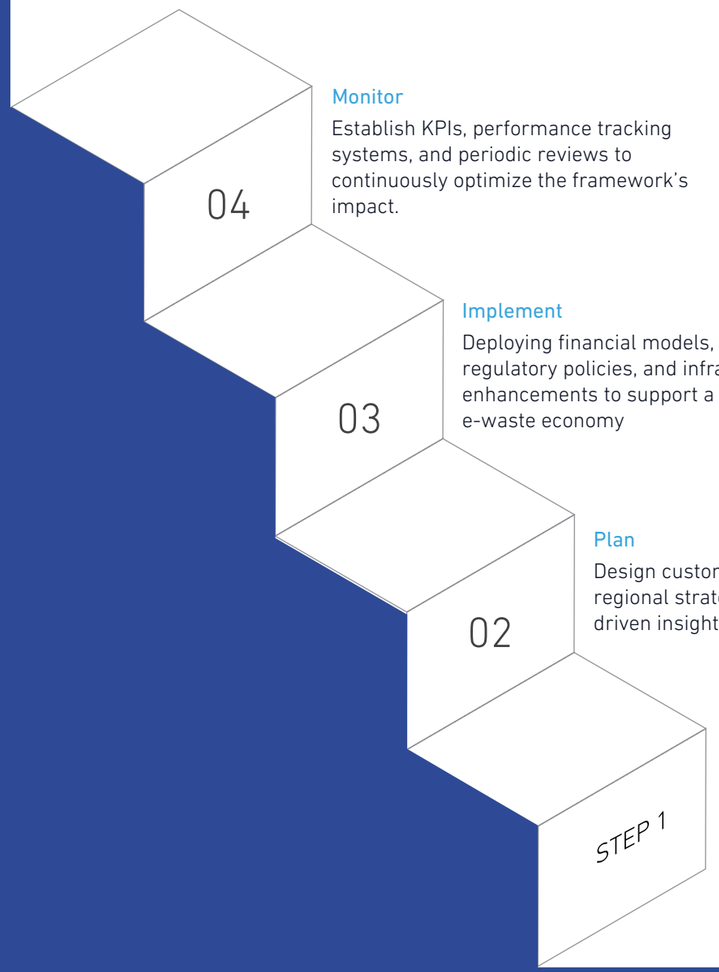
Recognizes the critical role of education, capacity-building, and community engagement in fostering responsible e-waste disposal and sustainable consumption. This pillar encourages stakeholder participation across government, industry, and civil society to enhance digital literacy and environmental awareness through targeted campaigns, training programs, and industry collaborations.

Infrastructure and Technology

Establishes a clear governance structure for e-waste management, combining legislative and voluntary mechanisms to ensure compliance, safety, and sustainable practices. This pillar also emphasizes international cooperation, enabling member states to align with global best practices and regional agreements such as the Basel Convention on transboundary e-waste movement.

A Phased Approach for Implementation

The EMP framework follows a structured, four-step approach—Understand, Plan, Implement, and Monitor—ensuring that member states can adopt and adapt e-waste management practices according to their national needs.



Driving Global Sustainability and Circular Economy Growth

By integrating regulatory, financial, technological, and human capital considerations, the EMP framework empowers governments, businesses, and communities to address e-waste challenges holistically. It promotes a shift from a linear consumption model to a circular economy approach, turning discarded electronics into valuable resources and bridging the digital divide by refurbishing and redistributing second-hand devices.

Through sustainable policies, innovative financial instruments, and cutting-edge technology, the EMP framework sets a blueprint for long-term environmental stewardship, ensuring that e-waste becomes a catalyst for sustainable development rather than an ecological burden.

"From policy to practice—building frameworks and fostering collaboration will enable sustainable e-waste solutions at scale."

Recommendations for Member States

The following recommendations emerged to help Member States strengthen their e-waste management strategies:

EPR 1. Establish Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Schemes

To ensure sustainable e-waste management, Member States should implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs that shift the financial and operational burden of e-waste collection, recycling, and disposal to manufacturers and importers. These programs should mandate that electronics producers finance the safe and efficient disposal of their products at the end of their lifecycle. Clear compliance mechanisms should be established, including financial penalties for non-compliance and incentives for companies that integrate eco-friendly product designs. Through EPR schemes, governments can reduce informal waste processing, promote resource efficiency, and encourage the development of circular economy solutions in the electronics sector.

