

Footprints of 20 Years of the Internet Governance Forum

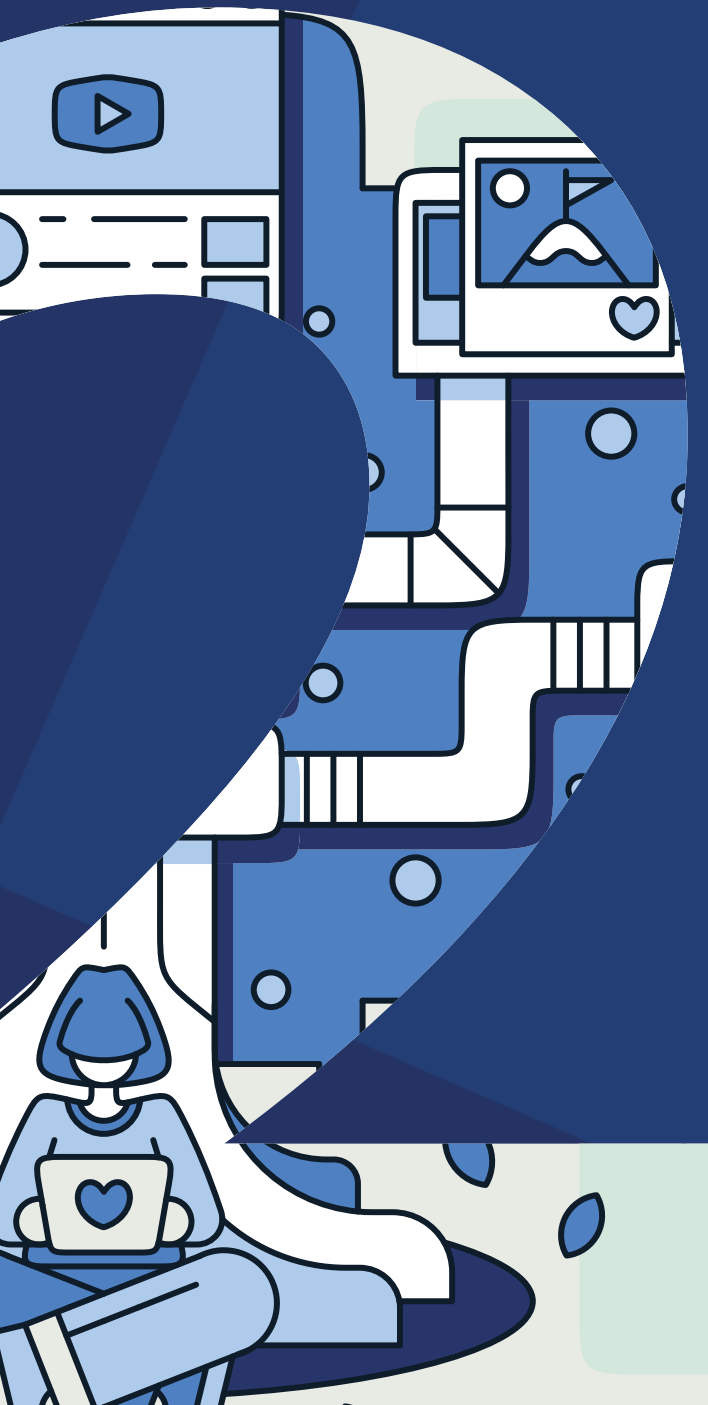


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Introduction



For two decades, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has served as the world's primary multistakeholder platform for dialogue on Internet governance. Agreed during the final negotiations of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005, and endorsed by the United Nations Member States, the IGF was created not to negotiate or regulate, but to convene. It enables open, inclusive, and informed discussions that influence how global Internet policy is shaped and implemented.

This joint report by the Internet Society (ISOC) and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) captures how the IGF's dialogues have contributed to concrete impact. From community connectivity initiatives and local Internet exchange points (IXPs) to improvements in routing security and the broader adoption of multilingual domain names, the IGF network has helped stakeholders convert discussion into progress.

The IGF's strength lies in its structure. What began as a single global meeting has evolved into a dynamic, year-round ecosystem supported by over 180 national and regional IGFs, as well as a growing track of intersessional work. This growth has been driven by the needs of participants—governments, technical experts, civil society, business, and academia—each finding value in a space designed for neutral, globally accessible cooperation.

