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The recommendations, actions, and initiatives proposed in this paper present a comprehensive framework to significantly strengthen startup ecosystems across South Africa, the African continent, and the wider G20. These ambitious proposals offer a strategic roadmap for G20 leaders to foster entrepreneurship and drive innovation-led economic growth globally. While Startup20 acknowledges that, given the current international context, some proposals may be challenging to implement, this framework nonetheless provides a valuable overview of key actions to enable startup and MSME ecosystems to grow and thrive across G20 countries.

The successful development of this Policy Paper has been made possible through the dedicated efforts and collaboration of the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD), The Department of Science, Technology and Innovation and the Startup20 South Africa Secretariat at 22 On Sloane, together with the invaluable contributions of the **Foundation and Alliance** Task Force Members and Knowledge Partners.

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GEN 22 ON SLOANE

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Foreword

By Task Force Chair and Deputy Chair.

Entrepreneurship is more than the creation of businesses; it is the spark that ignites possibility, drives innovation, and reshapes societies. Across every region, startups and MSMEs are reimagining how we work, trade, learn, and live. They are the problem-solvers of our age, offering answers to challenges as diverse as climate resilience, digital transformation, and inclusive growth. Yet too often their impact is constrained by unequal access to finance, fragmented policies, and barriers to global markets.

The SU20 Foundation and Alliance Taskforce were established to change this reality. Our purpose is clear: to place startups and MSMEs at the centre of inclusive, sustainable, and digitally enabled growth. They are not peripheral actors; they are vital engines of resilient economies and critical contributors to a fairer global future.

This policy paper reflects months of collaboration across taskforces, partners, and global stakeholders. It presents evidence-based recommendations and practical actions designed to transform fragmented entrepreneurial landscapes into a connected, equitable, and opportunity-rich global ecosystem. At its heart is the **Global Ecosystem Exchange (GEX)**, a framework to connect markets, expand digital equity, harmonise enabling policies, and reimagine entrepreneurial education for a new era. It is ccomplimented by **Digital Infrastructure and Cross-Border Innovation**, the **Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance**, and the **Global Entrepreneurship and Startup Policy Innovation Framework (GESPIF).** Together, they offer a systemic response to these challenges, designed to be practical, inclusive, and evidence-driven, while adaptable to G20 nations through standardised competencies, innovative learning environments, and sustainable partnerships that scale while respecting local contexts.

As South Africa chairs Startup20 during its historic G20 Presidency, we present this document not only as a set of policy proposals but as a call to collective action. We invite governments, corporates, investors, educators, and entrepreneurs to join us in building a future where every innovator regardless of geography, gender, or background can participate fully in shaping global prosperity.

Chairperson

Dr Thobekani Lose

Deputy Chair

Hilton Theunissen

Deputy Chair

Saki Zamxaka

Policy Glossary

Abbreviation	Definition
Accountability Mechanism	Transparent structures, rules, or processes that enable the monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment of policies, ensuring stakeholder voice.
Alliance	Formal collaboration between government, private sector, civil society, and research organisations to achieve shared development outcomes.
Alliance Secretariat	Administrative body responsible for convening, coordinating, and monitoring Alliance activities and reporting.
Board of Champions	Leadership cohort comprised of senior representatives from member countries/institutions to steward alliance governance.
Civil Society Board	Institutionalised body ensuring CSO participation and oversight within alliance decision-making and monitoring processes.
Civil Society Organisation (CSO)	Non-governmental, non-profit group representing various groups within society, often focused on advocacy, service delivery, or accountability.
Demand-driven Finance	Financing model where resource allocation is determined by local needs and priorities as identified by recipients/users.
Flexible Funding Windows	Multilateral funding instruments that allow for pooled, fast, and adaptive financing for emerging priorities.

Foundational Investments	Public spending on essential goods and services (e.g., basic health, education, social protection, water, energy) that form the basis for equitable development.
G20	The Group of Twenty: a forum for economic cooperation and policy coordination among major advanced and emerging economies [10].
Governance Structure	The formal arrangement of authority, representation, and decision-making within an organisation, alliance, or partnership.
Inclusive Growth	Economic expansion that is broad-based, reduces inequality, and ensures the participation of underserved and marginalised groups.
Institutional Capacity	The technical, human, and financial resources enabling governments and organisations to deliver, adapt, and scale services.
Multi-stakeholder Consultation	Deliberate engagement of diverse groups (government, private, civil society, marginalised voices) in policy design and oversight.
Participatory Policymaking	Policy design and review processes that explicitly include lived experience and insight from affected individuals and communities.
Peer Learning Platform	Network or forum for sharing of best practices, case studies, and technical knowledge among countries and institutions.
Policy Basket	A set of curated, evidence-based interventions or tools for countries to adapt and replicate in support of SDGs and resilience.

Public Goods	Services or infrastructure provided without direct profit motive for the welfare of all (e.g., roads, sanitation, education).
Rapid Response Mechanism	System for mobilising expertise, resources, or interventions quickly in times of crisis (health, climate, social, etc.).
Ring-fencing	Designating specific funding or resources for particular uses or beneficiaries in order to protect them from diversion or cuts.
SDG (Sustainable Development Goal)	One of 17 UN-defined targets for ending poverty, protecting the planet, and improving global prosperity by 2030.
Social Protection	Systems providing safety nets such as social assistance, insurance, and welfare to mitigate vulnerability and promote inclusion.
SU20	South Africa's G20 Presidency, convening inclusive and action-oriented taskforces for global policy reforms [10].
Voluntary Compliance	Policy or regulatory approach using encouragement, peer review, and public reporting rather than enforceable mandates.

Recommendations: Executive Summary

Innovation ecosystems remain fragmented across G20 member states, concentrated in well-resourced urban centres, and largely inaccessible to entrepreneurs in marginalized and underserved communities. Without a unified global framework, many remain excluded from co-creating innovation capacity and economic value. The Startup20 Task Force on Foundation and Alliance, under South Africa's 2025 G20 Presidency, proposes a comprehensive policy framework to connect innovation ecosystems globally and democratise access to resources, talent, and opportunity.

This framework advances four strategic priorities designed to dismantle ecosystem silos and unlock inclusive innovation across all G20 member states and partners:

1. **Establish an interoperable Global Innovation Exchange connecting regional ecosystems:** Deploy a unified digital platform enabling seamless cross-border resource flows, talent mobility, and knowledge exchange across 25,000 startups by 2030. The Exchange features Founder Passports, mutual regulatory recognition, and Fair Innovation Certification.
2. **Build shared digital infrastructure enabling secure, borderless participation:** Deploy decentralised credential stacks and interoperable data systems that eliminate redundant compliance burdens and reduce friction for cross-border startup operations. Infrastructure prioritises equity and removes digital divides limiting participation in emerging markets.
3. **Harmonise regulatory frameworks to reduce cross-border friction costs:** Implement aligned sandbox regimes, mutual recognition of certifications, and coordinated compliance approaches that maintain robust standards while enabling faster scaling. Regulatory alignment removes obstacles to global startup operations.
4. **Institutionalise inclusion and sustainability as design principles.** Embed gender parity mandates, regional equity quotas, and measurable environmental impact requirements. Ensure women and youth-led founders represent at least 40 percent of all ecosystem participants and funded ventures by 2030.

Summary of recommendations and summary actions:

- **Recommendation 1: Global Innovation Exchange Platform**
    - Action 1.1: Establish a cross-border digital platform connecting 25,000 startups across G20 regions.

  - Action 1.2: Create Founder Passports enabling talent and resource mobility without repeated compliance requirements.
  - Action 1.3: Launch Fair Innovation Certification standardising ESG metrics across member states.
- **Recommendation 2: Shared Digital Infrastructure and Cross-Border Operations**
  - Action 2.1: Deploy decentralised credential and compliance infrastructure reducing operational friction.
  - Action 2.2: Enable cross-border payment and contracting through standardised digital systems.
  - Action 2.3: Establish interoperable data standards protecting privacy while enabling ecosystem analytics.
- **Recommendation 3: Harmonised Regulatory Framework**
  - Action 3.1: Align sandbox regimes and innovation testing protocols across G20 jurisdictions.
  - Action 3.2: Implement mutual recognition of startup certifications and regulatory approvals.
  - Action 3.3: Standardise AML, KYC, and corporate governance requirements for cross-border entities.
- **Recommendation 4: Inclusive Growth and Sustainability Integration**
  - Action 4.1: Mandate gender and regional participation quotas in ecosystem programmes.
  - Action 4.2: Audit platform algorithms for bias and establish transparency reporting mechanisms.
  - Action 4.3: Track environmental and social impact metrics using blockchain-based tokens.

The G20 adoption of this framework will deliver measurable impact: 25,000 startups connected through the Exchange; 40 percent of participants women and youth-led founders; 250 billion USD in cross-border startup value creation; 750,000 jobs created; 100 percent of G20 member states with harmonised regulatory frameworks. These outcomes directly advance G20 priorities on inclusive growth, digital transformation, and sustainable development.

This framework transforms startup ecosystems from exclusive national networks into inclusive platforms for borderless innovation. By ensuring seamless cross-border resource flows, interoperable credentials, aligned regulation, and embedded equity, the G20 unlocks unprecedented innovation potential while advancing the Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no community behind. Foundation and Alliance recommendations position the G20 as architect of a fair, resilient, and prosperous global innovation economy.

Introduction

The global landscape of innovation, economic development, and social transformation faces growing volatility and opportunity. The G20's 2025 South Africa Presidency comes at a pivotal moment: climate instability, rising inequality, and cost-of-capital challenges are intersecting with rapid technological progress, digital transformation, and the accelerating movement of ideas, capital, and talent across borders.

Persistent disparities, both within and between economies, continue to disadvantage underserved communities, women, youth, and small enterprises. Historically, these populations have been excluded by structural barriers, inflexible financial systems, and limited access to markets, infrastructure, and digital connectivity. Notably, rapid developments in artificial intelligence, data governance, and platform economies present both hope and risk. While they offer solutions for efficiency, productivity, and inclusion, they also raise fresh concerns about surveillance, privacy, exclusion, and unequal access to new opportunities.

Recent years have witnessed critical shifts: the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of economic models overly reliant on globalised supply chains and revealed the vulnerabilities of those lacking strong social safety nets, digital capacity, or resilient governance structures. In parallel, youth movements, women's coalitions, and voices from historically marginalised and underserved communities have demanded a "seat at the table," urging for policy frameworks that are inclusive, adaptive, and future-facing. The G20's foundational principles of solidarity, equality, and sustainability now find new urgency, calling for strategies that enable collective ambition and strengthen institutional renewal.

A central rationale for the Foundation and Alliance Taskforce is to address fragmentation: innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation remain uneven, with some regions surging ahead while others remain excluded from real opportunity. The Global South, in particular, faces dual pressures, harnessing young talent, responding to demographic transitions, and aligning industrial policy with global sustainability goals, while also managing geopolitical tensions and the legacies of colonial exclusion. Meanwhile, the Global North must renew its productive base and social contract to stay relevant in a multipolar, digitally interconnected world.

Regional analysis reveals further context. In sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and select European and North American locales, policy gaps are compounded by legacy systems, inadequate infrastructure, and regulatory uncertainty. Local reforms must be nested in broader efforts to harmonise standards for digital privacy, cyber security, tax governance, digital public goods, and entrepreneurial support. The role of government, multilateral agencies, and private sector actors in mobilising resources and driving coalition-building is more important than ever, from innovative financing solutions to sustainable energy transition and digital literacy initiatives.

Against this backdrop, the Foundation and Alliance Taskforce's four main recommendations seek to:

- **Strengthen "ecosystem exchange**" to mobilise cross-border networks, access, and coalitions for inclusive growth.
- Forge **interoperable digital infrastructure and alliances** for robust innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology development.
- Establish internationally **harmonised AI platforms and governance models** that drive safe, equitable, and responsible development.
- Build **policy innovation frameworks** that nurture entrepreneurship in all segments of society, including underserved communities, women, youth, and climate action leaders.