2. Invest in E-Waste Recycling Infrastructure

A critical challenge in cross-border e-waste management is the lack of recycling infrastructure in many regions, leading to a high dependency on exports or illegal disposal methods. Member States should develop modernized recycling facilities that integrate mechanical, chemical, and AI-driven sorting technologies to enhance the efficiency of material recovery. Governments should also foster public-private partnerships (PPPs) to attract investments that will expand recycling capabilities and create job opportunities in green industries. Establishing national e-waste tracking systems will enable real-time monitoring of waste flows and help authorities identify and eliminate illegal dumping sites and unauthorized waste handlers.

3. Promote Data-Driven Transparency in E-Waste Flows

Effective regulation of cross-border e-waste trade requires robust data collection and monitoring systems. Member States should implement digital tracking tools, such as IoT-enabled waste management systems, to track, categorize, and regulate the movement of e-waste aCross-Borders. Establishing a national e-waste registry will allow policymakers to analyze trends in e-waste generation, collection, and disposal, ensuring that policies are aligned with real-time data insights. Furthermore, harmonized data-sharing agreements between countries will enhance regional coordination, enabling governments to detect and prevent illegal shipments while improving global sustainability reporting.

4. Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

E-waste management requires a collaborative approach that involves governments, the private sector, academia, and civil society organizations. Member States should foster cross-border partnerships to facilitate knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and regulatory alignment. Engaging with international organizations, such as the Basel Convention authorities will help align national regulations with global best practices in e-waste governance. Establishing regional e-waste management working groups will allow governments to coordinate policy reforms, share expertise on sustainable recycling models, and develop standardized regulatory frameworks for handling electronic waste.

5. Implement Public Awareness and Education Campaigns

A lack of awareness about proper e-waste disposal remains a major barrier to effective recycling and sustainable waste management. Member States should invest in nationwide awareness campaigns to educate consumers on the environmental and economic benefits of responsible e-waste disposal. Educational institutions should integrate e-waste management courses into school curricula, ensuring that younger generations adopt sustainable disposal behaviors. The private sector can also play a role by introducing consumer incentives, such as trade-in discounts, tax credits, or buyback programs, to encourage responsible electronics recycling. By promoting digital literacy and public engagement, governments can drive higher participation in e-waste collection programs, ultimately improving recycling rates and reducing hazardous environmental impacts.

"Collaboration, innovation, and accountability are the pillars of a sustainable e-waste ecosystem."

Lessons Learned

The Cross-Border E-Waste Management DSA highlighted the following critical takeaways:

Trust and Transparency

Building public trust requires transparent data systems and accountability mechanisms.

Technology as an Enabler

Innovations in recycling and tracking technologies can address major e-waste challenges.

Cross-Border Synergy

Coordinated international collaboration is vital to managing transboundary e-waste flows.

Inclusive Solutions

Integrating informal sectors and promoting awareness programs are essential for equitable progress.

"E-waste is not a challenge to solve alone—it is a shared opportunity for innovation, circularity, and sustainability."