As the digital policy landscape becomes more complex, the IGF remains a unique venue for bridging perspectives. This report offers timely evidence that the multistakeholder model is not only viable but essential. Over the past twenty years, the IGF has not simply convened stakeholders; it has helped shape governance frameworks, the coordination of technical standards, and the trust infrastructure that underpin the Internet today.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is the primary multistakeholder platform for discussing Internet governance issues within the United Nations (UN) system. It is an important outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which recognizes the importance of multistakeholder participation in Internet policy discussions. Over the years, the IGF themes and topics have shaped national, regional and global dialogues, and contributed to the implementation of WSIS action lines.

The IGF was purposefully designed to foster dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing, which have helped inform traditional environments—intergovernmental or commercial—where negotiations address policy or complex issues related to the transition to a digital ecosystem. By including perspectives from all participating stakeholders, the IGF serves as an incubator for discussions—whether longstanding or emerging—and reflects the wide-ranging characteristics of Internet development around the world. This approach is essential; effective Internet governance depends on understanding these varied viewpoints to inform policy and implementation.

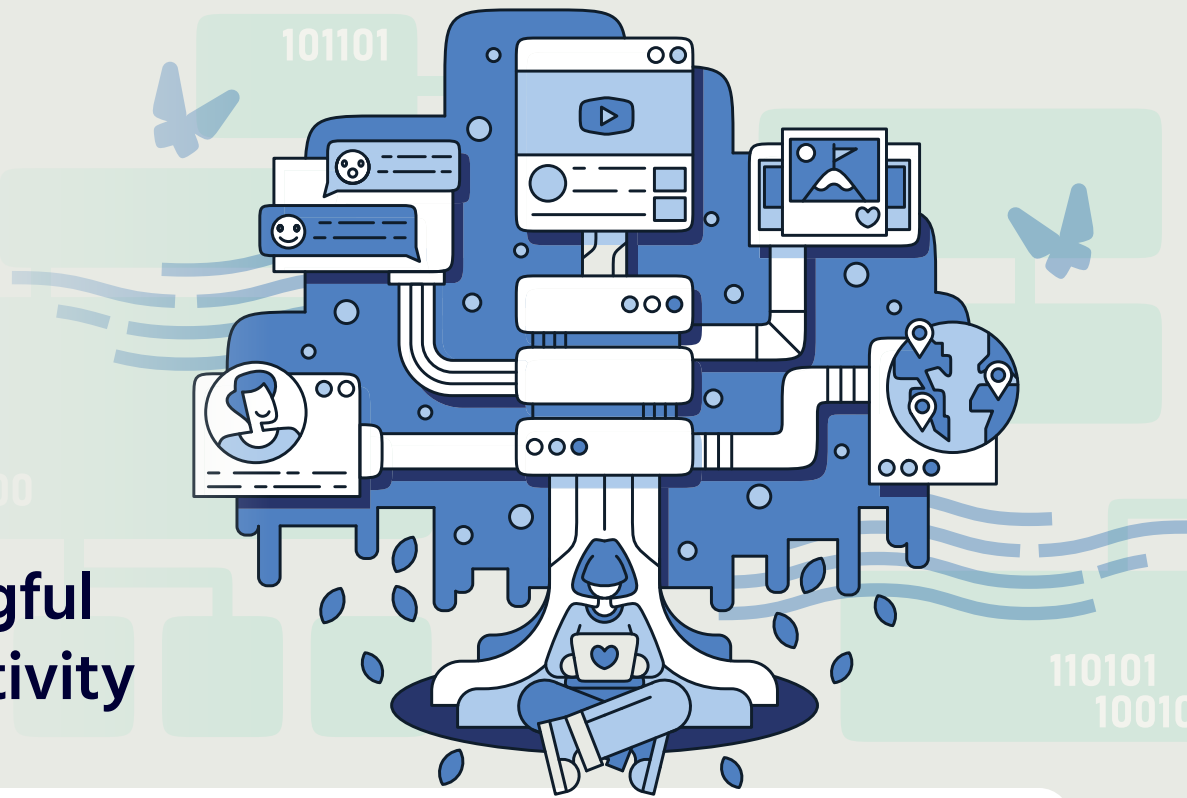
Since that first IGF meeting in Athens 19 years ago, the annual event has become the anchor of a growing network that includes more than 180 national and regional IGFs, as well as year-round intersessional work through best-practice forums, policy networks, and dynamic coalitions. This bottom-up, stakeholder-driven expansion demonstrates the value of the model beyond a once-a-year meeting.