Rather than offering isolated reforms, this paper advocates for systemic transformation. By linking education and human capital development with digital equity, market access, and policy harmonisation, the Taskforce offers a roadmap for G20 nations to build resilient ecosystems that scale locally while connecting globally.

Through collective action across markets, digital systems, and governance frameworks, the G20 can unlock hundreds of billions in cross-border value, create millions of jobs, and embed equity and sustainability into the fabric of the global economy.

Problem Statement

Global innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems remain fragmented and exclusionary, with underserved communities, women, youth, and small enterprises facing persistent barriers to knowledge exchange, financial resources, and market access. Structural disconnections between regions, sectors, and stakeholder groups prevent scale, resilience, and future-readiness, hampering equitable participation in the global digital economy. The absence of interoperable, evidence-driven ecosystem platforms limits joint ventures, talent mobility, climate action, and market validation, deepening divides within and among G20 member states. Closing these gaps is essential to delivering inclusive growth, equitable technology deployment, and sustainable economic transformation.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

Two key challenges facing foundational entrepreneurship ecosystems are persistent fragmentation and unequal access. Despite the many global success stories, over 70% of entrepreneurial activity remains concentrated in just a handful of G20 economies, leaving emerging regions, particularly Africa and the Global South in general, underrepresented and often excluded from international value chains. This concentration limits market connectivity and restricts the flow of venture capital, exacerbating inequality and stifling innovation potential. Access to reliable digital infrastructure and early-stage financing remains limited in underserved areas, with more than half of MSMEs struggling to secure the resources needed to scale, acquire certifications, or participate in procurement opportunities.

At the same time, the drive toward connected and harmonised ecosystems presents substantial opportunities for transformation. By linking markets, catalysing public-private alliances, and piloting global innovation nodes such as the Gateway Exchange, the G20 can unlock hundreds of billions in value, create new jobs, and deliver digital equity to millions of entrepreneurs. Advances in digital infrastructure enable startups from rural, youth, and women-led sectors to leapfrog legacy barriers and participate fully in the global economy. These advances include: interoperable credentialing systems, micro-credential recognition, and blended finance platforms. Ultimately, bold collaboration can convert fragmented support systems into vibrant, resilient engines for inclusive, sustainable growth.

Priority Areas/Thematic Pillars

The GEX is organised around four core pillars that together establish a holistic platform for MSME growth and cross-border integration:

- **Global Common Market (GCM)**: This pillar boosts access to global supply chains and digital trade for MSMEs by harmonising regulations, simplifying compliance, and creating new pilot models for procurement and Startup Passports. The GCM is designed as the market-facing engine of the GEX and focuses on scalable pathways for MSMEs to unlock value and create jobs.
- **Global Entrepreneurial Education Framework (GEEF)**: The GEEF strengthens entrepreneurial capacity through international micro-credentials, skills training, mentorship, and locally adapted education hubs. It ensures MSMEs and

entrepreneurs can acquire relevant global skills while benefiting from international recognition and mentorship networks.

- **Global Digital Infrastructure Equity (GDIE)**: GDIE aims to close connectivity and technology gaps, ensuring affordable, secure access to digital tools, cloud services, and cutting-edge technologies for MSMEs. It also promotes cybersecurity and digital public infrastructure integration, giving entrepreneurs equitable opportunities regardless of geography or scale.
- **Global Entrepreneurship Startup Policy Innovation Framework (GESPIF):** GESPIF creates an enabling and harmonised policy environment, advancing modern regulatory frameworks, compliance relief, and equity-driven benchmarks. It supports fair access, diversity, and policy innovation, allowing MSMEs to operate more predictably and thrive in multiple jurisdictions.

Policy Objectives

The GEX is organised around four core pillars that together establish a holistic platform for MSME growth and cross-border integration:

- **Objective 1**: **Establish Inclusive Global Entrepreneurship Architecture**
  Create a permanent multilateral platform connecting 25,000 MSMEs across G20 economies through 30 operational Gateway Nodes, achieving 40% participation by women, youth, and rural entrepreneurs by December 2030.
- **Objective 2**: **Generate Cross-Border Economic Value**
  Facilitate $250 billion in cross-border trade value and economic transactions through the Global Common Market pillar, demonstrating measurable contribution to G20 GDP growth and international trade flows by 2030.
- **Objective 3: Create Sustainable Employment Opportunities**
  Generate 750,000 direct and indirect jobs globally, with at least 40% benefiting women and youth entrepreneurs, contributing to UN SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) targets across G20 member states by 2030.
- **Objective 4: Reduce Entrepreneurial Compliance Barriers**
  Achieve 50% reduction in startup compliance costs across pilot jurisdictions through Startup Passport implementation and regulatory harmonisation, freeing capital for reinvestment in innovation and growth by 2027.
- **Objective 5: Bridge Digital Infrastructure Equity Gap**
  Provide affordable digital infrastructure access to 2 million underserved MSMEs, particularly in Africa and the Global South, narrowing the digital divide and enabling equitable participation in the global digital economy by 2029.

- **Objective 6: Build Globally Recognised Skills Framework**
  Certify 50,000 entrepreneurs through competency-based micro-credentials with cross-border recognition, creating a portable skills framework that enhances MSME access to finance, markets, and partnerships by 2030.
- **Objective 7: Achieve Financial Sustainability and Independence**
  Transition the GEX from 100% donor dependency to full operational independence by 2031, achieving 25% cost recovery by 2027, 50% by 2029, and generating surplus revenue for expansion by 2033, ensuring long-term platform viability.

Measurement Framework: Each objective incorporates specific targets (what), quantifiable metrics (how much), realistic timelines (when), clear beneficiaries (who), and alignment with G20 priorities and UN SDGs (why), following SMART criteria for policy objective development. Progress will be tracked through the Independent Evaluation Body with annual reporting to G20 leaders and mid-term assessment in 2027.

Evidence Base and Validation

The four recommendations and supporting actions in this policy paper rest on extensive international evidence. Research across multiple G20 economies and emerging markets documents persistent fragmentation in entrepreneurial ecosystems and significant barriers to inclusive participation. This evidence base validates the urgency and feasibility of the proposed interventions.

Recommendation 1: Global Ecosystem Exchange. The concentration of entrepreneurial activity remains highly uneven, with over 70% focused in a handful of G20 economies. This leaves Africa and the broader Global South significantly underrepresented in international value chains. Analysis of 5 million startups across 350 global ecosystems confirms that market fragmentation, compliance burdens, and information asymmetries impose prohibitive costs on MSMEs seeking cross border opportunities.

Evidence from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor demonstrates that while early stage entrepreneurial activity is rising in emerging economies, established business rates remain constrained by structural barriers. In South Africa specifically, regulatory complexity and limited access to market information contribute to high discontinuance rates. International studies consistently identify customs procedures, non tariff barriers, and lack of standardised compliance frameworks as major impediments for MSMEs entering regional and global markets.

Recommendation 2: Digital Infrastructure and Cross Border Innovation. Digital infrastructure gaps present substantial obstacles to MSME competitiveness and inclusion. While global broadband coverage has expanded, a usage gap affects 39% of covered populations due to affordability, skills deficits, and safety concerns. An estimated 850 million people lack official identification, and another 3.3 billion have no recognised digital credentials, fundamentally undermining trust and limiting access to finance and markets.

Countries implementing Digital Public Infrastructure have demonstrated measurable benefits. India's approach through integrated digital identity, payments, and data exchange platforms has generated billions in documented economic value and accelerated service delivery during crises. Ghana's interoperable payment infrastructure and Uganda's national data exchange platform provide African examples of successful DPI deployment, though integration across government sectors remains incomplete.

Regulatory fragmentation compounds these infrastructure deficits. Trade costs for MSMEs in low income economies are equivalent to a 219% ad valorem tariff, 85 percentage points higher than in high income economies. Divergent digital regulations cost an estimated $780 billion annually, disproportionately affecting startups unable to navigate complex compliance requirements.

Recommendation 3: Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance. Artificial intelligence capacity and infrastructure are highly concentrated. The United States and China dominate investment and output, while most G20 members depend on imported AI models, expertise, and technology. This concentration risks entrenching digital inequalities unless coordinated action establishes open standards, inclusive access protocols, and portability mechanisms.

Evidence from early DPI adopters demonstrates that strategic investments in digital skills, infrastructure accessibility, and transparent governance can accelerate digital transformation while ensuring no populations are excluded. However, implementation gaps remain significant. Many African e government projects encounter partial or total failure due to poor design, insufficient infrastructure, weak accountability frameworks, and inadequate citizen engagement.

Recommendation 4: Global Entrepreneurship and Startup Policy Innovation Framework. Gender and youth inclusion gaps persist despite growing recognition of their economic importance. Only 17.3% of African tech startups include a female co founder, and just 11.1% have a female CEO. These figures represent modest progress from prior years but remain far below parity. Female led ventures received only 2% of global venture capital funding in major markets, with similar patterns across Latin America and Africa.

Survey data[1] reveals that 79.3% of female founders perceive professional bias due to gender, and 69% believe they have lost opportunities because of it. Access to capital emerges as the biggest obstacle, cited by 55.2% of women entrepreneurs, followed by behaviour of men in professional networks and access to networks generally. Youth entrepreneurs face parallel challenges, including lower resource levels, less experience, and greater difficulties accessing finance compared to established business owners.

Trade facilitation measures designed specifically for MSMEs remain incompletely implemented across most countries. While larger Latin American economies have advanced trade facilitation frameworks, most MSMEs still lack access to single windows

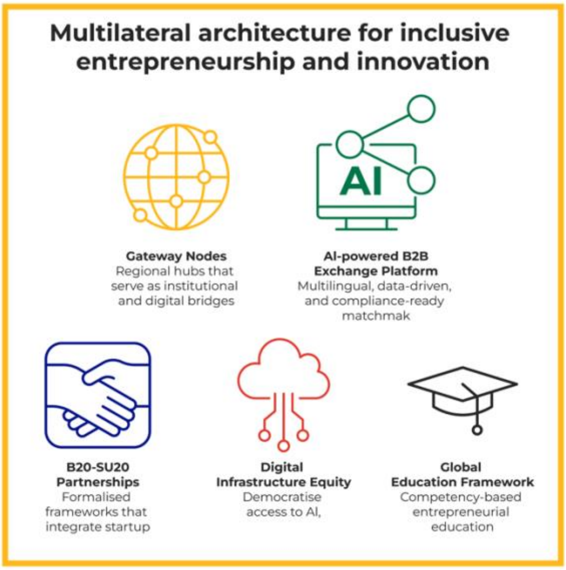
[1] Disrupt Africa (2024) https://www.connectingafrica.com/women-in-tech/only-17-of-african-startups-have-a-female-co-founder-disrupt-africa

and national trade facilitation committees. Simplified export schemes exist in some jurisdictions but face persistent concerns about unsuitable limits, complicated processes, and insufficient capacity building support.

This comprehensive evidence base confirms that systemic fragmentation, digital infrastructure deficits, regulatory divergence, and exclusionary practices impose substantial costs on MSMEs and underserved entrepreneurs. Coordinated G20 action to harmonise standards, expand digital infrastructure, reduce compliance barriers, and embed inclusion mechanisms can unlock hundreds of billions in cross border value while creating equitable pathways for participation in the global digital economy.

Recommendation 1: Global Ecosystems Exchange (GEX)

GEX is the Startup20 flagship under South Africa's G20 Presidency. It is designed as a digitally enabled, phased, demand-driven platform to connect entrepreneurial ecosystems globally, expand MSME market and finance access, and embed inclusion and sustainability at scale. It emphasises evidence-based validation, with initial studies commissioned to understand MSME and stakeholder needs. Governance is multi-layered: a global council (chaired by the G20 Presidency, with five continental vice-chairs and rotating developing economy seats, plus international/private sector observers); independent arbitration and external evaluation guarantee accountability. The system actively builds inclusion: dedicated pathways for women, youth, and underserved areas/rural entrepreneurs, with equity filters for matching, procurement and education pilots. Technical backbone includes an AI-powered B2B platform, multilingual, real-time matchmaking, compliant with data sovereignty standards. Physical and digital Gateway Nodes anchor integration, and evaluation/reporting is continuous and transparent.