Stakeholders Engaged

- **Andy Hursthouse**
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- **Wesley Billett**
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- **Darwich Noureldin**
  Sustainability expert, Equity Energies
- **David Greenfield**
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- **Jack Herring**
  Director, Jiva Materials Ltd
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  Lenovo
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- **Syed Iftikhar**
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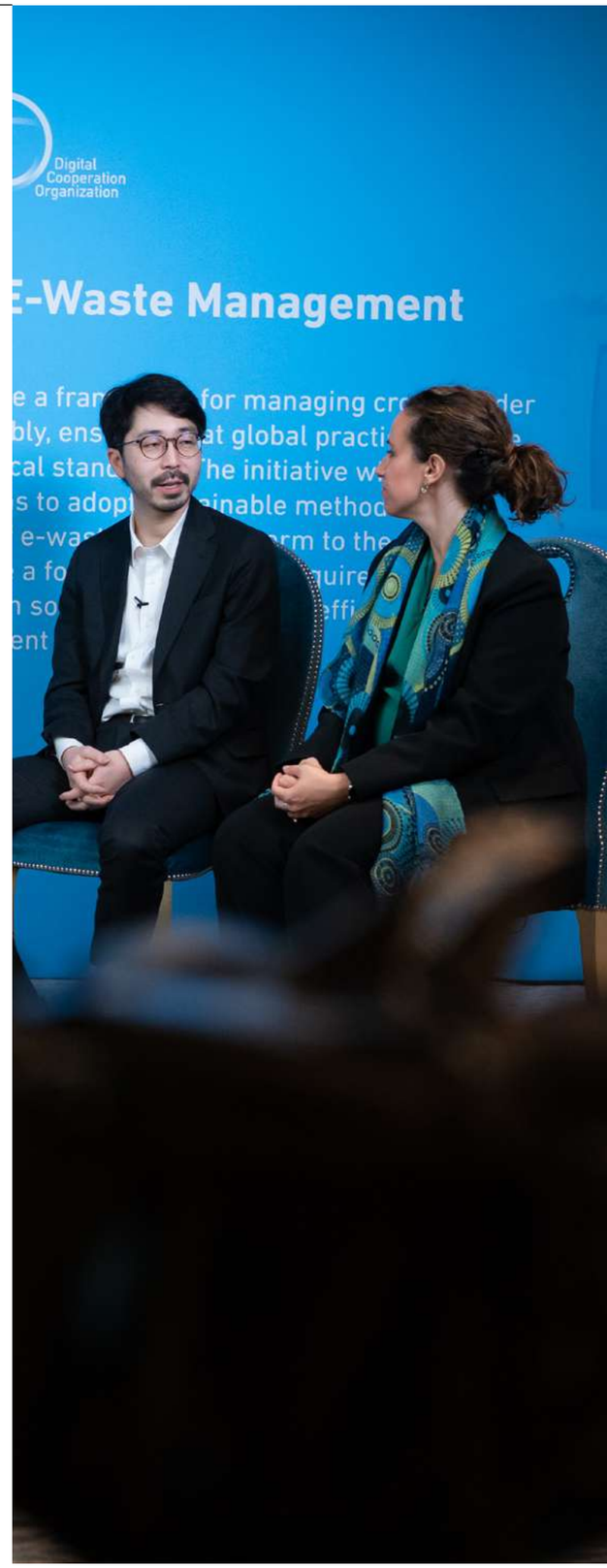
** The names of stakeholders are non-exhaustive and only includes those who have explicitly agreed to have their names shared*



** The names of stakeholders are non-exhaustive and only includes those who have explicitly agreed to have their names shared*

09

WAY **FORWARD**

CROSSCUTTING THEMES AND SYNERGIES

The Digital Space Accelerators (DSAs) have highlighted shared challenges and opportunities across initiatives addressing misinformation, startup ecosystems, digital trade, and more. While each DSA focuses on specific themes, significant crosscutting elements emerge, underscoring the importance of collaboration, adaptability, and inclusivity in fostering a sustainable and impactful digital transformation. These synergies provide actionable pathways to align objectives, leverage resources, and create a cohesive vision for the DCO Member States.

1. The Importance of Regulatory Coherence

Regulatory alignment has been a recurring priority across all DSAs. Misinformation mitigation should strike a balance between accountability and safeguarding access to information. while the Startup Act and Digital Trade DSAs emphasize harmonized policies to reduce compliance burdens and foster cross-border collaboration. Divergent regulations impede innovation and scalability, making it critical to develop model laws and interoperability agreements tailored to local contexts but aligned with global standards.

Cultural Value and Misinformation Mitigation

Inconsistent policies on misinformation weaken enforcement and public trust. A unified approach ensures balanced regulation, digital literacy, and content governance across regions.

Model Startup Act

Fragmented regulations hinder startup growth and cross-border expansion. Policy coherence in taxation, licensing, and investment fosters a thriving, scalable innovation ecosystem.

