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**EMPOWERING REGULATORS AS DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM BUILDERS**

As digital technologies transform how societies connect, trade, learn and are governed, regulators are being called to do more than oversee markets. They must adapt, embed innovation at the heart of their institutional mission and help shape resilient and future-ready digital ecosystems. This transformation demands a fundamental shift in mindset, the adoption of new tools, and deeper collaboration across sectors and borders.

Building on two decades of GSR Best Practice Guidelines, which have helped define sound regulatory principles and foster enabling environments, we – the regulators participating in the 2025 Global Symposium for Regulators – acknowledge the urgency of this shift. Responding to today’s challenges and preparing for those ahead requires regulators to assume the role of digital ecosystem builders.

These guidelines reflect our shared commitment: informed by national experience, guided by a global perspective and focused on delivering practical, forward-looking regulatory leadership for a digital future that leaves no one behind.

## I FOSTER INNOVATION IN REGULATORY APPROACHES

### Make innovation a core regulatory practice

Regulators should treat innovation not as a side project, but as a core part of how regulation is designed and delivered. Institutionalize experimentation by embedding pilot projects into annual workplans, using regulatory sandboxes and testing light-touch rules before full rollout.Make room for learning from failure, recognizing that not every innovation will succeed but every attempt generates valuable insights that strengthen future regulatory approaches.

### Develop future-ready skills and mindsets

In addition to technical knowledge in digital and new and emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, new space technologies and blockchain, regulators need skills in policy prototyping, behavioural science and systems thinking. Foster an agile, future-responsive regulatory culture by building continuous peer learning and cross-disciplinary collaboration into institutional routines.

### Regulate with agility and foresight

Implement agile frameworks such as outcome-based regulation, tiered licensing and sunset clauses to enable adaptive regulatory responses as technologies and markets evolve. Guide innovation rather than simply react to it by using data, strategic foresight, horizon scanning and anticipatory frameworks to better identify emerging risks and opportunities.

### Collaborate to innovate

Move from one-off consultations to structured, problem-solving partnerships with ministries, market actors, academia and civil society across sectors. Co-create legitimate, flexible solutions to align perspectives, and pool knowledge through collaborative governance. Align policies and prevent conflicting rules by embedding intersectoral coherence mechanisms.

## II ADAPT AND ENHANCE REGULATORY CAPACITY

### Update mandates for digital realities

Ensure regulatory mandates reflect convergence across infrastructure, content and services. This may require oversight of digital platforms, data governance or AI, as well as cross-sector coordination to reduce fragmentation and reinforce public interest outcomes. This also calls for political, operational and financial independence to enable long-term planning, impartial decisions and consistent enforcement beyond political or market cycles

### Invest in strategic capacity

Go beyond technical upgrades. Secure sustained investment in the human and financial resources needed to maintain and expand these tools as part of the core regulatory operations. Build multidisciplinary teams, establish internal foresight and data analytics units and streamline coordination across departments. Partner with academia and think tanks to support continuous learning and regulatory intelligence.

### Make decisions inclusive and evidence-based

Strengthen regulatory capacity for data- and risk-informed decision-making. Use data platforms, AI analytics and stakeholder inputs, especially from underserved groups and local innovators, to inform decision-making. Align rules with real-world conditions through regulatory impact assessments and staged implementation.

### Institutionalize collaboration

Coordinate across sectors and jurisdictions using joint task forces, shared regulatory labs and inter-agency working groups. Adopt ITU’s collaborative governance approach to design coordinated and adaptive responses to complex ecosystem challenges. A ‘whole-of-government’ approach is no longer optional; it is essential to ensure coherence in national digital policy and effective governance of complex digital ecosystems.

Recognize the need for innovative investment models to support the sustainable deployment of telecommunications/ICTs and digital infrastructure. In light of persistent financial challenges in rural and remote areas, we encourage the development of inclusive policy and regulatory approaches that enable public-public and public-private partnerships, government-wide collaboration, and long-term digital growth.

