



United Nations
Office for Digital and
Emerging Technologies



**DIGITAL PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE**
Universal Safeguards



Two years in
**BUILDING SAFE AND
INCLUSIVE DPI FOR SOCIETIES**



DPI Safeguards Initiative: Progress, learnings and future direction

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Digital public infrastructure (DPI) is transforming societies, powering innovation and momentum for rapid digital transformation.

When done right with appropriate safeguards, DPI is a means to many ends. It can bring about numerous benefits and significant multiplier effects, such as catalysing economic growth, boosting health and wellbeing outcomes, expanding access to education, and improving livelihoods. The opportunity for population-scale change has never been greater.

In 2023

DPI was selected by the United Nations Secretary-General as one of [12 High Impact Initiatives](#) with the potential to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2024, 193 UN Member States agreed on the need for safeguards to ensure that DPI approaches are inclusive, responsible, safe, secure and user-centred, with the adoption of the [Global Digital Compact \(GDC\)](#). The launch of the [Universal DPI Safeguards Framework](#) in 2024 was the direct response to that call. The Framework, designed through a multistakeholder process led by the [DPI Safeguards Initiative](#), comprises a set of **350+ good practices** that provide governments and institutions a foundation for building and operating responsible DPI.



Digital public infrastructure holds immense promise to accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals, but only if it is designed to protect the people it is meant to serve. As we approach the High-Level Review of the Global Digital Compact in 2027, I call on all Member States to act on their commitment to safe and inclusive DPI, and to make safeguards a standard part of how we build the digital foundations of our societies.

~ António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Today, DPI is a Global Priority.

More than [150 countries](#) have implemented some kind of DPI system, from national ID to payment data exchange systems, impacting billions of lives across the world.

With Safeguards



DPI becomes more than infrastructure: it can be a catalyst for innovation, economic growth, and social inclusion.

For countries seeking to accelerate development and looking to leapfrog on the markers that matter – health, longevity, education, and livelihoods – safe and inclusive DPI is the foundation for innovating and delivering population-scale services.

Without Safeguards



DPI creates exclusion, reinforces discrimination, and undermines trust.

This leaves vulnerable groups without adequate access to social, health, banking, or public services. Safeguards should not be retrofitted into DPI; they should be an upfront necessity to prevent harm, exclusion, and discrimination.

Progress in Numbers

9

countries across 5 regions pioneered the adoption of the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework and its Principles

16

additional countries have requested support with safeguards implementation, signalling growing demand

20

international organizations contributed to the expansion of the DPI Safeguards ecosystem and generated a common language around safeguards implementation

67

working group members selected across two cohorts co-created a set of #safeDPI **public knowledge assets** for the DPI ecosystem

3000+

stakeholders actively engaged in shaping what responsible DPI looks like in practice through convenings

1000+

organizations represented a plurality of voices and perspectives, shaping the Initiative from the ground up

20000+

users across diverse geographies have downloaded the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework as a foundational guidance resource for building safe and inclusive DPI

Image Credits: Lianne Milton



As UN Member States deploy DPI to improve public service delivery, reach underserved populations, and create new markets, proactive inclusion and risk mitigation measures are a necessary condition for success. The DPI Safeguards Initiative is the key digital cooperation mechanism to ensure this opportunity is realized responsibly and equitably for all.

**~ Amandeep Singh-Gill,
United Nations Under-Secretary-
General, Special Envoy for Digital and
Emerging Technologies**



Digital public infrastructure is reshaping how governments serve their people, and how people access their rights. But transformation at this scale demands responsibility. The Universal DPI Safeguards Framework is how we ensure that as these systems expand, they work for everyone, they are safe, and worthy of the trust placed in them.

**~ Alexander de Croo,
Administrator, United Nations
Development Programme**



SAFEGUARDS AT THE CENTRE OF THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Emerging learnings and insights

Phase 1 of the DPI Safeguards initiative set out to mainstream the adoption of the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework, gather learnings from across the evolving DPI ecosystem, and surface actionable insights to guide implementations. Two years in, countries are beginning to view safeguards not as a compliance burden or add-on, but as a non-negotiable upfront necessity for achieving population-scale digital transformation for everyone, everywhere.

Phase 1: 2023-2025

What we accomplished



Positioned safe and inclusive centrally in the global DPI discourse, laying the foundation for rights-based design and implementation of DPI as a gold standard.



Integrated safeguards into policy instruments, including the Global Digital Compact, formalizing requirements, standards and generating accountability for meeting GDC commitments.



Strengthened the work of safeguards practitioners by influencing their approaches, enhancing their capacity, and guiding the consistent application of safeguards principles across diverse contexts.



Established a common vocabulary and norms for safeguards, enabling governments, international organizations and civil societies to communicate with a shared language.



Organized a range of structured capacity-building engagements on safeguards, including trainings, workshops, and knowledge-sharing sessions.