Digital Trade

Diverse trade policies create barriers for entrepreneurs in cross-border commerce. Aligning data policies, e-payments, and trade frameworks reduces compliance costs and accelerates digital trade.

Ethical AI

Diversity in AI regulation creates governance gaps and ethical risks. Harmonized AI policies ensure responsible and human-centric AI adoption.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

Disjointed e-waste policies limit recycling and circular economy adoption. A cohesive regulatory framework drives sustainability, resource efficiency, and cross-border waste management.

2. Empowering Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

Entrepreneurs are central to all DSAs as drivers of innovation, economic resilience, and inclusivity. However, barriers such as limited access to funding, skills, and digital tools disproportionately impact their growth. The DSAs collectively advocate for capacity-building programs, financial incentives, and digital platforms to enhance entrepreneurs participation in digital ecosystems.

Cultural Value and Misinformation Mitigation

Misinformation undermines entrepreneurs by eroding trust in digital platforms. Clear content governance and digital literacy policies help SMEs navigate online risks and protect brand credibility.

Model Startup Act

Entrepreneurs struggle with regulatory complexity, funding gaps, and market access. A harmonized Startup Act streamlines business registration, unlocks financing, and fosters regional collaboration.

Digital Trade

Regulatory barriers restrict SME participation in cross-border trade. Aligned e-payment systems, data policies, and trade agreements reduce compliance burdens and expand market reach.

Ethical AI

Entrepreneurs face challenges in AI adoption due to high computing costs and diversity in regulations. Harmonized AI governance frameworks help entrepreneurs integrate ethical AI solutions while maintaining compliance.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

Entrepreneurs lack incentives to engage in sustainable e-waste practices. Targeted financial support and circular economy policies enable entrepreneurs to contribute to responsible e-waste management.

3. Integrating Digital Literacy and Education

Education emerged as a foundational pillar across the DSAs. The Cultural Values and Misinformation Mitigation DSA emphasized embedding critical thinking and media literacy in educational systems to combat false narratives, while the Startup Act and Digital Trade DSAs stressed the importance of upskilling programs for youth and entrepreneurs. Digital literacy enhances inclusivity and ensures that all stakeholders can participate meaningfully in the digital economy.

Cultural Value and Misinformation Mitigation

Limited digital literacy makes users more vulnerable to misinformation. Embedding media literacy in education helps individuals critically assess online content and mitigate misinformation threats.

Model Startup Act

Entrepreneurs need business, financial, and digital skills to scale successfully. Education programs, mentorship, and innovation hubs equip entrepreneurs with the tools to thrive in competitive markets.

Digital Trade

Entrepreneurs and individuals often lack awareness of cross-border trade policies and digital tools. Upskilling programs on e-commerce, digital payments, and trade compliance boost participation.

Ethical AI

Responsible AI adoption requires technical expertise and ethical awareness. Capacity-building initiatives ensure policymakers, businesses, and individuals can use AI responsibly and transparently.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

Lack of public knowledge on e-waste disposal harms sustainability efforts. Educational campaigns raise awareness of responsible recycling and circular economy practices.

4. Leveraging Technology Responsibly

Technology is both an enabler and a challenge. AI tools are critical for combating misinformation, enhancing digital trade, and streamlining startup operations, but they must be deployed ethically. The DSAs call for integrating human oversight into AI systems to ensure fairness, transparency, and cultural sensitivity.

Cultural Value and Misinformation Mitigation

AI-driven fact-checking tools help combat misinformation, but human oversight is essential to ensure cultural sensitivity and prevent algorithmic bias in content moderation.

Model Startup Act

Startups rely on digital platforms for growth, but unequal access to advanced technologies hinders scalability. Targeted technology adoption policies enable entrepreneurs to innovate while ensuring ethical use.

Digital Trade

Digital trade depends on secure e-payment systems, cross-border data flows, and interoperable platforms. Responsible regulation of fintech and e-commerce tools ensures fair competition and consumer protection.

Ethical AI

AI must be embedded with ethical considerations. Harmonized AI governance frameworks promote responsible innovation aligned with human rights.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

Technology in e-waste management—such as smart recycling systems and IoT-enabled tracking—can optimize waste collection, but must be designed to prevent data privacy risks and environmental harm.

