NGI Forum 2023: Celebrating 5 Years of Innovation and Unlocking the Power of Digital Commons

Brussels, 17 November 2023 - The NGI Forum 2023, held on November 15-16, 2023, at the Blue Point venue in Brussels, has concluded with resounding success. The flagship event of the European Commission's Next Generation Internet (NGI) initiative brought together a lineup of thought leaders, policymakers, and technologists, committed to the mission to advance a safer, open, and citizen-centric internet for the future. It also marked the NGI Funding's 5th anniversary.

Director-General of DG CONNECT at the European Commission, Roberto Viola, opened the event and delivered a thought-provoking keynote, outlining the Commission's vision for a resilient and democratic digital landscape and emphasising the importance of the contribution of the open source community in this endeavour. "The NGI community has the power to embrace an identity ecosystem that's open, federated and empowers citizens in both the digital and real world."

French Ambassador for Digital Affairs, Henri Verdier, emphasized that Europe is the house to a big community of technologists working on digital commons (the "commoners") and highlighted France's initiatives in advancing digital sovereignty and the importance of EU-wide collaboration. "Europe must do its best to support the resources it has created to ensure sovereignty."

Throughout the two-day event, the NGI Forum 2023 hosted thought provoking discussions on crucial topics for the future of the internet, including digital identity, quantum internet, large language models, web search, decentralized social media, and the security of the open-source supply chain. The plenaries and workshops provided a dynamic platform for participants to engage in discussions and collaborative efforts toward building the internet of tomorrow.

Showcasing the impact of NGI, both as a programme and as a community, the event also featured "impact stories", where members of the community presented their open source

solutions aiming at creating value for all – whether that is protecting privacy, improving traceability or enhancing digital identities.

The debates over the two days proved there are a lot of open questions regarding how to concretely deliver the human-centric internet which is at the core of the NGI mission but that the NGI community is deeply committed to address those and to cooperate with the governments and policy makers to achieve the common goal. As Pearse O'Donohue – Director for Future Networks at the European Commission – emphasised in his closing remarks, bringing together elements of top-down policy and bottom-up, grassroots ideas and solutions, is a challenge but one that NGI has clearly embraced.

Talking about future prospects, O'Donohue took the opportunity to present the upcoming new NGI projects – among which the 27Million NGI Commons Fund project and the new policy action on the digital commons – which are expected to significantly advance the work on digital commons in the EU.

The NGI Forum 2023 also served as a momentous occasion to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the NGI initiative's funding of innovations. Over the past five years, NGI has fostered a unique ecosystem of highly talented and value-driven innovators, contributing to projects such as CryptPad, Searx, Mastodon, and many more that prioritise open source and open data solutions.

During the event, it was announced that NGI has achieved a significant milestone of funding and supporting over 1000 groundbreaking innovations. This accomplishment speaks to the initiative's dedication to re-imagining and re-engineering the internet for a safer, open, and citizen-centric digital environment.

Unveiling the Digital Commons

The forum's agenda, filled with dynamic sessions and workshops, emphasised the importance of digital commons – shared digital resources that are accessible to all. These sessions unveiled strategies to foster innovation while ensuring equitable access and promoting sustainability in the digital ecosystem.

Highlights and Commitments

Key sessions discussed the future of decentralised social media, the Fediverse's potential to scale, and the urgent need to secure open-source software against supply chain risks. The event also shone a light on the advancements in open web search and the pivotal role of large language models in European innovation.

Empowering Digital Citizens

The NGI Forum 2023 stood out as a hub for not only sharing knowledge but also for empowering citizens in the digital world. Discussions delved deep into the creation of a digital identity that respects privacy and offers control to individuals across the European Union.

Quotes from the Speakers

Alexandre Zapolsky, President at Linagora "It's great to hear panelists talking about the leadership of France in #OpenSource #AI and thanking our ecosystem for being so active!"

Monique Calisti, CEO at Martel Innovate "The NGI is house to many Digital Commons efforts that are changing the destiny of the Internet, bringing back to its origins. That is shared, open, free, interoperable, and privacy-preserving by design."