Where we are going



Move from Political Alignment to Implementation

Greater political and multilateral alignment will help build legitimacy, momentum, and shared direction around safeguards. To make progress: continue to build commitments, develop country-level implementation pathways with agreed processes and practical, time-bound actions.



Assign Ownership to Drive Delivery

Once a country pathway is in place, advancing safeguards requires a lead institution, named actors responsible for different parts of the work, and a multistakeholder mechanism for coordination, decision-making, and delivery.



Integrate Safeguards into Funding Decisions

Safeguards need to be reflected in budget processes and financing decisions. Progress will depend on integrating safeguards into country programming, public budgeting, and donor and financing mechanisms, shaping both resource allocation and implementation behaviour.



Broaden the Ecosystem and Support for Safeguards Implementation

Countries need context-specific support, practical tools, and to be accompanied through implementation. Further progress will depend on a broader set of actors providing this support so that safeguards implementation can be advanced through multiple channels rather than a narrow set of actors.



Two years of implementation have shown us that safeguards are not a constraint on digital progress; they are the foundation of it. Countries that embed safeguards from the start build systems that are trusted, adopted, and sustainable. That is the lesson, and it is the ambition driving everything we do next.

~ Robert Opp, Chief Digital Officer, UNDP



DPI Safeguards

The DPI Safeguards initiative is a multi-stakeholder process to create a universal framework to build safe and inclusive digital public infrastructure.

SAFEGUARDS CHAMPIONS

It is not DPI if it is not safe and inclusive

From governments driving national digital transformation to civil society organisations working to protect vulnerable groups, here are some key perspectives representing the DPI Safeguards initiative's whole-of-society approach.



By leveraging digital public infrastructure, Brazil is strengthening a set of crucial government policies such as the digital ID, the Unified Registry for social programs, and the innovative Rural Environmental Registry, therefore promoting citizenship, eradicating poverty, and enabling a sustainable future. We are committed to building such infrastructures safely and inclusively, benefiting from the active engagement of our vibrant civil society.

**~ Esther Dweck,
Minister of Management and Innovation in
Public Services of Brazil**



With the launch of the MyMzansi roadmap, South Africa is building integrated digital public infrastructure that connects digital identity, data exchange, payments and services into a single system for accessing government services. We have committed to the Universal DPI Safeguards and are embedding these into the design from the outset, alongside open standards and digital public goods principles. In parallel, we are beginning to formalise more structured engagement with civil society following initial consultations.

**~ Melvyn Lubega,
Head of the Digital Services Unit, South
Africa Presidency**



As countries around the world lay the foundational digital rails that will transform their economies and societies for years to come, they face crucial decisions that will shape the well-being of all people. The UN DPI Safeguards Initiative, alongside several partners, is working with countries to chart a course to a safe, inclusive digital future. Together, we'll help make the safe choice the easy choice for every country embarking on a journey toward a digital future.

~ CV Madhukar, CEO, Co-Develop



The DPI Safeguards Initiative ensures that digital public infrastructure is developed in ways that protect openness, trust, and user rights. As DPI systems scale globally, success will depend not only on sound public governance, but also on the meaningful participation of private sector actors that operate critical digital infrastructure.

**~ Soheib Nunhuck,
Senior Policy Manager, DPI, alongside
GSMA's External Affairs Team**



As Uganda accelerates the rollout of digital public infrastructure, our key concern has been that digital systems are advancing faster than safeguards, public understanding, and meaningful participation. Through our engagement in the DPI Safeguards Initiative, we have recognised the critical importance of strengthening the capacity of civil society actors and facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue on digital rights and safeguards. This has enhanced more confident engagement with duty bearers on implementation gaps and is contributing to the emergence of a stronger, more coordinated civil society movement advocating for inclusive, accountable, and rights-centred digital transformation.

**~ Jackson Leviticus Wandera, Program
Officer, Economic Justice & Social
Protection, Initiative for Social and
Economic Rights (ISER)**