5. Fostering Regional and Global Collaboration

Cross-border partnerships amplify the impact of individual initiatives by pooling resources and aligning strategies. The DSAs collectively stress the need for regional agreements, shared platforms, and global coalitions to address systemic challenges and scale solutions.

Cultural Value and Misinformation Mitigation

Misinformation spreads aCross-Borders, requiring international cooperation on fact-checking, platform accountability, and digital literacy to ensure a unified response to online falsehoods.

Model Startup Act

Startups benefit from cross-border investment, knowledge exchange, and harmonized regulations. Regional collaboration creates scalable ecosystems that attract funding and enable market expansion.

Digital Trade

Fragmented trade policies limit SME access to global markets. Mutual recognition agreements, standardized e-payment systems, and interoperable trade regulations facilitate seamless digital commerce.

Ethical AI

Diverse AI regulations create governance gaps. Consistent ethical standards ensure responsible AI deployment across regions.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

E-waste management requires cross-border policies for recycling, material recovery, and sustainability. Global cooperation enables efficient resource use and minimizes environmental impact.

5.Unified Metrics for Impact

The need for measurable outcomes is a common theme. Metrics such as SME participation rates, misinformation resilience scores, and cross-border trade volumes provide actionable insights for refining strategies.

Cultural Value and Misinformation Mitigation

Measuring misinformation reduction requires standardized digital literacy assessments, fact-checking efficiency metrics, and misinformation exposure tracking to evaluate policy effectiveness.

Model Startup Act

Startup success depends on consistent metrics for business survival rates, funding access, and market expansion to track ecosystem growth and policy impact across regions.

Digital Trade

Harmonizing trade impact requires cross-border SME participation rates, digital transaction volumes, and compliance cost reductions to assess digital economy integration.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

Tracking sustainability progress requires e-waste recycling rates, material recovery efficiency, and regulatory adoption statistics to monitor circular economy success.

"By integrating efforts across DSAs, we can create a future that is inclusive, innovative, and sustainable."

EXPECTED IMPACT AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Digital Space Accelerators (DSAs) represent transformative efforts to address critical challenges in misinformation, startup ecosystems, digital trade, and beyond. By integrating insights from roundtables, stakeholder consultations, and real-world implementations, the DSAs have generated meaningful impacts while highlighting essential lessons for future initiatives. This section synthesizes the key outcomes and takeaways across the DSAs, with a focus on measurable impacts, success stories, and actionable recommendations for continuous improvement.

Expected Impact

Cultural Value and Misinformation Mitigation

The Cultural Values and Misinformation Mitigation DSA is expected to reduce misinformation susceptibility by 40%, strengthening trust in digital content and enhancing public awareness. Through AI-driven content verification, narrative-based literacy campaigns, and multilingual fact-checking initiatives, this DSA will empower citizens to distinguish fact from fiction. By embedding misinformation resilience within education systems, this initiative will promote informed decision-making and enhance societal trust in digital ecosystems.

Model Startup Act

The Model Startup Act DSA presents a transformative opportunity to strengthen startup ecosystems across Member States. By streamlining processes, they are expected to significantly enhance startup survival rates and reduce business registration times, making it easier for entrepreneurs to launch and scale. The establishment of regional innovation hubs, combined with targeted funding and tailored financial incentives, will create a more vibrant environment for entrepreneurial growth and attract increased venture capital investment. Furthermore, the integration of gender-inclusive policies will play a vital role in bridging the funding gap for women-led enterprises, fostering a more inclusive and resilient digital economy leading to higher innovation success rates across the DCO Member States

Digital Trade

This initiative seeks to enhance SME participation in cross-border trade by promoting harmonized data regulations, streamlined customs processes, and the adoption of Single Window systems. Strengthening mutual recognition agreements and digital payment interoperability will facilitate greater market access and economic opportunities for entrepreneurs, allowing them to operate more efficiently in the global digital trade ecosystem. By reducing regulatory fragmentation, the initiative aims to create a more seamless and inclusive environment for digital commerce.