The GEX is based on four core pillars: the **GCM** provides the market-facing anchor, enabling trade and cross-border opportunities. The **GEEF** builds the human capital and skills required for MSMEs to thrive in these markets. The **GDIE** pillar ensures equitable access to the digital tools and connectivity that underpin modern commerce. The **GESPIF** provides the enabling regulatory environment for harmonisation and fair competition. Together, these interconnected pillars are governed through inclusive global structures and supported by blended finance mechanisms, positioning the GEX as more than a network. A coherent, holistic system that integrates policy, education, digital infrastructure, finance, and trade for inclusive and sustainable MSME growth.

By 2030, the GEX aims to connect 25,000 MSMEs, establish 30 Gateway Nodes, generate $250 billion in cross-border value, and create 750,000 jobs. More importantly, it will demonstrate that small and growing businesses are not only engines of growth within national economies but also critical actors in shaping a fairer, more sustainable, and more inclusive global economy. As a legacy of South Africa's G20 Presidency, the Global Ecosystem Exchange will prove that collective action can embed entrepreneurship into the centre of global development and economic cooperation.

Context

The rationale for GEX is rooted in the urgent need to repair fragmented innovation ecosystems that lock out disadvantaged populations and hinder sustainable policy impact. The pandemic and climate disruptions have exposed these vulnerabilities, making harmonisation, resource sharing, and market validation mission-critical for resilient economic recovery and equitable growth.

Persistent fragmentation and inequality in the global entrepreneurial ecosystem, holds back MSMEs from contributing to inclusive growth and innovation. Key problems include the over-concentration of entrepreneurial activity in just a few G20 countries, severe digital divides, scarcity of early-stage capital, regulatory and compliance burdens, and exclusion from large procurement markets. These barriers perpetuate uneven access to capital, infrastructure, and policy support, risking greater global inequality unless coordinated interventions are enacted.

Strategic Priorities:

- Enhance cross-border and cross-sector interoperability for innovation ecosystems
- Drive inclusion for underserved communities, women, and youth
- Embed digital credentialing and resource validation
- Enable open dialogue and coalition-building between public, private, and civic actors
- Ensure continuous evaluation, transparency, and digital governance alignment.

Key Performance Indicators

Below is the phased roadmap for the Global Ecosystem Exchange (GEX). It combines annual implementation actions with clear KPIs to ensure accountability across governance, growth, finance, evaluation, and technical feasibility.

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
Cross-border GEX partnerships established between G20 innovation and enterprise networks (number)	0	500 transnational partnerships facilitating innovation and trade exchanges	1,000 institutional partnerships integrated under the GEX framework	G20 Foundation and Alliance Task Force	Regional Innovation Agencies; World Bank; OECD
Knowledge exchange and collaboration projects facilitated through GEX (number)	Baseline to be determined	1,000 projects coordinated across member innovation systems	3,000 projects actively transferring innovation models and digital solutions	G20 Research & Innovation Working Group	Incubator Alliances; University Networks; Private Innovation Councils
Participation rate of emerging economy ecosystems within the GEX digital platform (%)	20%	60% inclusion rate of emerging ecosystem partners	80% global inclusion rate across G20 and partner economies	SU20 Secretariat; G20 Digital Economy Working Group	UNDP; Commonwealth Secretariat; AfDB
Value of investment and trade deals brokered through GEX (USD)	USD 0.5 billion	USD 5 billion cumulative cross-border investments mobilised	USD 10 billion in green, inclusive, and digital trade and innovation partnerships	G20 Finance Track	IFC; Global Venture Networks; B20 Innovation Council
Global ecosystem policy frameworks harmonised to support mutual recognition of startups, innovation hubs, and exchanges (number)	2 frameworks	15 ecosystem interoperability frameworks aligned	30 policy-aligned frameworks facilitating universal innovation market access	G20 Policy Support Unit	WTO; UNCTAD; International Chambers of Commerce

Each KPI is tracked on a monthly basis, reported on annually and included in publicly disclosed GEX dashboards and independent evaluation reports, ensuring transparency and accountability throughout implementation.

Action 1.1: Develop and deploy the interoperable GEX platform

Summary: Develop and deploy the interoperable Global Ecosystem Exchange (GEX) platform as the foundation for cross-border entrepreneurial connectivity, underpinned by robust coalition governance and transparent digital processes across the G20. The GEX will serve as a standardised, secure, and scalable digital infrastructure, facilitating real-time links between markets, capital, and entrepreneurial knowledge. And while ensuring full interoperability for member states. Oversight and strategic direction will be provided by a cross-G20 council, with open, auditable systems ensuring accountability, efficient data exchange, and inclusive participation for all stakeholders, regardless of geography or sector. This platform directly addresses market fragmentation, builds trust, and expands opportunity for startups and MSMEs to connect, trade, and innovate at scale.

Develop and deploy the Global Ecosystem Exchange (GEX) platform as a fully interoperable, secure, and scalable digital infrastructure to connect entrepreneurs, markets, and capital across borders. Governance will be anchored by a cross-G20 coalition, ensuring transparent oversight, strategic direction, and systemic accountability through open digital processes and real-time monitoring. The GEX will address market fragmentation, facilitate trustworthy data exchange, and enable inclusive participation, positioning startups and MSMEs to trade, collaborate, and innovate on a global scale.

Background: Fragmented entrepreneurial markets, legacy digital infrastructure, and inconsistent policy environments have long impeded the growth and global reach of startups and MSMEs, especially in emerging and underrepresented regions. Access to cross-border opportunities is hindered by duplicated onboarding processes, non-standardised compliance checkpoints, and lack of a shared, trusted system for exchanging data and credentials between innovation ecosystems.

The need for a common, secure, and interoperable platform has become urgent as global value chains, remote work, and digital business models proliferate. Without intervention, these developments risk entrenching exclusion and widening disparities between nations and entrepreneurs. By creating the Global Ecosystem Exchange (GEX), Recommendation 1, Action 1.1 responds to these systemic gaps: offering a foundational digital backbone that enables seamless, scalable, and equitable participation in cross-border economic activity.

The GEX draws on proven models from large-scale exchange services to provide real-time, audited, and secure channels for the flow of business, compliance, and financial data, supported by transparent digital processes and governance mechanisms representing all G20 regions. This sets the stage for inclusive, sustainable economic growth and positions MSMEs and startups as leaders and beneficiaries of the collaborative digital economy.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
Interoperable GEX digital platform (status)	Conceptual framework in progress	Fully functional beta platform operational across pilot G20 innovation ecosystems	GEX platform scaled and interoperable across all G20 and partner countries	G20 Foundation and Alliance Task Force	G20 Digital Economy Working Group; BIS Innovation Hub; South African DCDT
G20 and partner economies integrated into interoperable GEX platform (%)	0%	60% platform integration with national innovation and trade networks	100% full integration and real-time operational interoperability	G20 Secretariat; Digital Economy Working Group	National ICT Ministries; OECD; Global DPI Alliance
Ecosystem stakeholders registered on GEX (innovation hubs, startups, accelerators, research entities)	0	12,000 registered and active cross-border ecosystem participants	30,000 verified entities participating across 20+ countries	G20 Foundation and Alliance Secretariat	World Bank; UNDP; Global Entrepreneurship Network
Annual cross-border collaborations, data exchanges and project partnerships facilitated via GEX (number)	None established	8,000 collaborative exchanges annually including co-innovation and co-incubation projects	25,000 annual exchanges supporting green and digital value chains	GEX Technical Working Group	WTO; ICC; B20 Innovation Coalition

Compliance rate with interoperability, cybersecurity, and digital trust standards (%)	0%	75% compliance with G20 digital trust, identity, and data governance frameworks	100% compliance ensuring platform-wide standardisation and security	G20 Data & Trust Taskforce	ITU; ISO; WEF Centre for Digital Trust

Implementation Approach:

The implementation approach for Action 1.1: developing and deploying the Global Ecosystem Exchange (GEX) platform, follows a phased, evidence-driven, and coalition-guided roadmap, anchored in early validation, inclusive governance, and adaptive scaling.

- **Initial Validation and Piloting**: In the first operational year, the GEX will commission independent market validation across diverse economies, launching five pilot Gateway Nodes (South Africa, India, Brazil, Indonesia, USA), and deploying the AI-powered B2B Exchange Platform within pilot corridors. This stage is tightly monitored to ensure proof of concept and stakeholder alignment.
- **Phased Expansion**: Once pilot success is validated, the initiative will scale to 10–15 nodes across G20 and African Union regions, expanding the B2B platform's multilingual and AI capabilities, enabling more corridors, and formalising partnerships with public and private sectors for procurement and finance access.
- **Inclusive and Resilient Design**: Dedicated inclusion pathways especially for women, youth, rural, and township entrepreneurs are embedded within the platform, supported by real-time performance dashboards tracking jobs, partnerships, and capital mobilised. The governance model ensures representation from each region, technical oversight, and dispute resolution, while independent monitoring and evaluation enable continuous course correction.
- **Financial Sustainability**: Early operations are supported by blended finance, but the design adopts a progressive transition to earned revenues through transaction, certification, and premium service fees to ensure long-term independence by 2031.
- **Scaling and Adaptation**: Feedback loops, open data, and stakeholder input are prioritised. Governance agility, opt-out clauses for countries, and surge protocols for crises ensure the platform remains credible, adaptive, and resilient through all phases.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- **Executive Council** (G20 Chair + Vice-Chairs): Strategic direction, coalition building, dispute resolution, and oversight of annual evaluations.
- **Technical Advisory Board**: Manages AI algorithm accuracy, platform integration, cybersecurity testing, and scalability.
- **Gateway Node Regional Leads**: Pilot deployment, on-the-ground feedback, MSME onboarding, local adaptation.
- **Independent Evaluation Body**: Conducts annual reporting, mid-term assessments, manages real-time dashboards, and provides quarterly course correction reviews.
- **MSME Networks/Ecosystem Partners**: Mobilise users, provide feedback, champion local adoption and inclusion.

Risks and Mitigation:

This robust, adaptive plan secures the GEX's credibility and ensures that risks are proactively addressed. It enables the unlocking of genuine cross-border impact and inclusion for MSMEs and startups globally.

- **Risk**: Resistance to harmonisation. **Mitigation**: Use flexible, milestone-based Startup Success Guidelines and celebrate phased adoption; offer incentives for progress.
- **Risk**: Geopolitical and fragmentation risks. **Mitigation**: Allow regional rollout, opt-out clauses, and flexible coalition models; maintain neutrality.
- **Risk**: Cybersecurity/data privacy breach. **Mitigation**: Enforce global standards, end-to-end encryption, independent audits, rapid response protocols.
- **Risk**: Interoperability barriers. **Mitigation**: Use tiered integration standards and subsidised training/infrastructure for lower-capacity regions.
- **Risk**: Uneven platform adoption. **Mitigation**: Staggered rollouts, targeted technical support, regional champions accelerate local uptake.

Recommendation 2: Digital Infrastructure and Cross-Border Innovation

This recommendation advocates for the creation of world-class digital infrastructure and robust cross-border innovation frameworks to accelerate inclusion, competitiveness, and sustainable growth among G20 members. Overcoming digital divides and addressing interoperability barriers is central to the G20's vision for a globally integrated digital economy. The recommendation targets underserved communities, small enterprises, women, and youth, ensuring their access to affordable connectivity, modern platforms, and digital literacy programs. By leveraging mutual recognition of standards and the design of smart corridors for payments, e-services, and innovation, G20 countries position themselves to harness new waves of digital opportunity, unlock investments, and mitigate fragmentation risks. Actionable strategies include developing digital public infrastructure (DPI), promoting data free flow with trust (DFFT), and launching pilot cross-border sandboxes.