### Leverage co- and self-regulation

Where appropriate, delegate responsibilities to trusted partners with clear accountability mechanisms. Support co-regulation with expert institutions, civil society or industry actors — especially in fast-moving areas like cybersecurity, AI and data governance.

### Shape digital innovation for public value

Regulation should not only enable innovation but direct it toward social inclusion, rights protection and sustainability. Align incentives with investment in underserved areas, meaningful connectivity and digital public infrastructure to ensure technology delivers tangible benefits for people and communities.

## III LEVERAGE EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES FOR REGULATORY EXCELLENCE

### Use digital tools across the regulatory cycle

Integrate emerging technologies such as AI, big data, blockchain and IoT into regulatory supervision, compliance and decision-making – not as add-ons, but as embedded capabilities. Examples include regulation through data, real-time spectrum monitoring, automated compliance alerts and smart licensing systems, among other RegTech and SupReg applications.

### Harness data for responsive oversight

Build integrated data systems that combine market actor submissions, sensor data and crowd-sourced feedback. Detect service gaps, identify risks early and guide interventions where they matter most by using dashboards and analytics.

### Modernize engagement through technology

Launch digital portals, open data platforms and mobile tools to make decisions transparent and participation easier, especially for users in underserved or remote communities. Improve access and feedback with tools like AI chatbots or map-based dashboards. Streamline and simplify regulatory processes for industry to lower compliance costs and improve the ease of doing business while maintaining oversight.

### Institutionalize experimentation

Test regulatory responses before codifying rules by using sandboxes, living labs, simulations and scenario tools. Accelerate consultation analysis and improve responsiveness with AI-assisted tools. Ensure effectiveness and responsible innovation by co-designing these experimental frameworks with industry and other stakeholders.

### Design for trust and ethics

Lead by example in how technologies are used internally. Adopt privacy-preserving tools, establish clear accountability for automated decision-making and align with global principles on trustworthy AI and data protection. Clearly communicate with the public on how technologies are being used and what safeguards are in place.

### Build the capacity to deliver

Recognize that digital transformation requires strategy, not just software. Invest in multidisciplinary talent, promote open standards and develop shared infrastructure across government to avoid duplication and overdependence on proprietary systems.

## IV STRENGTHEN CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION FOR A CONNECTED FUTURE

### Make collaboration results-driven

Use regional and international partnerships to solve common challenges and shared priorities, from spectrum coordination to AI governance. Prioritize joint activities, regulatory sandboxes or enforcement efforts that deliver tangible impact over formal agreements alone.

### Harmonize where it adds value

Pursue alignment in areas such as digital trade, AI ethics and data protection, but allow flexibility to reflect national contexts. Mutual recognition, shared policy principles and coordinated timing help balance interoperability with sovereignty.

### Build shared learning infrastructure

Establish communities of practice, joint training platforms and peer mentoring schemes. Support open-access knowledge tools that can be adapted locally and reused by other regulators.

### Coordinate data, tools and standards

Promote interoperability-by-design in regulatory systems. Monitor cross-border risks and align regulatory action by using common APIs, shared indicators and data-sharing protocols.

### Assert regional voice and digital sovereignty

Shape global norms in line with local needs through cooperation. Engage in multilateral fora, strengthen digital diplomacy and support regional initiatives to align regulatory practices and shape regional positions on shared digital challenges.

### **Make cooperation a core function**

Assign dedicated units, mandate cross-border planning and track the real-world impact of cooperation. Integrate systemic coordination into institutional design to support ongoing alignment across policies, sectors and stakeholders.

## V WAY FORWARD

In a landscape shaped by constant flux and technological upheaval, regulation must become a lever for responsible innovation – grounded in technological understanding, institutional adaptability, cross-border cooperation and ethical integrity. Regulators who embrace this role can move from rule-setters to ecosystem builders. The principles and approaches in these guidelines offer a clear path: one that strengthens public trust, fosters digital development that leaves no one behind, and reinforces the collective ability to govern a connected, dynamic and interdependent digital world.