Ethical AI

The Ethical AI DSA aims to provide Member States with a shared foundation for AI governance. Following their adoption by the DCO Member States, the DCO Principles for Ethical AI are expected to provide clear policy guidance while respecting diversity in national contexts. By embedding ethical AI considerations into governance frameworks, Member States will be better positioned to address algorithmic bias, enhance public trust in AI systems, and mitigate risks in critical sectors such as healthcare, finance, and law enforcement. The initiative will further encourage collaborative governance approaches to ensure AI remains trustworthy, ethical, and inclusive across diverse regulatory landscapes.

Cross-Border E-Waste Management

With global e-waste volumes projected to exceed 82 million tons by 2030, this initiative aims to increase recycling rates by 25% and reduce reliance on primary resource extraction. By leveraging circular economy models, digital tracking technologies, and extended producer responsibility (EPR) programs, Member States will strengthen regulatory enforcement, promote sustainable e-waste management, and enhance environmental accountability. Additionally, repurposing second-hand devices can bridge the digital divide, providing affordable access to technology for underserved populations.

Lessons Learned

Localized Approaches Are Critical

Digital transformation efforts must be adapted to regional and cultural contexts. Misinformation strategies must align with cultural trust mechanisms, AI governance should respect national priorities, and startup policies must reflect local economic conditions.

Technology Alone Is Not Enough-Human Oversight Is Essential

While AI-powered solutions are effective in fact-checking, trade facilitation, and AI ethics compliance, they require human oversight to ensure transparency, fairness, and contextual sensitivity. Human-AI collaboration is key to scalable and ethical adoption.

Cross-Border Collaboration Enhances Digital Policy Success

Fragmented regulatory approaches hinder progress. Unified policy frameworks, regional trade agreements, and cross-border cooperation are necessary for effective digital trade, AI governance, and misinformation mitigation.

Capacity-Building and Digital Literacy Are Foundational

Without adequate training, education, and awareness programs, the impact of DSAs will be limited. Empowering governments, entrepreneurs, and the public with practical knowledge ensures sustainable digital transformation.

Sustainability and Inclusivity Must Be Embedded in Digital Strategies

Digital policies should prioritize environmental sustainability, gender inclusion, and SME empowerment. The Cross-Border E-Waste Management DSA, Startup Act DSA, and Digital Trade DSA show that sustainability and inclusivity drive long-term success.

Measurable Impact Is Key to Continuous Improvement

Tracking key performance indicators (KPIs)—such as misinformation reduction, startup growth, AI adoption rates, and e-waste recycling metrics—ensures that DSAs remain effective, adaptable, and scalable.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusion

Digital Space Accelerators (DSAs) have demonstrated the transformative potential of aligned frameworks and collaborative approaches in addressing global challenges such as misinformation, startup ecosystem development, and digital trade facilitation. By drawing on insights from diverse regions, including the GCC, Africa, and Asia, the DSAs have created a roadmap for sustainable digital transformation rooted in inclusivity, innovation, and accountability.The journey of the DSAs highlights the importance of:

Regulatory Coherence

Harmonized policies have reduced compliance burdens, promoted cross-border data flows, and enabled trustworthy digital ecosystems. For instance, the Digital Trade DSA has supported mutual recognition agreements to standardize e-payment systems, while the Ethical AI DSA has promoted alignment on AI governance frameworks, ensuring that AI ethics regulations remain consistent across jurisdictions.

Fragmented Value Chains

Segmented e-waste collection, processing, and recycling systems undermine operational efficiency.

Empowering Entrepreneurs

Targeted initiatives have expanded access to funding, market opportunities, and capacity-building programs. The Model Startup Act DSA has successfully streamlined business registration frameworks, reducing startup launch times by 60%, while the Digital Trade DSA has facilitated cross-border participation for SMEs through interoperability agreements.

Education and Awareness

Public digital literacy campaigns and entrepreneurial training programs have strengthened misinformation resilience and capacity-building efforts. The Cultural Values and Misinformation Mitigation DSA has enhanced fact-checking frameworks through AI-driven content verification tools, while the Cross-Border E-Waste Management DSA has promoted public awareness of circular economy solutions to increase e-waste recycling rates by 25%.