We propose that G20 nations collectively endorse and fund **interoperable digital infrastructure frameworks**, expand **DPI and DFFT**, and create **innovation corridors** that connect underserved communities, SMEs, and innovation actors across G20 member states.

Context

Fragmentation across digital rules, standards, identity, connectivity, and AI capacity severely hinders the G20's digital economy and disproportionately affects SMEs and entrepreneurs from emerging economies. Regulatory divergence has become more restrictive, causing an estimated $780 billion in annual costs and complicating international business for startups. While global broadband coverage is widespread, a significant "usage gap" persists: 39% of people, though covered, do not use mobile internet due to barriers like affordability, lack of skills, and concerns about safety and relevance. The lack of identity infrastructure is also a major barrier, with 850 million people lacking official IDs and another 3.3 billion without recognised digital IDs, undermining trust and limiting financial and market access.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has shown tangible benefits for inclusion and efficiency where it's implemented effectively, such as in India with UPI. Yet, progress across G20 countries is uneven, with wide disparities in deployment and interoperability, leaving many opportunities unfulfilled. AI's benefits are similarly concentrated: the US and China dominate investment and output, while other G20 members are often dependent on imports of AI models, expertise, and technology. Without coordinated action around open standards, inclusivity, and portability, digital inequalities are poised to grow.

The compounded result is that for SMEs and startups, key engines of innovation and jobs, the patchwork of digital regimes creates much higher costs, prevents scaling, and deepens existing inequalities. Addressing these barriers is essential for enabling broad-based participation, growth, and innovation across G20 economies

Strategic Priorities

1. Rapid expansion of **affordable broadband** and **critical digital infrastructure**, targeting underserved communities.
2. Establish multilateral agreements for **digital interoperability** and **data governance**.
3. Launch cross-border **pilot corridors for seamless payments**, **regulatory experiments**, and **innovation sandboxes**.
4. Promote **digital literacy**, **skills certification**, and **talent mobility**, particularly among women, youth, and small enterprises.
5. Strengthen mechanisms for **evaluating**, **scaling**, and sustaining **digital inclusion** and **connectivity**.

Key Performance Indicators

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
Availability of digital public infrastructure (DPI) for cross-border innovation in G20 economies (%)	Limited adoption and interoperability	70% of G20 economies with live and interoperable DPI components	100% interoperability and availability for cross-border digital services	G20 Digital Economy Working Group	National ICT Ministries; African Union; OECD
Share of cross-border digital transactions leveraging secure, interoperable DPI (payments, authentication, data exchange) (%)	10% (pilot use)	50% of relevant transactions enabled by DPI standards	85% of cross-border digital transactions secure and interoperable	South Africa Presidency (Digital Innovation)	BIS Innovation Hub; World Bank; UN ESCAP
New cross-border digital infrastructure projects (connectivity, cloud/data, digital corridors) jointly launched and implemented (number)	Few pilot projects	40+ new infrastructure projects across G20, AU, and Asia-Pacific corridors	100+ integrated digital infrastructure projects globally	G20 Infrastructure Working Group	African Union; ASEAN Digital Ministers; Private Consortiums
Participation rate of MSMEs and underserved actors enabled by cross-border DPI in trade, innovation, and finance networks (%)	Low inclusion (<15%)	50% MSME participation in supported innovation/trade platforms	85% MSME and underserved community inclusion in digital trade systems	G20 Digital Inclusion Initiative	UNDP; National Digital Inclusion Bureaus; B20
Cross-border transaction costs and average settlement time via digital infrastructure (%)	Avg. 7% cost, 2+ days settlement	Avg. 3% cost, <8 hours settlement	Avg. 1% cost, real-time or near real-time settlement in all major corridors	G20 Finance Track	SWIFT; IFC; Global Payments Platform Alliance
Availability of digital public infrastructure (DPI) for cross-border innovation in G20 economies (%)	Limited adoption and interoperability	70% of G20 economies with live and interoperable DPI components	100% interoperability and availability for cross-border digital services	G20 Digital Economy Working Group	National ICT Ministries; African Union; OECD

Action 2.1: Establish G20 Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Interoperability Framework

Summary: Action 2.1 aims to create a standardised G20 Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Interoperability Framework that enables seamless cross-border digital trade, innovation, and regulatory cooperation among member states. By developing common technical standards for digital identity, payments, credentialing, and data governance, this framework will reduce fragmentation, lower compliance barriers, and promote digital inclusion for startups and MSMEs operating across borders. The approach leverages best practices on open standards, secure design, and modular interoperability to ensure regionally adaptable solutions. Coordinated governance and ongoing stakeholder engagement will underpin trust, security, and scalability for G20 countries, positioning this initiative as a cornerstone for a future-ready, digitally integrated global market.

This action directly addresses the fragmentation in digital infrastructure that currently limits cross-border startup and MSME operations. By establishing common technical standards and interoperability protocols, we create the foundational layer that enables the Global Ecosystems Exchange (GEX) platform to function effectively across jurisdictions while reducing compliance costs and regulatory barriers for entrepreneurs.

Background: The concept of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has rapidly gained international recognition as a fundamental enabler for inclusive digital economies. DPI refers to foundational digital systems built with open standards and designed to be modular, secure, and interoperable at scale. These systems include digital identity, digital payments, and trusted data exchange. As identified in the 2023 G20 consensus, these infrastructures are essential not only for delivering public and private services at societal scale, but also for fostering development, inclusion, trust, and innovation amid rapid digital transformation.

G20 economies, while diverse in digital maturity and legacy infrastructure, share the urgent need to bridge fragmentation across national and sectoral systems. Without interoperable frameworks, startups and SMEs face high compliance costs, duplicative onboarding, and limited access to markets, digital payments, and regulatory innovation. The DPI framework aims to address these barriers by implementing technology-neutral protocols, robust governance standards, and transparent participation mechanisms.

Fundamentally, the DPI approach puts inclusivity, openness, and sustainability at the core, bringing together government, private sector, and civil society to build a digitally connected, equitable future. A whole-of-society governance model and an emphasis on protocol-based (rather than platform-centric) architecture position G20 digital infrastructure for resilience, adaptability, and population-scale impact over the next decade.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
G20 Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Interoperability Framework covering governance, technology, and community dimensions (status)	Fragmented national DPIs and absence of unified interoperability standards	G20-endorsed interoperability framework developed and adopted in at least 12 member states	Full alignment and integration of national DPIs with the G20 interoperability framework	G20 Digital Economy Working Group	OECD; World Bank; UNDP; Digital Cooperation Organisation
Adoption of cross-border interoperability protocols (identity, payments, data exchange) under G20 DPI framework (rate %)	Limited bilateral or regional arrangements	Common G20-endorsed technical and governance standards for DPI interoperability in 50% of G20 economies	100% adoption across all G20 members and strategic partner regions	G20 Secretariat	BIS Innovation Hub; Global DPI Alliance; WEF Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution
New DPI systems built using open standards and specifications (%	35% of G20 digital systems based on open architecture	75% of new DPI systems aligned with open standards principles	100% inclusion of interoperability-by-design principles in new DPI systems	G20 Digital Infrastructure Taskforce	ISO; ITU; GovStack Alliance; Open Government Partnership
Member economies implementing common data governance and trust protocols across interoperable DPI platforms (number)	Heterogeneous digital governance frameworks	60% of G20 economies applying harmonised digital trust, privacy and data exchange policies	100% of members implementing secure, rights-based and interoperable governance frameworks	G20 Data Governance and Trust Working Group	UN ESCAP; Global Privacy Assembly; African Union Digital Strategy Secretariat
Capacity-building and technical exchange initiatives among G20 and partner countries for DPI interoperability (number)	Limited cross-country technical exchanges	20 multilateral capacity-building and governance-sharing programmes launched	50+ operational cross-border DPI interoperability projects supported by multi-stakeholder consortia	G20 Foundation and Alliance Task Force	UNDP Digital Office; World Economic Forum; African Union Smart Africa Alliance

Implementation Approach:

- Formalise multilateral agreements for DPI expansion, regulatory harmonisation, and interoperability.
- Prioritise inclusive outreach, subsidies, and skills development in connectivity investments.
- Launch competitive grants and technical support for underserved community, women, and youth participation.
- Design and pilot cross-border payment and innovation corridors, with ongoing G20 peer review and evaluation.

Key Components

1. **Digital Identity and Credential Framework**

- Develop mutual recognition protocols for digital identity systems across G20 jurisdictions
- Establish common standards for professional credential verification and business registration authentication
- Create secure, privacy-preserving identity verification mechanisms for cross-border entrepreneurship
- Integrate with existing national digital identity systems while maintaining sovereignty.

2. **Cross-Border Payment Infrastructure Alignment**

- Harmonise Application Programming Interface (API) standards for digital payment systems
- Facilitate interoperability between Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) and existing payment rails
- Establish common protocols for SME financing and micro-transaction processing
- Reduce settlement times and transaction costs for startup cross-border operations.

3. **Regulatory Sandbox Interoperability**

- Create shared frameworks for regulatory sandbox participation across multiple G20 jurisdictions

- Develop common risk assessment criteria and compliance monitoring protocols
- Enable startups to test innovative solutions in multiple markets simultaneously
- Establish mutual recognition of regulatory sandbox approvals where appropriate.

4. **Data Governance Harmonisation**

- Align data protection and privacy standards to facilitate secure cross-border data flows
- Establish common protocols for data localisation requirements and cross-border data transfers
- Create frameworks for sectoral data sharing agreements (financial services, healthcare, education)
- Develop standardised consent management and data portability mechanisms.

Implementation Timeline

Phase 1 (2025-2026): Foundation Setting

- Establish G20 DPI Technical Working Group with national representatives
- Conduct comprehensive mapping of existing digital infrastructure capabilities across G20 countries
- Develop initial technical standards and interoperability specifications
- Launch pilot programs with 5 volunteer G20 countries

Phase 2 (2027-2028): Core Framework Development

- Deploy standardised APIs and integration protocols
- Implement mutual recognition agreements for digital credentials
- Launch cross-border regulatory sandbox initiatives
- Conduct comprehensive testing and security audits

Phase 3 (2029-2030): Full Deployment and Scale

- Achieve full G20 country integration of DPI interoperability framework
- Launch commercial operations for cross-border startup services

- Implement advanced features including AI-powered compliance monitoring
- Establish ongoing governance and evolution mechanisms

Success Metrics

- Technical Interoperability: 95% successful cross-border digital transaction completion rate
- Regulatory Efficiency: 60% reduction in compliance time for cross-border startup operations
- Cost Reduction: 40% decrease in cross-border payment processing costs for SMEs
- Coverage: 100% G20 country participation in core framework elements
- Security: Zero critical security incidents in cross-border digital infrastructure
- User Adoption: 250,000 startups and MSMEs actively using cross-border DPI services

The G20 DPI Interoperability Framework will be governed by a multi-stakeholder council including:

- G20 Digital Economy Working Group coordination
- National central banks and financial regulators
- Data protection and privacy authorities
- Private sector technical advisory panels
- Startup and MSME representative organisations.

Roles:

Each stakeholder group has clear roles in mobilising resources, setting standards, embedding inclusion, providing regulatory certainty, and delivering project outcomes, all in service of achieving interoperability, recognising credentials cross-border, and advancing both the digital economy and social inclusion agendas in line with G20 objectives.

