



## Public Report on the Third Cycle of Independent Assessments of GNI Company Members 2018/2019 | Executive Summary

This is the public report on the 2018/2019 independent assessments of 11 member companies of the Global Network Initiative (GNI): Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Millicom, Nokia, Orange, Telefónica, Telenor Group, Telia Company, Verizon Media, and Vodafone Group. This assessment cycle covered a two-year period, from July 1, 2016, to July 1, 2018 (“the assessment period”). However, only for this assessment cycle, the relevant period of review for Millicom, Nokia, Orange, Telefónica, Telenor Group, Telia Company, and Vodafone Group spanned from their accession to GNI on March 27, 2017, to July 1, 2018.

GNI was launched in 2008. Its mission is to protect and advance freedom of expression and privacy rights in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector by setting a global standard for responsible decision making and serving as a multistakeholder voice in the face of government restrictions and demands. GNI brings together ICT companies, civil society (including human rights and press freedom groups), academics, academic institutions, and investors from around the world to provide a framework for responsible company decision making, foster accountability by member companies, offer a safe space for shared learning, and provide a forum for collective advocacy in support of laws and policies that promote and protect freedom of expression and privacy.

A unique feature of GNI is its independent assessment process that relies on a methodology designed to allow GNI’s civil society, academic, and investor board members (non-company board members) insight into member company efforts to implement the GNI Principles on Freedom of Expression and Privacy (“the GNI Principles”). This report marks the third cycle of GNI company assessments. Based on a detailed evaluation of confidential reports prepared by independent assessors, and the querying of the assessors and member companies, GNI’s multistakeholder [Board of Directors](#) reviewed the assessments and determined that each company is making good-faith efforts to implement the GNI Principles with improvement over time.

*“The assessment process strives to increase company transparency while protecting users’ rights through ample access to information.” Gare Smith, Foley Hoag LLP*

The independent assessments were conducted according to the [GNI Assessment Toolkit](#) by assessors accredited by the GNI Board as meeting [independence and competency criteria](#)



[established by GNI](#) who then participated in mandatory assessor training. Assessors received access to information, including relevant documents in secure settings. They also had access to key company personnel, from frontline teams to senior management, and conducted a total of 125 interviews. Assessments included an examination of 86 case studies, which looked at how the companies are dealing with government requests and demands in practice. The GNI Board met four times over the course of 2019 to review the 11 company reports and engage in detailed discussion with each company and assessor before making their determinations.

The GNI assessment process is confidential by design. It allows companies to share and discuss sensitive cases of government requests with GNI's non-company board members. It also allows discussion of internal company systems and processes to implement the GNI Principles. This report primarily presents information in aggregate or anonymized form in order to show how the companies review and respond to government requests, without disclosing confidential or otherwise legally protected information. To increase transparency with the public, this report includes some examples of case studies and assessor recommendations specific to individual companies.

This report shares the findings from the 11 company assessments. Points of progress and areas for future shared learning identified in the report include further consideration of how companies integrate the GNI Principles into their business operations, ways to enhance and expand training efforts inside companies, and developing tools and guidance on topics such as human rights due diligence (HRDD) and impact assessment.

The assessments also provide insights into the external operating environment for companies. These include ongoing challenges around state surveillance and impediments to transparency, challenges responding to government-ordered network disruptions, and the need for greater collaboration with civil society and other stakeholders to engage governments to bring their laws and policies into alignment with international human rights norms.

This cycle of assessments provides a window into how a growing number of companies from across the ICT sector are exercising their responsibility to uphold the rule of law and respect the freedom of expression and privacy rights of billions of users and customers while dealing with increasingly sophisticated government measures to assert control over online content and digital communications.



No single company can face today's freedom of expression and privacy challenges on its own. Pushing back on efforts to suppress freedom of expression and privacy rights or limit the operating environment for rights-respecting ICT companies requires dedicated efforts by governments, regulators, companies, and other key stakeholders, including investors, academics, and civil society organizations inside and outside of GNI.

The assessment process shows how companies from different segments of the ICT sector can commit to a common set of fundamental freedom of expression and privacy principles, grounded in international human rights law and commitments to accountability, collaboration, shared learning, and public policy. After the publication of this report, each company will communicate to the public about the outcome of its assessment.

Going forward, GNI will work to integrate insights from this assessment cycle into our wider efforts to protect and promote freedom of expression and privacy in the ICT sector. Specific steps will include:

- A complete review of the assessment process to strengthen our standards and practices for the fourth GNI assessment cycle,
- The integration of findings from the assessments into shared learning across and within constituencies, and
- Using insights from the assessment to inform and enhance GNI's collaborative engagement with governments on freedom of expression and privacy rights.