The IGF network fosters meaningful information exchange, shared understanding, and opportunities to advance solutions. However, implementation of those solutions often occurs outside the IGF itself. This makes the footprints of the IGF's impact difficult to trace, as implementation happens in a decentralized manner, just like the Internet it supports.

However, there are several examples that demonstrate how the IGF network has directly and indirectly contributed to real-world change.



Meaningful Connectivity



Community Networks as a Tool to Achieving Meaningful Connectivity

Issue

Internet connectivity is a social, economic, and political lifeline. However, despite advances in technology and infrastructure, one-third of the world's population remains unconnected. New models, such as community-centered solutions where people work together to establish and maintain connectivity, can help bridge this gap. This includes, but is not limited to, community networks.

IGF-Related Activity

At the global level, the Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity (DC3) was created. In 2016 it adopted the [Guadalajara Declaration on Community Connectivity](#). This declaration established the characteristics of Community Networks and offered policy recommendations to support them. DC3 has also created [The Community Network Manual: How to Build the Internet Yourself](#), published with Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV), the International

Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Internet Society (ISOC). National and regional IGFs have featured community network discussions; one prominent example is the [Murambinda Community Network](#) which was shared at the 2017 Zimbabwe IGF to raise awareness and build capacity.

Developments/Current Status

IGF discussions and DC3 initiatives have supported the growth of community networks that now connect previously unconnected areas. Examples include *El Cuy in Patagonia, Argentina*, in the mountains in *Tusheti in Georgia*, the *Arctic's first community network in the remote community of Ulukhaktok in Canada*, and the *highest-in-the-world, Everest community network*. Between 2020-2024, ISOC distributed over US\$3.1 million to support 85 community networks, working with local chapters and partners like the [Association for Progressive Communications](#) on building community-centered connectivity. These

grassroots efforts helped create enabling policy and regulatory environments. For example, the [Brazilian Regulator ANATEL](#) endorsed the DC3 manual as “defining an Internet access model that can be adopted and scaled to improve access to the Internet in Brazil”. The

ITU World Telecommunications Development Conference-22 adopted Resolution 37 on Bridging Digital Divides, referencing complementary access networks and solutions”, thereby supporting community-centered connectivity.



The Deployment of Internet Exchange Points to Facilitate Meaningful Connectivity

Issue

The Internet’s effectiveness as a global network of networks depends on high-performance pathways for data transfer. However, *without* local interconnection points, data often travels unnecessarily long distances, even between users in the same region. This requires reliance on distant connections or international transit links that increase costs and degrade service quality through latency and reduced speeds. Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) provide a crucial solution to this inefficiency by acting as physical facilities where diverse Internet players (ISPs, content providers, businesses) can interconnect *directly* within a local area. By enabling this direct peering, IXPs allow local traffic to remain local, drastically reducing reliance on costly international routes and significantly improving performance; this enhances the overall quality of service and lowers costs worldwide. This proves particularly impactful for fostering robust, resilient, and affordable Internet infrastructure in underserved countries.

IGF-Related Activity

Discussions related to the benefits of, the need for, and the process to develop IXPs have taken place across the IGF network, including at annual IGFs and a variety of national and regional initiatives (NRIs) meetings. From these conversations, recommendations were developed, knowledge was transferred, and

relationships were established that have proactively contributed to the expansion of IXPs. Examples include: a best-practice session at the 2007 IGF in Rio on [Internet Traffic Exchange in Less Developed Internet Markets and the Role of Internet Exchange Points](#) and information sharing by ISOC on [the Role of IXPs in Bridging the Digital Divide](#) at the West Africa Internet Governance Forum in 2016.

Developments/Current Status

Since the IGF network was launched, the number of IXPs has continued to grow. [ISOC’s review in 2020](#) showed the growth of IXPs in Africa alone increased from 19 to 46 over a 10-year period. By 2021, more than half of the African countries had at least one IXP, and six countries had more than one. This growth and development significantly improved local traffic exchange and reduced interconnection costs. An [ISOC 2012 study](#) demonstrated how IXPs enabled Kenya and Nigeria to save millions of dollars in telecom costs while accelerating local data exchange and supporting the development of locally hosted content and services. For instance, the Kenya Internet Exchange Point (KIXP) reduced the latency of local traffic from 200–600 ms to 2–10 ms on average while saving local ISPs nearly US\$1.5 million per year on international connectivity charges. Nigeria’s Internet Exchange Point (IXPN) had a similar reduction in latency while lowering costs by almost US\$1 million per year.