- **Foundation and Alliance Task Force**: Sets technical standards, oversees compliance, and manages scaling of pilots; ensures overall alignment with the G20 digital public infrastructure vision.
- **Digital Diplomacy Task Force**: Leads on negotiation and implementation of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) and cross-border privacy assurance frameworks; facilitates regulator coordination and interoperability between jurisdictions.
- **Trade, Security, and Standards Bodies**: Develop payment, data exchange, cybersecurity, and trust protocols; protect the integrity and resilience of digital infrastructure at the cross-border level.
- **Finance and Investment Task Force**: Mobilises blended public-private finance (MDBs, DFIs) for digital infrastructure; supports procurement model design and ensures operational sustainability.
- **Inclusion and Sustainability Task Force**: Drives equitable access and usage by delivering community helpdesks, digital literacy, and women/youth/rural participation pathways; ensures that deployments fulfil social inclusion targets.
- **National Governments and Regulators**: Enact enabling legal and regulatory reforms, provide sovereign oversight of data, and ensure program execution at country level.
- **Private Sector and Local Operators**: Deliver technical solutions, operate pilot services, co-invest in infrastructure, and act as issuers or validators of credentials.

Risks and Mitigation:

The rollout of the G20 Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Interoperability Framework presents several key risks, along with robust mitigation strategies to assure secure, inclusive, and scalable implementation.

- **Risk**: Data Privacy and Security. **Mitigation**: Embed strict privacy protocols, consent mechanisms, and transparent data governance from inception. Ensure compliance with both national and international standards, subject to independent assessment.
- **Risk**: Geopolitical and fragmentation risks. **Mitigation**: Adopt open technical standards for cross-border credentialing, payments, and data exchange. Facilitate interoperability through coordinated technical advisory groups and regular system audits.
- **Risk**: Exclusion and Inequality. **Mitigation**: Establish community helpdesks, digital literacy programs, and targeted inclusion pathways for underserved regions and populations.
- **Risk**: Technical Failures and System Vulnerabilities. **Mitigation**: Deploy automated threat detection, system stress testing, and frequent vulnerability assessments to ensure technical resilience.
- **Risk**: Regulatory Uncertainty. **Mitigation**: Implement phased legal harmonisation with opt-in flexibility, supported by feedback loops and agile dispute resolution bodies
- **Risk**: Limited Stakeholder Trust. **Mitigation**: Leverage independent oversight (including third-party evaluators, public dashboards, and annual reports) to build trust and iterative improvement across all participating jurisdictions.

Action 2.2: Pilot and scale mutual recognition and credentialing

Summary: Action 2.2 focuses on piloting and scaling mutual recognition and credentialing systems to facilitate seamless cross-border mobility of entrepreneurs, skills, and businesses. This involves launching targeted pilot projects for interoperable digital IDs and verifiable credentials in multiple jurisdictions, with an emphasis on underserved and high-potential markets. The action supports the negotiation and operationalisation of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) and privacy pathways and implements conformance testing and open trust frameworks to ensure that credentials and qualifications are accepted across borders.

These pilots are expanded in phases to achieve large-scale credential recognition, aiming for 100,000 entrepreneurs credentialed and at least 50 communities onboarded by 2028, laying the foundation for a truly interoperable global digital economy.

Background: There is a growing need for seamless qualification and skills recognition amid increasing cross-border mobility, globalisation, and evolving labour market demands. As students, entrepreneurs, and professionals move internationally for opportunities, fragmented recognition systems prevent the full utilisation of their skills and education. The expansion of online learning and micro-credentialing further amplifies the challenge, highlighting a need for standardised quality assurance and mutual recognition frameworks. Quality-assured pilots and scalable protocols are vital for enabling trusted, portable digital credentials and qualifications, aligned to industry needs and responsive to national regulatory regimes. These frameworks must also consider global conventions, equity in skills transfer, and facilitating inclusive participation within the G20's development agenda

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
G20 mutual recognition and credentialing framework for digital, technical, and professional qualifications (status)	Fragmented national and regional systems with limited cross-border portability	G20-endorsed framework for skills, qualifications, and micro-credentials recognition tested in at least 8 pilot economies	Global implementation of interoperable, digitally verifiable credentialing model across all G20 members and partner economies	G20 Education Working Group (EdWG)	UNESCO; OECD; Commonwealth of Learning (COL); World Bank
G20 and partner economies participating in mutual credentialing pilots (%)	0%	60% participation in cross-border pilots across education, innovation, and professional certification sectors	100% participation in harmonised G20 recognition framework	G20 Secretariat	National Qualification Authorities; African Union; ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
Digital verification systems integrated into cross-border credentialing frameworks (e.g., digital IDs, blockchain-based diplomas, verifiable credentials) (number)	Initial phase pilots in select economies	50 integrated national digital credentialing systems with G20-aligned standards	100 globally connected and interoperable digital credentialing systems	G20 Digital Economy Working Group	WEF Centre for Digital Trust; GovStack Alliance; Open Recognition Alliance
Global higher education and professional entities adopting mutual recognition standards (%)	Less than 10%	55% adoption of interoperable, quality-assured micro-credential systems aligned with G20 standards	Over 85% integration into national qualification frameworks and international credit transfer systems	G20 EdWG and Labour Mobility Task Force	International Labour Organisation; UNESCO Regional Qualification Framework; B20 Skills Coalition
Measurable movement in international labour and education mobility enabled by mutual credentialing (%)	Limited institutional linkage and recognition	30% increase in cross-border employment and education admissions supported by mutual recognition systems	70% increase in digital credential portability supporting youth employability and mobility	G20 Labour and Education Joint Track	International Chamber of Commerce; ITU; African Union; G20 Employment Working Group

Implementation Approach:

- **Launch and scale pilot projects** in key G20 member countries and target communities: partnering with local governments, regulators, and the private sector to facilitate mutual recognition and digital credentialing systems aligned with national frameworks and global standards.
- **Develop and deploy open trust frameworks, conformance testing protocols, and regulatory templates:** to ensure secure, portable, and widely accepted cross-border digital credentials.
- **Integrate independent assessment and real-world user feedback** into **pilot implementation**: enabling rapid adaptation and alignment to evolving sector and market needs.
- **Iterate, expand, and mainstream successful pilots:** aiming for at least 100,000 entrepreneurs credentialed and 50 underserved communities reached by 2028, while sharing toolkits and best practices for broader G20 adoption and long-term interoperability.

Roles:

Each stakeholder group has clear roles in mobilising resources, setting standards, embedding inclusion, providing regulatory certainty, and delivering project outcomes, all in service of achieving interoperability, recognising credentials cross-border, and advancing both the digital economy and social inclusion agendas in line with G20 objectives.

- **Foundation and Alliance Task Force**: oversees institutional design, compliance harmonisation, and pilot scaling, ensuring standards, reference architecture, and conformance testing are implemented and maintained.
- **Finance and Investment Task Force**: mobilises blended public-private capital, models ROI, de-risks procurement, and drives fiscal sustainability for credentialing infrastructure and pilot expansion.
- **Inclusion and Sustainability Task Force**: coordinates digital literacy initiatives, localised delivery, and ensures women, youth, and rural entrepreneurs are included in pilot rollouts through targeted training and community engagement.

- **Digital Diplomacy and Trade Task Forces**: lead on mutual recognition agreements, privacy pathways, cross-border regulatory harmonisation, and facilitate negotiation of interoperability profiles for recognition and market access.
- **National and local governments, industry partners, and civil society**: provide implementation capacity, support pilot deployment, and maintain ongoing community-level feedback, ensuring practical adoption and long-term system scalability.

Risks and Mitigation:

Action 2.2, focusing on piloting and scaling mutual recognition and credentialing, entails risks and targeted mitigation strategies that must guide its implementation.

- **Risk**: Regulatory Fragmentation:. **Mitigation**: Adopt international best practices for credential verification, leveraging existing conventions, frameworks, and partnerships to align quality assurance and recognition processes.
- **Risk**: Credential Fraud and Quality Assurance. **Mitigation**: Embed secure, privacy-respecting digital identity systems and legal equivalency protocols to ensure authenticity and minimise fraud risks.
- **Risk**: Digital Divide and Inequality. **Mitigation**: Conduct small-scale pilots with transparent auditing and real-time stakeholder feedback before wider deployment, adapting based on real-use data.
- **Risk**: Skills Drain or Unidirectional Mobility. **Mitigation**: Use continuous monitoring and independent evaluation to inform course corrections, supported by transparent reporting and dispute resolution.
- **Risk**: Data Security and Privacy. **Mitigation**: Include measures to support domestic capacity development and mitigate one-way mobility effects, ensuring mutual benefit for sending and receiving regions.

Action 2.3: Harmonise regulations and compliance for digital trade

Summary: Action 2.3 aims to create a harmonised regulatory environment for digital trade among G20 economies by fostering the adoption of common standards, interoperability, and shared frameworks addressing fragmented regulations, data flows, and compliance requirements. The action focuses on reducing barriers posed by regulatory divergence, enhancing market transparency, and promoting secure and inclusive cross-border digital transactions. Successful harmonisation will simplify trade processes, lower costs for businesses, especially SMEs, and foster innovation, inclusion, and economic growth in both advanced and developing economies.

Background: The rapid expansion of digital trade has outpaced regulatory frameworks worldwide, resulting in fragmented rules, compliance gaps, and inconsistent standards that create obstacles to seamless cross-border transactions among G20 countries. The lack of harmonised approaches to data flows, e-signatures, and digital identities, along with uneven digitalisation within trade agreements, amplifies compliance costs, limits market access for SMEs, and undermines trust in the digital economy. As G20 economies grow more interconnected, establishing a unified, digital-friendly regulatory environment has become essential to enabling inclusive, secure, and efficient trade.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
G20 and partner economies adopting harmonised digital trade regulations and compliance frameworks (%)	Heterogeneous regulations; only pilot harmonisation in place	70% of G20 economies aligned to G20-endorsed digital trade facilitation principles	100% adoption and implementation of harmonised frameworks across all G20 members	G20 Trade and Investment Working Group	WTO; United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT); OECD
Regional and global digital trade agreements embedding cross-border standards (e.g., e-signatures, e-invoicing, data flows, cybersecurity) (number)	Limited scope and often fragmented pilot agreements	35 new/planned digital trade agreements incorporating G20 digital standards	70+ binding digital trade agreements with global adoption of core regulatory norms	G20 Digital Trade Task Force	Asian Development Bank; African Union; World Economic Forum
Cross-border compliance costs and delays for digital trade transactions (time/cost to trade digitally) (%)	High and uneven compliance costs; variable digital readiness	25% average reduction in trade compliance costs and procedural time through digitalisation	50%+ average reduction in administrative and compliance friction for digital trade	G20 Digital Economy Working Group	World Bank; ICC; ISO Digital Standards Committee
Volume and value of digital and digitally-enabled cross-border trade transactions (USD)	Baseline volume as per WTO Digital Trade estimates	40% growth in G20 digital trade flows from 2024 values	100%+ growth in global digital trade by 2030 supported by harmonised regulations	G20 Trade Facilitation Committee	Global Business Coalition; B20; National Customs Authorities
Measurable difference in MSME access to cross-border digital trade ecosystems (%)	MSMEs face high entry barriers and regulatory disparities	60% MSME inclusion in certified digital trade and compliance platforms	90%+ MSME onboarding and trade participation in harmonised digital trade environment	G20 SME Development Track	OECD SME Centre; ICC; Regional Chambers of Commerce

Implementation Approach:

- **Establish G20-wide working groups** to develop **shared regulatory frameworks and model laws** addressing key issues such as data flows, e-signatures, privacy, and digital identity.
- **Promote alignment of national regulations** through technical exchanges, peer reviews, and capacity-building initiatives, especially among developing member states.
- **Pilot interoperable compliance platforms and mutual recognition mechanisms** to streamline digital trade compliance and lower administrative barriers for businesses.
- **Foster ongoing engagement with private sector and civil society stakeholders** to inform policy adjustments, test implementation tools, and ensure frameworks are inclusive, transparent, and market-relevant.
- **Prioritise delivery of harmonised standards and protocols**, supported by digital tools and monitoring dashboards, to track adoption, identify bottlenecks, and drive adaptive reforms in digital trade governance.