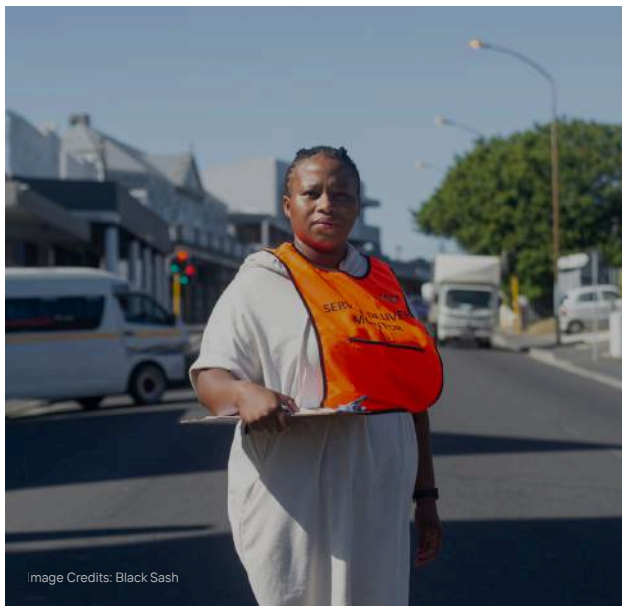


Image Credits: Black Sash



Digital public infrastructure is rapidly reshaping the way people access and use financial services. Through the Global DPI Insights Community, the Center for Financial Inclusion at Accion is exploring risks to user experience and trust, as these systems roll out across the world. This work is taking place alongside technical partners GSMA, CCAF, the UN Safeguards Initiative and Integral Governance Solutions, and with support from the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth. The UN's Universal DPI Safeguards Initiative is playing a vital role by turning lessons into practical guidance for those building DPI. Together, we are helping policymakers and leaders create DPI systems that are secure, affordable, and able to reach underserved people at scale.

**~ Michael Schlein, President & CEO,
Accion**



Image Credits: Accion



The Universal DPI Safeguards Framework provides us with a structured, rights-based language and methodology to strengthen our advocacy for a hybrid system – one that includes non-digital pathways as a right. This aligns with digital public infrastructure principles to promote trust, accountability, and human rights in digital transformation. As the South African government moves swiftly toward the digitisation of other permanent grants and social services, the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework is becoming increasingly significant to our work.

**~ Evashnee Naidu, KZN Regional Manager;
Hoodah Abrahams-Fayker, National
Advocacy Manager, Black Sash**

Safeguards in Action



Malawi

Implementing safeguards in practice

Implementing Offline Digital ID to Strengthen Inclusion

Malawi is a pioneer in inclusive digital infrastructure and undertook a massive national digital ID campaign, registering 97 percent of its population. However, one in ten people were still unable to access services, blocked by missing smart cards, patchy electricity, and overstretched district offices. In parallel, weak verification created risks of impersonation, including cases where individuals used someone else's ID card to collect agricultural subsidies – the Farmers Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) – such as fertilizer and seeds. UNDP Malawi worked with the National Registration Bureau under the Ministry of Homeland Security for an offline digital ID approach as a practical safeguards measure to strengthen both inclusion and integrity in service delivery. This included Malawi rolling out offline digital ID in the form of biometric QR verification that can provide ID confirmation without connectivity, devices, or infrastructure. In 2025-26, approximately 1.1 million people were verified and accessed the FISP by using the digitally signed biometric QR code. Almost 2 million people used the digital QR code to register and vote in the 2025 election.

A similar model could be adapted for other public interest use cases, including social cash transfers, public works programmes, healthcare delivery, and SIM registration.



Image Credits: UNDP Malawi



Lesotho

Lesotho's DPI drive

Building better for every child

As Lesotho digitalises its social protection systems, the risks also increase: personal data from families in remote areas is now stored on national platforms. The government is responding by developing DPI safeguards, starting with systems that directly impact children. With support from UNICEF and the Co-Develop Fund, key protections are being integrated into the national social registry, NISSA, which covers over 90 percent of households. This will help prevent exclusion and protect personal data from misuse. For families in remote communities, this means accessing essential services in a way that they can trust.



UNICEF is one of our key partners, especially when it comes to DPI. Even though we are now taking it further by conducting pilots, we are also working closely with UNICEF on DPI safeguards. We will therefore collaborate with them to establish our own local DPI safeguards framework.

**~ Kanono Ramashande,
Principal Secretary,
Ministry of Communication, Lesotho**



Digital transformation must be inclusive from the start. These safeguards ensure that no child is left behind and that families can access services with confidence and dignity.

**~ Deepak Bhaskaran,
UNICEF Representative in Lesotho**



Image Credits: UNICEF/UNI118944/Tylle



SCALING DPI SAFEGUARDS



Commitment, capacity and capital

Initial investments have moved the DPI Safeguards initiative from pioneering work to global momentum, but more resources are needed to match the growing demand from countries and the scale of the opportunity at hand.

The world over, the pace of human development progress has slowed, but the promise of digital transformation continues to ignite new possibilities. As a critical enabler of digital transformation, DPI can multiply these possibilities exponentially and turn them into meaningful realities for communities. This however can only happen when safeguards are embedded as an upfront necessity.

With digital transformation accelerating globally, countries that build DPI without safeguards risk building systems that people don't trust, and don't use, ultimately collapsing the economic and societal models they were designed to support. The DPI Safeguards initiative is on a mission to ensure every DPI is designed, implemented and governed with safeguards.

The DPI Safeguards initiative is grateful for the generous support during Phase 1 from Co-Develop and the Gates Foundation.

Partner with us to build safe and inclusive DPI for societies.

Digital Cooperation Fund

<https://www.digitalcooperationfund.org/>

DPI Safeguards

www.dpi-safeguards.org

DPI Safeguards Secretariat

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Get involved



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