

## ***From Open Software to Open Culture***

***Opportunities and challenges of open source to support the United Nation mandate***

***9am-10:30am (EST), 23 September 2021, Virtual meeting***



### Concept Note

As stressed by the UN Secretary-General, "The advances of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, including those brought on by a combination of computing power, robotics, big data and artificial intelligence, are generating revolutions in healthcare, transport and manufacturing. I am convinced that these new capacities can help us to lift millions of people out of poverty, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and enable developing countries to leapfrog into a better future". Recognizing their potential, Member States are also increasingly interested in ways to better leverage open source technologies for sustainable development. Promoting open source technologies is thus critical to ensuring that technologies' full benefits are harnessed to achieve the United Nations' mandates, goals and perspectives.

Whether we realize it or not, we rely on open source software every day. Indeed, open source software powers the cloud and provides professional tools for big data and for information and knowledge management. It is in supercomputers, blockchain, the internet of things and artificial intelligence. There are high chances that, any new project involving software is based on open source software built through open source Initiatives key parameters and protected by a standard Open Source License.

The open source paradigm is based on the idea that software reuse need not stop at organizational boundaries. By sharing source code freely under a license that generously permits copying, modification, and redistribution, open source projects allow collaborative software development that benefits a larger community. By removing barriers between innovators, open source promotes a free exchange of ideas within a community to drive creative, scientific and technological advancement. By definition, open source development is collaborative, inclusive and revolutionary when compared to traditional software and business built on proprietary and closed practices.

The term open source also applies beyond software and can include openly licensed content, data, standards and AI models that allow access for anyone to view, use and adapt them. These different types of open source solutions reinforce one another, creating increasingly open and accessible systems that have enormous capacity to advance the sustainable development goals and ensure the benefits of increased internet connectivity can be fully and equitably realised. Hence, the United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation stresses that "We must undertake a concerted global effort to encourage and invest in the creation of digital public goods: open source software, open data, open AI models, open standards and open content."

The open source ethos and culture also embodies the ideals of the United Nations as it rests on openness, transparency, equality and collaboration. The open source approach comes with very low entry barriers allowing for ICT professionals and future generations of technologists from developed, developing as well as least-developed countries alike to collaborate with existing and new global technology communities and build strong and sustainable capacity.

The UN has been the host of several successful open source-based initiatives assisting in the delivery of its mandate in the areas of peace & security, development, and human rights, as well as promoting the advancement of digital public goods. The UN and its various funds and agencies are also increasing collaborations and partnerships with related stakeholders.

However, for a wider adoption and institutionalization of open source, the UN requires a culture change to expand its experience in collaborating and engaging with partners outside of the organization and the larger public. A real paradigm shift within the United Nations system is necessary to harness the power of open source while accepting its limitations and challenges.

### Objective of the event

The objective of this event is to explore the potential of open source technologies in the work of the United Nations, particularly to help exemplify and develop new ideas on how open source can be used as test bed for co-creating new solutions to global challenges. The event will showcase concrete examples of new modes of co-creation and innovation based on the open source culture.

The panel discussion will provide a forum for UN Secretariat Staff, experts, and practitioners to discuss and share ideas on how to increase the understanding and awareness of the opportunities and challenges of open source, so as to create the needed mindset shift to fully realize the potential of these technologies within the United Nations system.

The event will also begin a dialogue with external entities on how to support collaborative platform(s) to facilitate the sharing of the best ideas and innovations to inform policy, including building the needed capacity within the United Nations, through and Open Source Programme Office (OSPO) in OICT.

## Speaker list

### **Moderator**

- Director Policy, Strategy and Governance Division, UN-OICT – Mr. Salem Avan

### **Keynote speakers**

- Assistant Secretary-General & Chief Information Technology Officer - Mr. Bernardo Mariano Junior
- Officer in Charge, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology – Assistant Secretary-General - Ms Maria-Francesca Spatolisano

### **Panellists**

- Acting, Director of Digital Services at the European Commission DIGIT – Ms. Natalia Aristimuno Perez
- Chief, Open Source Programme, Israel Ministry of Science & Technology – Mr. Shimon Shore
- Secretariat co-lead, Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) – Ms. Lucy Harris
- Former Minister for Technological Innovation, Researcher and Lecturer University of Torino - Ms. Paola Pisano
- Associate Dean for Research, Johns Hopkins University - Mr. Sayeed Choudhury
- Director of Tech for Social Good, GitHub – Ms. Mala Kumar

## Participants

The panel discussion will be held virtually through the UN standard on-line platform.

The event will be open to all participants.

If you plan to attend this event, kindly RSVP here: <https://forms.office.com/r/iJ6szZAaRm>