Roles:

Each stakeholder group has clear roles in mobilising resources, setting standards, embedding inclusion, providing regulatory certainty, and delivering project outcomes, all in service of achieving interoperability, recognising credentials cross-border, and advancing both the digital economy and social inclusion agendas in line with G20 objectives.

- **Foundation and Alliance Task Force**: oversees institutional design, compliance harmonisation, and pilot scaling, ensuring standards, reference architecture, and conformance testing are implemented and maintained.
- **Finance and Investment Task Force**: mobilises blended public-private capital, models ROI, de-risks procurement, and drives fiscal sustainability for credentialing infrastructure and pilot expansion.

- **Inclusion and Sustainability Task Force**: coordinates digital literacy initiatives, localised delivery, and ensures women, youth, and rural entrepreneurs are included in pilot rollouts through targeted training and community engagement.
- **Digital Diplomacy and Trade Task Forces**: lead on mutual recognition agreements, privacy pathways, cross-border regulatory harmonisation, and facilitate negotiation of interoperability profiles for recognition and market access.
- **National and local governments, industry partners, and civil society**: provide implementation capacity, support pilot deployment, and maintain ongoing community-level feedback, ensuring practical adoption and long-term system scalability.

Risks and Mitigation:

Action 2.3 on harmonising regulations and compliance for digital trade involves significant policy, technical, and operational risks along with established mitigation approaches.

- **Risk**: Regulatory Fragmentation: **Mitigation**: Activate G20 mechanisms for international regulatory dialogue, harmonising legal, technical, and tax frameworks (including cross-border AML/KYC protocols, reporting, and dispute resolution).
- **Risk**: Market Concentration. **Mitigation**: Pilot regulatory sandboxes to test new compliance models and iterate legal harmonisation, enabling evidence-based, adaptive rollout in diverse G20 jurisdictions.
- **Risk**: Data Sovereignty and Privacy. **Mitigation**: Streamline compliance, reduce burdens for small businesses, and incorporate consumer protection into harmonisation frameworks.
- **Risk**: Consumer and SME Disadvantage: **Mitigation**: Develop international agreements and privacy-by-design protocols for secure, trusted digital trade, balancing openness with regulatory sovereignty.
- **Risk**: Tax Evasion and Transparency Gaps: **Mitigation**: Annually review harmonisation progress, market concentration effects, consumer and SME outcomes, and fiscal transparency, using independent and public reporting mechanisms.

Recommendation 3 : Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance

Summary: This recommendation establishes the Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance, a global platform designed to bridge gaps in artificial intelligence deployment, capacity, and access, especially for underserved communities, women, and emerging innovators in G20 nations. The Alliance will accelerate responsible and inclusive AI adoption, spur public-private partnerships, standardise AI governance, foster talent mobility, and scale digital public goods. With a strong focus on equity, trust, and safety, it addresses the urgent need for digital infrastructure that is innovative, resilient, and sensitive to the diversity and sovereignty of G20 members. Action areas include shared infrastructure investments, harmonised AI data governance standards, open platforms for cross-border collaboration, and targeted support for green compute and local language data. The initiative is underpinned by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, with clear milestones and verified impact reporting.

Executive Recommendation: Launch and operationalise the G20 Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance to catalyse global partnerships, build compute/data/talent pipelines, and accelerate the safe, inclusive, and scalable uptake of AI for sustainable development and economic transformation.

Institutionalise the G20 SU20 Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance as a presidential-level framework that harmonises digital regulations, democratises access to AI, and establishes interoperable digital public infrastructure (DPI) across all G20 economies. The Alliance will **adopt** open, verifiable micro-credentialling for AI and digital skills, issued and recognised via the cross-border credentialling stack defined in Recommendation 2.

Context

Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance highlights the urgent need for collective G20 action to prevent widening global disparities in digital and AI capacity. Unequal access to digital infrastructure and compute resources risks entrenching social and economic divides, particularly in AI, and could systematically exclude underserved communities.

Global digital and AI infrastructure is marked by fragmentation and systemic inequality, with advanced economies dominating infrastructure and standards, while developing economies face exclusion from the promises of AI-driven growth. Gaps in digital identity and regulatory harmonisation impair innovation, access, and cross-border business engagement. The concentration of compute resources and AI capacity risks entrenching dependency and impeding the local development of AI solutions, ethics, and governance. There is a widening digital divide and deepening exclusion of SMEs and marginalised groups, moving to undermine equitable growth, societal benefit, and security worldwide. G20 countries must act collaboratively to build inclusive digital infrastructure, harmonise standards, and purposefully widen access.

- **Digital Inequality**: Many economies lack robust digital infrastructure, resulting in an expanding "AI equity gap." Without interventions, this gap perpetuates geographic, linguistic, and socio-economic marginalisation.
- **Regulatory Fragmentation**: 78% of startups cite fragmented compliance regimes as the biggest obstacle to scaling. These inefficiencies cost an estimated $780 billion annually, slow cross-border expansion, and discourage investment, especially in emerging markets.
- **Digital Identity Gap**: Only 35% of G20 South citizens have reliable digital IDs, compared to over 99% in advanced economies. This leaves hundreds of millions excluded from finance, healthcare, and the global digital economy. The lack of universal digital ID restricts SME access to credit and prevents effective delivery of government services.
- **AI Infrastructure Concentration**: 60% of global AI infrastructure is in the US and China; meanwhile, G20 South countries account for only 4% of global open-source AI value, despite representing 42% of the world's population. This prevents broad participation in shaping AI governance and application.

Strategic Priorities

- Invest in AI compute infrastructure with green compute principles, targeting underserved communities and local innovators.
- Create cross-border, multi-stakeholder partnerships for data governance, safety, and talent mobility.
- Standardise digital public goods and trust/safety protocols for AI, prioritising equity and sovereignty.
- Scale up development and deployment of local language and context-relevant AI systems.
- Establish AI testbeds and independent evaluation to drive responsible innovation and learning.

Key Performance Indicators

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
G20 Digital Infrastructure & AI Innovation Alliance as a formal global collaborative platform (status)	Fragmented innovation networks and uncoordinated AI governance initiatives	Alliance legally formalised with multi-stakeholder governance structure and operating secretariat	Fully functioning global alliance with 50+ member economies and innovation partners	G20 Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG)	UNDP; OECD; WEF Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution; African Union
AI and digital innovation partnerships catalysed under the Alliance (research, proof-of-concept, business incubation) (total number)	Initial pilot collaborations across G20 presidencies	200 cross-border innovation partnerships facilitated through the Alliance platform	600+ funded or implemented collaborations advancing AI for sustainability and inclusion	G20 AI Task Force	UNESCAP; UNESCO; Global Partnership on AI; BIS Innovation Hub
G20 economies adopting common principles for trustworthy, ethical, and human-centric AI deployment (%)	Divergent AI regulation and ethical standards	70% of G20 economies harmonising frameworks based on G20 AI Principles	100% alignment and enforcement of harmonised ethical AI guidelines and interoperability standards	G20 AI Governance and Trust Framework Committee	UNESCO; OECD; ITU; ISO AI Standards Committee
Investment and funding directed towards sustainable and inclusive AI innovation ecosystems (%)	Limited targeted global financing mechanisms	USD 2 billion mobilised through multi-donor AI Innovation Fund and private capital blending instruments	USD 10+ billion cumulative investment in sustainable and inclusive AI initiatives globally	G20 Finance and Investment Taskforce	World Bank; IFC; Global Digital Compact Fund; Private Sector Investors
Capacity development through digital infrastructure and AI research hubs, particularly in emerging economies (number)	Uneven access to AI computing, talent and resources	20 national AI innovation hubs connected through the Alliance; 5 in	50 multinational and regional AI hubs fostering	AI for Africa Initiative Secretariat (AU-G20)	African Union; NVIDIA; Cassava Technologies; Deep Learning Indaba

		Africa and the Global South	collaborative research, talent exchange and green compute infrastructures		
Rate of inclusion of MSMEs and startups in G20-endorsed innovation ecosystems (%)	Limited MSME and startup access to digital infrastructure networks	60% of G20 MSMEs engaged in AI/Digital collaboration programs	90% active participation across global innovation clusters enabled by inclusive regulatory frameworks	G20 MSME Digital Challenge Secretariat	G20-Digital Innovation Alliance; Accelerators; B20; Global Startup Network

Action 3.1: Establish Comprehensive Digital Innovation Infrastructure Beyond GEX

Summary: Action 3.1 aims to activate the G20 AI Innovation Alliance and deploy comprehensive digital innovation infrastructure that extends beyond the GEX platform to address broader cross-sectoral digital needs. This includes establishing AI governance frameworks, green cloud computing networks, digital skill development programs, and regulatory sandboxes to foster innovation across multiple industries and regions. The initiative prioritises building inclusive talent pipelines for marginalised communities, harmonising AI regulations, and creating interoperable infrastructure that connects trade facilitation, learning platforms, social protection systems, and innovation ecosystems. By mobilising blended finance and establishing open data governance, this action will empower diverse innovation alliances including women-led enterprises, youth innovators, and rural entrepreneurs to participate in an equitable global digital economy by 2030.

Background: Action 3.1 addresses the G20's recognition that digital transformation requires comprehensive infrastructure beyond single-platform solutions. While the GEX platform (under Recommendation 1) focuses specifically on cross-border MSME trade facilitation, Action 3.1 establishes the broader digital backbone necessary for inclusive innovation across all sectors. This encompasses AI governance frameworks, multi-sectoral data sharing protocols, cloud computing networks, and regulatory harmonisation that enables diverse digital ecosystems to thrive.

Historically, G20 efforts have evolved from broad AI principles toward integrated digital infrastructure approaches, including the "Osaka Track" for trusted data flows and enhanced digital public infrastructure. South Africa's G20 Presidency emphasises that comprehensive digital transformation requires infrastructure that serves multiple innovation alliances simultaneously. From fintech startups to educational technology platforms, from agricultural innovation networks to healthcare digitisation initiatives.

This action builds upon the G20's commitment to digital equity by ensuring that AI and advanced digital technologies are accessible not just for trade facilitation, but across education, healthcare, agriculture, and social services. The comprehensive infrastructure approach recognises that sustainable digital transformation requires interoperable systems that can support diverse use cases while maintaining security, privacy, and inclusive access standards.

This distinguishes Action 3.1 from Action 1.1 by focusing on broader digital infrastructure development beyond the GEX platform, emphasising multi-sectoral applications, diverse innovation alliances, and comprehensive ecosystem development rather than specifically trade-focused platform deployment.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
A global digital innovation infrastructure framework beyond GEX, integrating regional and sectoral hubs (status)	Fragmented innovation ecosystems and limited collaboration beyond GEX platforms	Global framework formalised, linking 10 regional digital innovation and AI hubs under G20-DEWG leadership	Fully operational, data-linked digital innovation infrastructure system connecting 30+ global hubs	G20 Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG)	African Union; ITU; UNDP; World Bank
Total investment mobilised for inclusive digital innovation infrastructure in emerging and developing economies (USD)	Less than USD 200 million in collaborative impact capital	USD 3 billion in blended finance and PPP-supported digital transformatio	Over USD 8 billion mobilised for inclusive and sustainable digital infrastructure	G20 Finance & Investment Taskforce	IFC; AVPA; B20; MDB consortium

		n infrastructure			
Interoperable national and regional digital frameworks aligned to G20 digital infrastructure standards (number)	Disparate governance frameworks and siloed systems	15 national and regional ecosystems aligned with cross-border interoperabilit y standards	40+ fully harmonised ecosystems facilitating digital trade, AI research, and innovation exchange	G20 Secretariat	OECD; ASEAN Digital Ministers; African Union Digital Agenda
MSME and startup participation in G20-supported digital innovation ecosystems (%)	Less than 10% inclusion in digital innovation networks	50% MSME inclusion through public-private-led innovation accelerators	80% MSME connectivity and participation enabled by affordable, inclusive infrastructure	G20 MSME Innovation Challenge Platform	National Chambers; B20; WEF Global Innovators
Cross-border data and research collaboration through AI infrastructure networks (%)	Limited data exchange protocols and regional restrictions	25% increase in AI-driven R&D and open data exchange between G20 hubs	70% increase in secure, ethical cross-border research and innovation collaboration networks	G20 AI Task Force and G20-DIA	UNESCO; OECD.AI; Global Partnership on AI (GPAI)

Implementation Approach:

- **Launch multi-country pilots** in strategic sectors (e.g. AI, cloud, data governance) to test and demonstrate digital infrastructure models.
- **Establish digital innovation labs and regulatory sandboxes** in priority regions for experimentation and local adaptation.
- Mobilise the G20 AI Innovation Alliance to **co-develop standards, protocols, and open data resources** for secure, trusted digital systems.
- **Roll out global digital skills and certification programmes** targeting marginalised populations, women, and youth.
- **Deploy blended finance mechanisms and investment platforms** to build green compute networks, data centres, and sustainable digital applications.
- **Coordinate through global and regional bodies** to align standards and governance for interoperability and regulatory innovation.