The Role of Internationalized Domain Names in Meaningful Connectivity

Issue

Meaningful connectivity is facilitated by Internet users accessing applications and services using Internet addresses in their own language. Early Internet standards, however, were developed to support ASCII characters, resulting in English language-dominated domain names. To bridge this gap, standards for Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) were created by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) in 2003 and updated in 2008. However, adoption of IDNs and universal acceptance (UA) has faced ongoing challenges; many software applications were not updated to support the full range of new and multilingual domain names or associated email addresses.

IGF-Related Activity

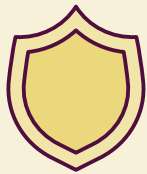
The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and others have hosted working sessions on IDNs and the importance of UA at multiple IGFs over the years, helping raise awareness of their role in expanding digital opportunity worldwide and encouraging collaboration to close adoption gaps. In 2007, ICANN collaborated on an IGF session focused on global efforts to forge universal standards for building a multilingual cyberspace. The Dynamic Coalition for Domain Name System Issues (DC-DNSi) held its first meeting at the IGF 2018 in France, with an initial focus on UA; follow-up [discussion](#) took place at IGF 2019 in Germany. These continued at [IGF 2020](#), [IGF 2021](#), [IGF 2022](#), [IGF 2023](#) and [IGF 2024](#), emphasizing the role of all stakeholders and strategies for promoting universal acceptance.

Developments/Current Status

Today IDN deployment continues to grow. There are 151 IDN top-level domains among both gTLDs and ccTLDs. At the second level, there are nearly [4.4 million](#) IDN registrations, with the largest holdings under the ccTLDs .pф (769K), .de (648K), .cn (537K), 中国 (164K) and .jp (85K). Of the total, [1.475 million](#) IDNs are registered under gTLDs. To advance adoption, ICANN has partnered with linguistic communities; intergovernmental organizations, such as the ITU; technical bodies; and academic institutions. Since 2023, ICANN has coordinated UA Day annually around 28 March; this initiative engages global, regional, and local communities through training, curriculum development, and adoption-focused events. In 2025, ICANN is supporting more than 50 UA Day events globally. Together, IDN deployment and UA efforts help users access websites and services in their own languages, making the Internet easier to remember, navigate, and share.



Security & Trust



The Importance of Mutually Agreed Norms for Routing Security (MANRS) for Security

Issue

The Internet's ability to connect us and deliver vital services relies entirely on data finding its way reliably from source to destination. This journey is not a single, fixed line; data travels along dynamic "routes" through a vast network of interconnected systems. However, the way these routes are announced and shared across the global network can have inherent weaknesses that may be exploited, either maliciously or through accidental misconfigurations. Such attacks can disrupt communication, misdirect traffic, or even cripple critical infrastructure—from financial networks to emergency services—that depend on stable and secure routing. To address these risks, ISOC launched the Mutually Agreed Norms for Routing Security (MANRS) initiative: a set of shared best practices aimed at strengthening the resilience and security of the global routing system. Adopting these practices is essential for the operators and organizations that guide data across the Internet; helping ensure a safer and more dependable Internet for everyone.

IGF-Related Activity

The importance of routing security and the need for collective action have been discussed at many IGF sessions over the years. Initially addressed within broader cybersecurity topics, routing security—and MANRS in particular—has more recently been the subject of dedicated [workshops](#). In 2019, MANRS was referenced in the final report of the IGF [Best Practice Forum on Cybersecurity Agreements](#). Discussions have also taken place within the NRIs. For example, at the [2021 Asia Pacific Regional IGF \(APrIGF\)](#), a session titled "MANRS for Policy Makers" was held to promote awareness and alignment with global routing security norms.

Developments/Current Status

MANRS began as a collaboration among nine network operators who recognized the need to improve Internet routing. Within a decade, it has grown into a community of more than 1,000 participants; including network operators, IXPs, content delivery networks

(CDNs), cloud providers, and equipment vendors. All are committed to adopting MANRS actions to reduce routing threats. To support implementation, The MANRS initiative provides compliance and measurement tools such as the MANRS Observatory; it also builds capacity through tutorials, courses, and

workshops and promotes training, research, and policy engagement. The IGF network has contributed significantly to raising awareness and collaboration, helping expand the reach of MANRS and, in turn, improve the security and reliability of the global routing system.