Sophie Bloemen, Director at Commons Network "Embracing the digital commons is not just about technology, protocols, code, and algorithms, it is about our economy, how we govern it, and who it serves"

Alex Grech, Executive Director at University of Malta "In the context of Web 4.0, with people frequently moving across borders, everyone eventually needs to verify their credentials somewhere. It's important that we examine this issue and consider the collective good, particularly in relation to digital identity and credentials."

Irene Hernández, CEO at Gataca "NGI Forum is a pivotal event that tackles critical issues head-on to forge a secure and trustworthy Internet for all. Europe has a strong vision for our digital future, with Digital Commons, Digital Identities, and open source taking center stage as instrumental assets."

Alexander Herranz, Head of Technology at ALASTRIA "One of the most challenging issues for digital wallets from a technology perspective is to provide a great user experience and the highest level of security to put the user in control of their data"

Melanie Rieback, CEO & Co-founder at Radically Open Security "One of the great things with NGI is that you are funding sufficiently scoped cybersecurity audits for open-source projects. It's not benefitting Europe, it's benefitting everyone."

Renaud Chaput, CTO at Mastodon GmbH "Attending the NGI Forum for the first time was a fantastic experience. It's heartening to see so many individuals deeply engaged and committed to creating a better internet and striving towards a sustainable model for smaller-scale tech projects."

Koen de Jonge, Board Member at Open Internet Discourse Foundation "What's most important on the Fediverse is that you can be who you are without moderation, without automated algorithm basis, without being pushed."

Jesse Robbers, Co-founder & Executive Board Member of Quantum Delta NL "All 27 EU Member States have signed a declaration agreeing to work together to explore how to build a quantum communication infrastructure across Europe, boosting European capabilities in Quantum technologies, cybersecurity and industrial competitiveness."
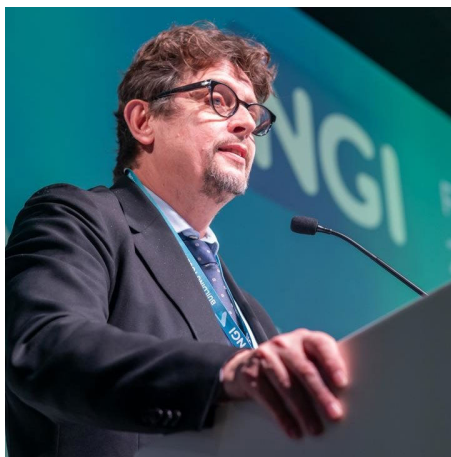
Gael Duval, CEO at Murena "The NGI initiative is making various projects and people from all other countries in the EU to meet and work together. We have different cultures and different languages but we succeed to communicate and build together. Maybe it's one of the first incarnation of a "human-centric European Union", something similar to Erasmus in its spirit, that let millions young Europeans meet and discover each other."

Looking Ahead

As the NGI Forum 2023 wraps up, the path forward is clear: Europe is poised to take bold steps towards a more inclusive, secure, and innovative digital future. The forum has set the stage for ongoing dialogue and action, with a unified vision to realise the potential of the internet as a force for good.

As we reflect on the success of NGI Forum 2023 and the accomplishments of the NGI initiative over the past five years, we look forward to continued collaboration and innovation that will shape the digital landscape of Europe and beyond.

For more information on NGI Forum and the NGI initiative, please visit: https://www.ngi.eu/

NGI Forum 2023 Photo Gallery

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About NGI Forum:

The NGI Forum is the flagship event of the European Commission's Next Generation Internet (NGI) initiative, bringing together innovators, policymakers, and technologists to advance a safer, open, and citizen-centric internet. NGI Forum explores topics that underpin the transition to the future internet, focusing on the concept of the Digital Commons, equitable access to information, innovation, and digital sovereignty. Learn more at https://ngiforum2023.eu/

About NGI Initiative:

The Next Generation Internet (NGI) is a European Commission initiative that aims to shape the development and evolution of the Internet into an Internet of Trust according to the vision of the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles. An open Internet that responds to people's fundamental needs, including trust, security, and inclusion, while reflecting the values and the norms all citizens enjoy in Europe.

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