- Implement continuous monitoring, learning, and adaptation to ensure local responsiveness and alignment with global best practices

Roles and Responsibilities:

- **The G20 AI Innovation Alliance:** will provide overall strategic direction, coordinate member actions, and foster global partnerships to develop digital infrastructure, standards, and governance frameworks.
- **National governments:** will design, implement, and regulate programmes for AI, data governance, and digital skills development, in alignment with G20 principles and tailored to local contexts.
- **Regional and global regulatory bodies (including ITU, OECD, UNESCO, and UN agencies):** will advise on cross-border interoperability, ethical standards, and inclusive governance, and provide technical and policy assistance.
- **Private sector partners:** including digital platforms, startups, and investors, will co-invest in infrastructure, participate in regulatory sandboxes, and help develop practical use cases and training pathways.
- **Academic institutions, research networks, and civil society groups:** will lead capacity building, conduct impact assessment, advise on societal inclusion and ethics, and amplify stakeholder voice in infrastructure planning and certification.
- **The Technology Policy Assistance Facility and task force secretariat:** will support coordination, facilitate knowledge exchange, organise pilot programmes, and monitor progress against G20 targets.

Risks and Mitigation:

Action 2.3 on harmonising regulations and compliance for digital trade involves significant policy, technical, and operational risks along with established mitigation approaches.

- **Risk**: Digital Inequality: **Mitigation**: Prioritise buildout in underserved regions, integrate targeted support and subsidies for marginalised communities, and ensure digital public goods for equitable access.
- **Risk**: Fragmentation of Standards and Governance. **Mitigation**: Advance interoperability via G20 AI Innovation Alliance, establish shared certification and governance frameworks, and promote regular coordination meetings across member states.

- **Risk**: Security and Privacy Threats. **Mitigation**: Embed privacy and security protocols into digital infrastructure, conduct regular risk assessments, and align with global data protection standards.
- **Risk**: Sustainability Challenge: **Mitigation**: Invest in energy-efficient computing, data centres, and digital infrastructure funded through blended finance mechanisms prioritising sustainable design and operation.
- **Risk**: Barriers to Startup and SME Participation: **Mitigation**: Roll out global digital skills programs, regulatory sandboxes, and innovation labs to facilitate inclusive upskilling and reduce barriers for startups, women, youth, and rural entrepreneurs.

Recommendation 4: Global Entrepreneurship and Startup Policy Innovation Framework

A globally harmonised policy framework for entrepreneurship and startup ecosystem innovation, anchored in equity, capacity-building, and cross-border collaboration. G20 members are called to scale and harmonise support for early-stage ventures and entrepreneurial capacity, especially in underserved communities, among women, and youth. Innovative regulatory approaches, inclusive financing mechanisms, and digital support platforms must be introduced.

The framework aims to break persistent ecosystem barriers, expand access to business services, catalyse private and public investment, and formalise connections among startups, corporates, and research. Strategic elements include piloting inclusive funding models, fostering entrepreneurial learning, leveraging international partnerships, and streamlining regulatory pathways.

Impact will be measured through transparent KPIs reflecting success in job creation, capital mobilisation, and the integration of marginalised groups into high-growth sectors. All actions include clear roles, detailed implementation guidance, and explicit risk mitigation as in the original draft.

The G20 Global Entrepreneurship and Startup Policy Innovation Framework is put forward for adoption by the G20 countries. It codifies best practices in ecosystem development, inclusive capital flows, regulatory reform, and digital transformation to unlock global entrepreneurial opportunity, especially for underserved communities, women, and young innovators. This includes harmonised Startup Acts where relevant, supported by Targeted Policy Innovation Pilots, Compliance Relief Frameworks, and a Global Knowledge Hub that enables shared metrics, evidence-based policymaking, and cross-border learning.

Context

Persistent barriers such as capital access limitations, fragmented business services, and inflexible regulation, continue to restrict the growth of high-potential startups and entrepreneurship, especially for underserved groups. Despite G20 member commitment to inclusive growth, a lack of harmonised approaches and limited multilateral support prevent the scaling of successful local models. By unifying policy guidance, financial innovation, and international cooperation, this framework seeks to lower structural barriers and enable new engines of sustainable, equitable growth across all member states and regions.

Across G20 economies, startups face these systemic barriers created by regulatory frameworks originally designed for large corporations. They impose complex tax systems, inflexible labor codes, and high legal/accounting costs on early-stage ventures, stifling innovation and preventing young firms from scaling.

The burden is disproportionately felt by youth, women, rural, and first-time founders. Evidence reflects that:

- Up to 25% of seed capital in emerging markets is lost to compliance costs instead of innovation.
- Founders spend 3× more time on compliance than on product development in their first year.
- 94% of African startups fail due to regulatory barriers rather than weak business models.
- Without relief frameworks, youth and women founders in Tier 3 economies are disproportionately excluded from growth opportunities.

Without clear startup definitions in law, targeted policy reform innovation, and right-sized compliance frameworks, millions of potential entrepreneurs remain excluded. Tier 3 economies such as South Africa illustrate how systemic bottlenecks, such as outdated exchange control frameworks that restrict access to global capital and markets, and ongoing talent and intellectual property flight, combine to limit the ability of high-growth ventures to scale. These barriers not only constrain foreign direct investment but also drive entrepreneurs abroad, weakening local innovation ecosystems and eroding the very foundation of inclusive economic transformation.

The consequences are included:

- Lost innovation and jobs: promising ventures never launch or scale due to high compliance costs.
- Geographic inequality: rural founders face longer registration timelines and lack access to services.
- Gender imbalance: women-led ventures are 64% less likely to navigate complex systems successfully.
- Fragmented innovation economy: startup-friendly policies exist in some markets, but others lag, creating a two-tier global ecosystem.

However, policy reform demonstrates measurable upside. Countries with Startup Acts (Tunisia, Nigeria, Senegal, Italy) have seen:

- 60%+ increases in formalisation rates for youth-led ventures.
- 68% growth in early-stage funding.
- 80% growth in foreign direct investment and startup capital flows, as a result of a 144% reduction in the cost of starting a business in Tier 3 economies such as South Africa
- 3.2× more government contracts awarded to women-led startups.

Strategic Priorities

Pilot inclusive and flexible funding solutions for startups led by marginalised groups, with a robust monitoring framework.

Scale technical assistance, networks, and business platforms for all early-stage entrepreneurs, especially in underserved localities.

Establish regionally harmonised startup and SME regulatory frameworks.

Drive talent development, market entry, and partnership-building through international collaborations.

Track progress through a standardised, G20-wide entrepreneurial KPIs set.

Key Performance Indicators

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
Entrepreneurship and Startup Policy Innovation Framework across G20 member and partner economies (status)	Fragmented national-level policies for startups and entrepreneurship	Framework adopted by 70% of G20 economies integrating unified policy principles for startups and MSMEs	100% adoption and operational alignment with global entrepreneurship policy principles	G20 Startup20 Engagement Group Secretariat	Department of Small Business Development (South Africa); OECD; UNCTAD; World Bank
An integrated Global Startup Economy Fund to support scalable early-stage innovation (USD)	Limited multilateral funding accessible to emerging entrepreneurs	USD 2 billion in pooled seed funding through the Fund across G20 economies	USD 10+ billion cumulative funding mobilised for scalable and sustainable startups globally	Startup20 Finance and Investment Task Force	IFC; Global Entrepreneurship Network; Development Finance Institutions
Startup and MSME ecosystem participants benefitting from harmonised policy and finance frameworks (number)	Currently fragmented; low integration of MSMEs in policy ecosystems	500,000 startups supported through G20 policy-coordinated programs and platforms	Over 2 million startups and MSMEs engaged globally under cohesive entrepreneurial policy innovation systems	G20 Policy Innovation Platform	African Development Bank; ASEAN SME Centre; EU Startup Nations Standard
G20 nations implementing gender- and youth-inclusive entrepreneurship policies under the Framework (%)	Limited focus on gender and youth in startup policy design	75% of G20 economies with gender- and youth-responsive entrepreneurship strategies	Universally applied gender-smart and youth-oriented entrepreneurship policies across G20 economies	G20 Inclusion and Sustainability Task Force	UN Women; Youth20; Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi)
Entrepreneurship development infrastructure (incubators, accelerators, policy labs) linked to the Framework (number)	Sparse cross-country collaboration and policy experimentation	150 innovation and incubation policy labs connected under the G20	500+ globally networked policy labs and innovation hubs co-operating through	G20 Research and Innovation Working Group	World Economic Forum; 22 on Sloane; ANDE Global; Policy Lab Network

		collaborative programme	shared digital platforms		
Contribution of startups to formal job creation and inclusive economic growth (%)	MSMEs contribute 5060% of private-sector employment	20% increase in startup-driven formal job creation across G20 economies	35% cumulative increase in startup-driven employment with significant participation from women and youth	G20 Employment and Social Inclusion Group	ILO; International Trade Centre; Global Impact Investing Network

Action 4.1: Institutionalise a Global Startup Policy Innovation Framework Through Policy Labs and Pilots

Summary: Action 4.1 establishes a unified, globally recognised framework to modernise startup policy across G20 member states, embedded through policy labs and pilot reforms. The process prioritises legal recognition for startups, compliance relief, and streamlined support, with dedicated governance bodies ensuring inclusivity for women, youth, and rural founders. By consolidating evidence-based best practices and monitoring metrics in a global knowledge hub, this action accelerates formalisation, attracts early-stage investment, and positions startups as central drivers of sustainable, equitable economic growth by 2030.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Baseline (2024)	Target (2028)	Target (2030)	Tracking Institution	Champion Institution Example
A Global Network of Startup Policy Labs piloted across G20 and partner economies (status)	Fragmented national-level startup policy experimentation	20 multi-country Policy Labs operational under the Startup20 Secretariat	50 interconnected Policy Labs sharing insights and innovations in startup policy design	Startup20 Policy Innovation Taskforce	OECD; UNCTAD; World Bank; 22 on Sloane

Policy innovations tested and scaled through Policy Lab collaborations (number)	Limited real-time policy experimentation and evaluation platforms	100 startup policy pilots tested and co-developed across participating economies	300 validated and scaled startup policy models driving inclusive entrepreneurship	G20 Research and Innovation Working Group	National Ministries of Innovation; Global Entrepreneurship Network; ANDE Global
Integration of Policy Lab findings into national and regional entrepreneurship policies (%)	Ad hoc or informal policy adoption without standardised review mechanism	60% of G20 economies integrating Policy Lab-tested frameworks within national startup policies	90% institutionalisation of Policy Lab outputs into G20-aligned entrepreneurship legislation	G20 SME and Innovation Ministers Forum	World Economic Forum; B20; Policy Lab Network
Volume of co-investment and knowledge-sharing partnerships catalysed by the Policy Labs USD)	Fragmented bilateral collaborations and undercapitalised pilots	USD 1 billion in cross-country public private co-investment facilitated through startup policy pilots	USD 5 billion cumulative funding channelled through Policy Lab-driven innovation ecosystems	Startup20 Finance and Investment Taskforce	IFC; G20 Development Working Group; Regional Innovation Hubs
Cross-regional representation and inclusivity in Policy Lab initiatives (youth, women, emerging markets) (%)	Limited participation of underrepresented groups in policy co-creation	At least 50% representation from emerging economy stakeholders and youth/women innovators	Sustained gender-equal and globally balanced participation in all Policy Lab programs	G20 Inclusion and Sustainability Taskforce	UN Women; Youth20; Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi)
A Global Network of Startup Policy Labs piloted across G20 and partner economies (status)	Fragmented national-level startup policy experimentation	20 multi-country Policy Labs operational under the Startup20 Secretariat	50 interconnected Policy Labs sharing insights and innovations in startup policy design	Startup20 Policy Innovation Taskforce	OECD; UNCTAD; World Bank; 22 on Sloane