Technological Innovation

Emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, and blockchain have been integrated ethically into misinformation mitigation, digital trade facilitation, and e-waste management. The Ethical AI DSA has addressed algorithmic bias and transparency concerns, while the Cross-Border E-Waste Management DSA has introduced smart tracking systems to regulate e-waste disposal.

Fostering Regional and Global Collaboration

The DSAs have played a critical role in creating cross-border partnerships, fostering regulatory alignment, and strengthening digital cooperation across DCO Member States. Whether through AI ethics standardization, misinformation mitigation strategies, or trade agreements, the DSAs have catalyzed multi-stakeholder collaboration to shape inclusive digital economies.

Through these concerted efforts, the DSAs have laid the foundation for resilient and inclusive digital ecosystems. However, the journey is ongoing, and the lessons learned provide a pathway for continuous refinement and expansion.

Next Steps

Building on the success of the DSAs, the following next steps outline a forward-looking strategy to sustain and scale the impact of these initiatives:

1. Scaling and Institutionalizing DSA Models

Adapting Proven Frameworks

Member States should scale and customize successful DSA models such as Tunisia's Startup Act, Singapore's Digital Literacy Programs, and regional mutual recognition agreements for digital trade. Adaptation should be data-driven and tailored to national priorities.

Embedding the DSA's policy recommendations into National Policies

Governments should integrate DSA policy recommendations into national digital strategies, ensuring long-term sustainability. For example, the Model Startup Act DSA's policy proposals should be reflected in SME regulatory reforms, while the Ethical AI DSA's governance recommendations should shape AI regulatory policies.

Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Leveraging private-sector innovation and investment is crucial to sustaining DSA initiatives. Governments should collaborate with industry leaders, venture capitalists, and tech hubs to scale digital trade, AI governance, and misinformation mitigation programs.

Piloting Regional Centers of Excellence

Establishing regional innovation hubs will enhance knowledge sharing and accelerate policy implementation. These centers can focus on digital trade integration, AI policy harmonization, and scaling circular economy solutions from the Cross-Border E-Waste Management DSA.

2. Enhancing Monitoring, Impact Assessment, and Data-Driven Decision-Making

Unified Impact Metrics

Develop standardized KPIs to track progress across DSAs, including misinformation resilience scores.

Real-Time Dashboards

Implement digital dashboards that provide stakeholders with real-time data on initiative performance, enabling data-driven adjustments.

Encouraging Transparent Reporting and Data Sharing

Governments should adopt open data standards for misinformation detection, digital trade flows, and AI governance, ensuring cross-border transparency and regulatory alignment.

3. Strengthening Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation

Cross-Border Agreements

Expand agreements on data protection, electronic payments, and regulatory interoperability to facilitate seamless collaboration.

Engaging Global Tech Companies

Foster partnerships with tech giants to co-develop solutions for digital trade and misinformation mitigation.

4. Deepening Focus on Digital Literacy and Inclusion

Targeted Training Programs

Develop standardized KPIs to track progress across DSAs, including and misinformation resilience scores.

Youth and Gender Initiatives

Launch programs focused on empowering women and youth through entrepreneurial training and access to digital tools.

5. Promoting Sustainable Innovation

Incentivizing SDG-Aligned Startups

Provide financial and technical support to startups addressing sustainability challenges, such as clean energy and healthcare innovation.

Ethical Technology Deployment

Establish guidelines for the responsible use of AI and IoT, prioritizing transparency and cultural sensitivity.

Call to Action

The success of the DSAs underscores the transformative potential of collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity. As Member States move forward, continued commitment to these principles will ensure that digital transformation benefits all stakeholders, fostering economic resilience, societal trust, and sustainable growth.

The DSAs have demonstrated the transformative potential of aligned strategies, collaborative efforts, and data-driven implementation. By continuing to refine and scale these initiatives, Member States can build resilient, inclusive, and innovative digital ecosystems that drive sustainable development.

"Together, we can build a digital future that is inclusive, innovative, and sustainable—one that leaves no one behind."



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