Addressing DNS Security Vulnerabilities with DNSSEC

Issue

The proper functioning of the Internet depends on the Domain Name System (DNS). The DNS translates human-friendly domain names, such as icann.org, into numeric IP addresses like 192.0.43.7 and 2001:500:88:200::7 in a process known as ‘name resolution’. Almost every action that begins with a domain name, whether visiting a web page, sending an email, accessing an application, or retrieving a picture from social media, relies on the DNS. However, the DNS was designed in the 1980s when the Internet was much smaller, and security was not a primary consideration. To strengthen its integrity the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)—the primary open standards body for Internet engineering—developed Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC), which helps prevent forged or manipulated DNS responses. While this was a critical step forward, broader deployment of DNSSEC is needed across the Internet ecosystem to ensure trusted name resolution

IGF-Related Activity

ICANN and others have hosted IGF sessions to raise awareness about DNSSEC and other security-related standards for many years. These sessions highlighted how the adoption of standards improves the safety and resilience

of the Internet. In 2020, the IGF established the Dynamic Coalition on Internet Standards, Security and Safety with the goal to promote the deployment of key safety and security standards, including DNSSEC. In 2024, the Coalition published a [report](#) targeted at senior leadership in organizations, explaining why security-related standards like DNSSEC are essential; not only for internal risk mitigation, but for broader societal trust. The report also covered routing security, linking back to the importance of coordinated implementation of standards like those promoted through MANRS.

Impact/Outcome

ICANN continues to support DNSSEC deployment through direct engagement with DNS operators worldwide, including during IGF-related meetings and capacity-building sessions. It also leads the [KINDNS](#) Initiative; a global effort to promote basic, actionable DNS operational best practices among DNS operators of all sizes. These practices are designed to be simple to implement yet impactful in improving DNS reliability and security. [As of April 2025](#), 93.01% of top-level domains (TLDs) are signed with DNSSEC, including 65.73% of country-code TLDs (ccTLDs). This progress demonstrates steady movement toward a more secure and trustworthy global naming system.



The Role of Encryption in Internet Security and Trust

Issue

Billions of people around the world rely on the Internet for countless daily activities: sending messages, banking, conducting air traffic control, accessing medical data, shopping, and even casting votes online. In all these cases, users must trust that their private information is secure and protected from unauthorized access. Encryption is foundational technology that enables this trust. It protects the confidentiality and integrity of personal data and is vital to both individual safety and national security. However, some policies designed to reduce online harm can unintentionally weaken encryption; when that happens, it increases risk for all users and undermines the very systems they are intended to protect. Ensuring strong encryption is understood, preserved, and deployed is essential to a safe digital future.

IGF-Related Activity

Encryption has been a recurring theme across IGF sessions, appearing in discussions on security, safety, law enforcement, and child protection. The Global Encryption Coalition (created by ISOC together with partners) has led multiple IGF sessions on the topic. These include a Day 0 workshop at IGF 2020 and an Open Forum in 2022. At IGF 2023, the Coalition issued the [Kyoto Statement on end-to-end encryption](#). Additionally, the [IGF Best Practice Forum on Cybersecurity](#) has highlighted how attempts to undermine encryption ultimately reduce security for society at large.

Developments/Current Status

The IGF network has played a key role in elevating understanding of encryption's role in a safe and trusted Internet. Through sessions, open forums, and coalition-led initiatives, the IGF has supported a broad-based dialogue that helps dispel myths, clarify misconceptions, and highlight the global importance of end-to-end encryption. These efforts have informed policymakers, civil society, and technical experts alike. By fostering these discussions, the IGF has enforced the message that encryption is integral to—not separate from—achieving security and safety, and preserving trust in the Internet.



Governance Arrangements



The Evolution of ICANN's Governance Arrangements

Issue

ICANN's formation preceded the WSIS and the creation of the first IGF. As an early example of multistakeholder decision-making within a clearly defined mission and mandate, ICANN's technical coordination responsibilities and governance model became one of the central topics during the WSIS debates.

These discussions continued into the early years of the IGF, reflecting broader questions about global Internet governance and institutional legitimacy.

