



# The Geneva Data Community: Digital sovereignty and responsible innovation: strengthening the Geneva ecosystem in an interconnected world

*Summary of the meeting of 16 April 2026*

*57<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Statistical Commission*

In the introduction, an update was first provided on the 57th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, held in early March. The session was effective, with the Commission continuing to function smoothly despite broader challenges within the United Nations system. Key topics included the work of the [High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP](#), for which a report by the UN Secretary-General and this group is expected soon. The results of this report might start the post-2030 discussions. Artificial intelligence readiness was also discussed. Four priority areas for national statistical offices were identified (data collection, data processing, data dissemination, and supporting processes) and a working group, the Kigali City Group on AI-Readiness for official data and statistics is expected to begin shortly, including public consultations.

*Trusted Data Observatory – where are we?*

The presentation of the Trusted Data Observatory focused on the growing difficulty of identifying reliable and trustworthy data in an increasingly crowded and AI-driven information environment. Challenges include distinguishing high-quality data from low-quality sources, combating misinformation and disinformation, and enabling effective data discovery for large language models. The TDO inverts the traditional model by moving from “data to metadata” to “metadata to data”, relying on systematic implementation of common standards, open data principles, and machine-readable formats. Functionally, the TDO operates as a prism that receives user queries and gives responses by linking exclusively to trusted data sources, such as national statistical offices and international organisations, with a planned future expansion to high-quality data from NGOs. This approach aims to improve transparency, visibility, and access to trusted data, mitigate hallucination risks in AI systems, and provide a concrete mechanism to challenge misinformation. While the conceptual phases of the TDO have been completed, the next steps focus on institutionalization, building a minimum viable product, conducting proof-of-concept tests, and transitioning to a fully operational platform. Governance is envisioned under UN leadership, supported by a broad and representative stakeholder group and a high-level decision-making structure, with the long-term objective of establishing a UN Trusted Data Observatory.

Open discussions raised important cross-cutting issues, including how to define “trust” in data, concerns over transparency in AI decision-making, and the potential misuse of trusted data. Suggestions included framing trust in terms of regulated versus unregulated data. Several challenges were acknowledged, including engagement with major technology companies and AI developers, sustaining partnerships and securing long-term funding. Initial engagement with companies has already begun, and upcoming events are expected to further advance the initiative.

## *Giga initiative*

The meeting also featured a presentation on the joint ITU/UNICEF GIGA initiative ([Giga | Connect every school | UNICEF - ITU](#)). Giga was launched in 2019 with the goal of supporting governments to connect every school in the world to the internet. The scale of the challenge was emphasized, with 2.2 billion people and approximately 500 million students still lacking connectivity worldwide, and an estimated USD 1.6 trillion required to close the digital infrastructure gap. GIGA is currently engaged with 49 countries, primarily in Africa, Central Asia, and the Caribbean, working in four key areas (pillars): mapping school locations and connectivity status through platforms; modelling infrastructure and connectivity scenarios; facilitating innovative financing solutions through partnerships with development banks and other institutions; and aggregating demand to reduce costs through coordinated contracting. Capacity development underpins each of the four pillars. It is the focus of the Giga Learning Hub in our Geneva Connectivity Centre, as well as the Government Tech Exchange Programme in Barcelona.

## *Public event*

The event brought together representatives from international organisations, NGOs and civil society to discuss digital sovereignty, responsible innovation, and trusted data in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) and global data governance. The discussions emphasized the growing importance of trust, interoperability, and transparency in a rapidly evolving digital environment shaped by AI, with a particular focus on Geneva's emerging role as a global hub for data governance.

The Trusted Data Observatory (TDO), led by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, was presented as an answer to the challenge of discovering reliable, official data. Rather than storing data, the TDO functions as a global "lighthouse" that enables users to identify who published data, when, where, and under which standards. Operating as a metadata platform, it relies on common metadata standards to support comparability across countries and to guide citizens, researchers, and AI systems toward verified sources. The TDO was repeatedly described as a discovery mechanism rather than a data repository, reinforcing the idea that "the language of data is metadata" and that discovery metadata is essential for navigating today's fragmented data landscape.

Geneva's strategic role in global data governance was another major focus in the welcoming remarks of **Thomas Gürber**, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations Office at Geneva. He highlights that in a complex global "polycrisis" marked by misinformation and fragmentation. Reliable data and shared facts are essential for effective multilateral action. Geneva has the potential to become a dashboard for global governance, capable of providing shared digital tools for the multilateral system.

**Martin Müller** and **Laurent Mentek**, from the [Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator \(GESDA\)](#), presented its work on scientific anticipation, aimed at grounding long-term foresight in scientific research. GESDA's approach involves consulting scientists to identify technological developments on 5-, 10-, and 25-year horizons, structured through a Science Anticipation Radar covering domains such as socio-political developments. The organization emphasized trust built through people, data, and transparent processes, adherence to FAIR principles, and the use of AI strategies with clearly documented data sources and methodologies.

The panel discussion was composed of **Pádraig Dalton**, Project lead "Trusted Data Observatory"; **Irene Kaggwa**, Giga Programme Manager, International Telecommunication Union (ITU); **Samira Gazzane**, Policy Lead, Future-Ready Economies, WEF and **Ines Knäpper**, Women in AI Switzerland.

Discussions on data sovereignty revealed significant regional differences and a lack of a universally accepted definition. Perspectives highlighted contrasts between regulatory-driven approaches, particularly in Europe, and policy-oriented strategies elsewhere that focus on enabling access to high-quality datasets. Initiatives such as [digital embassies](#) for sovereign AI were presented as ways to allow countries to use cross-border infrastructure while maintaining regulatory control. From an infrastructure standpoint,

participants stressed that international standards are essential to balancing sovereignty with interoperability, especially given challenges such as incompatible data formats, cybersecurity risks, and different levels of digitalization across regions.

The issue of bias and representation in data featured in the discussion. Speakers raised critical questions about whether trusted data is not only accurate, but also representative of the populations it affects and auditable enough to detect and correct bias. It was emphasized that bias must be addressed at the source through inclusive data collection practices, as AI systems can replicate and amplify existing biases at scale. The diversity of the panel itself was highlighted as a positive example from typical technology-focused discussions. Participants also identified persistent challenges in global data infrastructure, including dependency on proprietary solutions, limited internet connectivity in developing regions, and the need for approaches that balance safety, security, and interoperability. Effective data governance was framed broadly to include sovereignty, security, privacy, and cybersecurity.

Finally, the discussions acknowledged that global AI governance is likely to remain fragmented due to differing regional priorities and risk perceptions. While the European Union emphasizes precaution and citizen protection, other regions prioritize innovation and address risks after disruption. The event concluded with a forward-looking perspective, highlighting upcoming initiatives such as the AI Summit in Geneva in 2027.

### **Follow-up**

- I. The FSO will schedule the next meeting of the *Geneva Data Community*. Further information will follow in due course.
- II. Switzerland will continue to bring discussion pertaining to data to this community. The next event planned is a side-event at the World Health Assembly on 18 May 2026.
- III. The upcoming episode of the podcast *NeXCt – when Strategy meets Technology*, featuring Georges-Simon Ulrich, Director General of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, and Pádraig Dalton, will discuss the Trusted Data Observatory. The episode will be available on various platforms. For more information please see the following link : [NeXCt – when Strategy meets Technology](#) .