Implementation Approach:

- **Develop** a harmonised global **Startup Policy Innovation Framework and toolkit** to set core standards for startup recognition, support, and equity.
- **Launch Policy Labs** in selected G20 countries to co-design, test, and refine targeted regulatory reforms such as startup acts, compliance relief, and inclusion benchmarks.
- **Implement pilot reforms** collaboratively with public stakeholders, ecosystem partners, and steering groups; use data-driven monitoring and inclusive feedback at every stage.
- **Consolidate** the results and best practices of pilots into **a central digital knowledge hub** to inform continuous improvement and facilitate additional G20 member adoption.
- Systematically **report** on **legal recognition, economic impact, and KPIs** for diversity, inclusion, formalisation, and environmental sustainability.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- **The G20 Startup20 Secretariat**: **lead coordinator** for Action 4.1, managing collaboration between member countries, stakeholder engagement, and oversight of implementation progress.
- **National Ministries responsible for entrepreneurship and innovation**: **country-level leads**, integrating policy reforms, facilitating the adoption of harmonised startup definitions, and supporting the rollout of the Global Policy Innovation Framework.
- **Regional Networks of Centers (RNCs)**: designated by each member or region, function as **single points of contact**, ensuring local adaptation, collecting feedback, and reporting implementation progress to the Secretariat.
- **Independent Evaluation Bodies**: **annual monitoring and mid-term reviews**, verifying outcomes, compliance, and impact relative to agreed targets.
- **Taskforce Champion Institutions:** including universities, accelerators, and incubators, provide **technical support**, contribute to policy co-design and pilot deployment, and act as capacity-building agents.
- The **Technical Advisory Board**: with experts in regulatory and digital systems, guides the framework's refinement, interoperability, and continuous improvement for Action 4.1 activities.

- **Civil society organisations, ecosystem builders, and advocacy groups**: play a **supporting role** by communicating grassroots needs, promoting inclusion, and ensuring representation for women, youth, and rural entrepreneurs throughout the Action 4.1 process.

Risks and Mitigation

Technical

1. **Interoperability with legacy systems**. *Mitigate:* Interoperability Profiles v1.0 + adapter blueprints; open-API/conformance clauses; shared Legacy Integration Facility.
2. **Blockchain scalability and vulnerabilities.** *Mitigate:* Ledger-agnostic VC design (optional anchoring), rate-limiting, audited smart contracts/bug-bounty; key-rollover and revocation registries.
3. **Technical talent shortages**. *Mitigate:* G20 fellowships and vendor-neutral academies; South–South exchanges; Rapid Engineering Pool.

Regulatory and Inclusion

4. **Sovereignty concerns** (high in many members). *Mitigate:* Federated model (data stays national); phased MRAs starting with low-risk credentials.
5. **Digital literacy gaps** (excludes many entrepreneurs). *Mitigate:* Community helpdesks; assisted onboarding; micro-grants for devices/data; multilingual UX.
6. **National security concerns in cross-border data sharing**. *Mitigate:* Data-minimisation, purpose-binding, selective disclosure/ZK proofs; DPIAs; kill-switch for classes of assertions.

Sustainability

7. **Long-term O&M costs (abandonment risk)**. *Mitigate:* DPI-as-Utility (small fees), multi-year O&M contracts; stabilisation fund.
8. **Credential reliability post-funding**. *Mitigate:* Accredited issuer registry; SLAs for revocation; periodic re-attestation.
9. **Infrastructure degradation in remote areas**. *Mitigate:* Ruggedised/solar kits; offline-first flows; telemetry; rapid-replacement SLAs.

G20 Alignment and Relevance

The proposals in the Foundation and Alliance policy paper advance G20 commitments by aligning directly with the group's core cross-sectoral priorities of inclusive growth, digital transformation, and sustainable development. By promoting harmonised digital infrastructures, interoperable standards, and SME-focused policies, the agenda operationalises G20 mandates on MSME empowerment, bridging digital divides, and leveraging technology for broad-based economic resilience.

Initiatives such as Digital Public Infrastructure, support for cross-border data flows, and policies on digital skills and entrepreneurship show a clear line of sight to the Sustainable Development Goals and previous G20 communiqués, while market validation and extensive stakeholder consultations ensure recommendations are implementable and tailored to the real economy's needs.

This integrated, evidence-driven approach positions the Foundation and Alliance recommendations as critical enablers of the G20's ambitions for a competitive, inclusive, and digitally enabled global economy.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Foundation and Alliance policy paper adopts a robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan to ensure systematic measurement against KPIs, regular review, and meaningful feedback mechanisms throughout implementation. The plan is anchored in best practice policy cycles, progressing from baseline data collection and indicator setting, through continuous monitoring, to comprehensive post-implementation evaluation, promoting transparency, learning, and adaptive management.

Regular Review and Reporting

- M&E activities are embedded throughout the policy cycle, with **quarterly and annual progress reviews** scheduled to assess implementation status and early outcomes.
- An independent evaluation body will oversee the production of **annual reports** verified by relevant G20 committees, ensuring accountability and unbiased measurement of progress.

Measurement Against KPIs

- Each core recommendation and action area is assigned **measurable KPIs, with clear baselines and quantifiable targets** reflecting G20 and SDG priorities.
- **Performance metrics** cover inclusion, digital transformation, market access, job creation, sustainability contributions, and cross-border digital integration.
- **Real-time dashboards** will be deployed to aggregate and visualise indicator data, enabling decision-makers and stakeholders to monitor progress easily.

Feedback Mechanisms

- Ongoing **stakeholder feedback loops** are built into the process, utilising direct user surveys, focus groups with MSMEs, and open comment periods after annual reporting milestones.
- **Findings from feedback and evaluation** are systematically reviewed to inform adaptive course corrections, with results and lessons learned disseminated to all stakeholders for shared learning.
- **Policy adaptations and mid-course corrections** will be based on this evidence, with transparent documentation of changes.

External Accountability and Transparency

- **Annual M&E results** are published and made widely accessible to G20 members, the private sector, and civil society, supporting transparency and global learning.
- **Public comment** is actively sought on evaluation findings to harness external expertise and stakeholder perspectives before recommendations are refined or scaled.

This comprehensive approach ensures the Foundation and Alliance initiative remains accountable, data-driven, and agile in advancing G20 priorities for inclusive and sustainable growth in the digital era.

Conclusion

The Foundation and Alliance Taskforce Policy Paper present not only a blueprint for inclusive entrepreneurial transformation but a call to reimagine global cooperation itself. It advances four interconnected recommendations, each designed for scalability, interoperability, and long-term resilience:

- **Global Ecosystem Exchange (GEX):** A platform for coordinated collaboration across ecosystems.
- **Digital Infrastructure and Cross-Border Innovation:** Frameworks to enable seamless digital trade and innovation.
- **Digital Infrastructure and AI Innovation Alliance:** A collective approach to harnessing AI and digital infrastructure.
- **Global Entrepreneurship and Startup Policy Innovation Framework (GESPIF):** A policy framework to align startup legislation and innovation incentives.

Together, these recommendations offer systemic solutions to fragmentation, exclusion, and inefficiency, ensuring their relevance well beyond a single presidency cycle.

This policy paper offers a cohesive, evidence-based suite of recommendations that harmonise digital infrastructure, regulatory innovation, and capacity building within a robust governance ecosystem. The Global Ecosystem Exchange and its complementary frameworks provide scalable solutions tailored to diverse national contexts, ensuring relevance and adaptability in a complex global landscape.

We call on G20 leaders, governments, private sector actors, and development partners to seize this moment for bold, coordinated action. Collaborative implementation, underpinned by transparent monitoring, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and independent evaluation, will be critical to the success and longevity of these initiatives. Together, the G20 can catalyse a new era of shared prosperity, resilience, and global economic integration, ensuring that no entrepreneur or community is left behind.

The path forward demands political will, strategic investment, and sustained partnership. By embracing this comprehensive vision, the G20 will not only advance its commitments to solidarity, equality, and sustainability but also demonstrate global leadership in shaping a fairer, more dynamic economic future for all.

Appendices

Appendix 1: References

1. OECD. (2024). "Entrepreneurship Education: Building Competencies for the Future Economy - International Framework and Implementation Guidelines." OECD Education Policy Series, No. 234.
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Appendix 2:

Global Competency Models and Frameworks

1. OECD Entrepreneurship Competencies: Comprehensive analysis of opportunity recognition, risk management, creativity, and resilience integration across diverse cultural contexts
2. EU EntreComp Framework: Detailed examination of 15 competences across ideas and opportunities, resources, and action implementation with cross-cultural validation studies
3. UNESCO Learning Compass 2030: Transformative competencies framework for creating new value, reconciling tensions, and taking responsibility in global contexts
4. World Economic Forum Inclusive Entrepreneurship Guidelines: Evidence-based public-private collaboration models and implementation strategies with outcome assessments

Experiential Learning Research and Validation

5. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory: Application studies in entrepreneurship education contexts with effectiveness measurement across diverse populations
6. Effectuation Theory Research: Practical implementation frameworks in educational settings with longitudinal outcome tracking and cultural adaptation studies
7. Safe-to-fail Environment Design: Comprehensive principles and methodologies for creating supportive failure experiences with learning outcome optimisation
8. Innovation Sandbox Operational Models: Effectiveness assessment frameworks, cost-benefit analyses, and scalability studies across different economic contexts

Partnership and Sustainability Analysis

9. Public-Private Partnership Sustainability: Critical success factors in educational contexts with long-term outcome analysis and financial sustainability modelling
10. Corporate Mentorship Program Effectiveness: Comprehensive evaluation studies covering program design, implementation strategies, and scalability assessment with ROI analysis
11. Quality Assurance Framework Comparisons: International educational system analysis with best practice identification and cultural adaptation guidance
12. Inclusive Access Barrier Analysis: Systematic studies of participation barriers and intervention effectiveness across diverse demographic groups with longitudinal tracking

International Implementation Case Studies

13. Estonia e-Residency Program: Comprehensive analysis of digital entrepreneurship education integration with practical business application and international scalability assessment
14. Singapore SkillsFuture Initiative: Detailed examination of lifelong learning integration with economic development outcomes and public-private partnership sustainability
15. Germany Dual Education System: Industry partnership model analysis with adaptation potential assessment for entrepreneurship education contexts and international transfer
16. Chile Start-Up Chile Program: Government-sponsored entrepreneurship acceleration outcomes with comprehensive impact assessment and replication guidance

Cultural Adaptation and Inclusion Studies

17. Cross-cultural entrepreneurship education effectiveness: Comparative studies across G20 nations with cultural adaptation framework development
18. Gender inclusion in entrepreneurship education: Barrier analysis and intervention effectiveness with outcome measurement across different cultural contexts
19. Rural entrepreneurship education delivery models: Resource optimisation strategies and outcome assessment with scalability analysis for diverse geographic contexts
20. Disability-inclusive entrepreneurship education: Accommodation strategies and effectiveness measurement with universal design principal integration

Appendix 3: Acknowledgements

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