IGF-Related Discussions

In its first years, the IGF hosted many sessions exploring ICANN's evolving structure, its relationship with governments, and its stewardship of unique Internet identifiers. These included topics such as IP addressing, the domain name system (DNS), and the management of country-code top-level

domains (ccTLD). Relevant sessions included *"Governance frameworks for Critical Internet Resources"* (IGF 2007, Rio), *"The Future of ICANN: After the JPA, What?"* (IGF 2008, Hyderabad), and four consecutive main sessions titled *"Managing Critical Internet Resources"* beginning at IGF 2009 (Sharm El Sheikh). At IGF 2015 in João Pessoa, the session *"IANA functions transition: A New Era in Internet Governance?"* (IGF 2015, João Pessoa) captured the momentum of ICANN's shift toward greater independence.

Developments/Current Status

ICANN's governance framework has since matured. In 2009, its Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. government was replaced by the [Affirmation of Commitments](#), which emphasized ICANN's role as a nonprofit public benefit organization acting in the global public interest. The Affirmation also introduced community-based review mechanisms and extended oversight beyond

the U.S. government. In 2014-2016, the [IANA Stewardship Transition process](#) further changed ICANN's governance. It shifted stewardship of the Internet's unique identifiers from the U.S. government to the global multistakeholder

community. This transition also introduced stronger accountability mechanisms and led to the termination of the Affirmation of Commitments in 2017.



How IGF National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs) Impact Governance Arrangements

Issue

The development and implementation of global governance arrangements requires action at national and regional levels; there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Bottom-up mechanisms are essential to reflect the legal, political, and cultural contexts of each environment. Driven by local stakeholders, the IGF network now includes over [180 national and regional IGFs \(NRIs\)](#). These initiatives drive the multistakeholder model at the local level. They are spaces where stakeholders can explore topics specific to the regional and national levels and where change can happen locally. Notably, some NRIs have produced meaningful policy outcomes by engaging a broad cross-section of local stakeholders through multistakeholder processes. One of the most prominent examples is the Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (CIGF).

IGF-Related Activity

Convened by the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) and the CARICOM Secretariat in 2005, the CIGF took place even before the first global IGF. It has since been convened annually by the CTU, with the aim of studying and offering recommendations on a wide range of issues, including technical infrastructure, content regulation, cybersecurity, privacy, and

Internet-related policy. The CIGF was the first regional forum of its kind and continues to evolve in step with the Internet. It is officially recognized as an IGF NRI.

Developments/Current Status

One of the CIGF's main achievements is the establishment of the [Caribbean Internet Governance Policy Framework](#). Developed in 2009 by regional stakeholders, the framework defines priority issues, key recommendations, and the stakeholder groups responsible for implementation. It has been updated regularly based on outputs from CIGF sessions and intersessional engagement. The approaches developed through the CIGF have supported capacity building, encouraged the exchange of best practices, and contributed to regional infrastructure growth—particularly the proliferation of Internet exchange points (IXPs). The Forum has also supported the creation of a national IGF and fostered strong connections with other NRIs, such as the LACIGF and the UK IGF.



The Impact of the IGF Parliamentary Track on Governance Arrangements

Issue

National parliaments are key participants in Internet governance at the local level. They often establish the legal frameworks that determine how Internet-related issues are regulated in their respective countries. The Internet's global nature means that national rules can have unintended consequences beyond a single jurisdiction. These potential cross-border policy conflicts are often overlooked or insufficiently addressed. Engaging parliamentarians in IGF processes brings these transnational implications into focus, while also helping to build legislative capacity and cross-stakeholder understanding.

IGF-Related Activity

As part of the ongoing efforts to evolve the IGF, a proposal was put forward to create a dedicated space for national parliamentarians—a group not originally highlighted in the WSIS process. Parliamentary roundtables were held at IGF annual meetings from 2019 to 2022. In 2023, this effort extended into a formal Parliamentary Track, which included a series of structured engagements in the lead-up to and during the annual meeting. By 2024, the approach had been adopted by several NRIs, including the [Africa IGF](#) and [West Africa IGF](#).

Developments/Current Status

In addition to building capacity and raising awareness of how national regulations affect the global Internet, parliamentarians have begun engaging in inter-regional cooperation. In 2021, they adopted a declaration titled [Legislative Approaches for a User-Centric Digital Space](#). Additional declarations followed: in 2023, [Shaping Digital Trust for the Internet We Want](#); and 2024 [Building multistakeholder Digital Future](#). These declarations reflect a growing parliamentary role in global Internet governance dialogues.

Capacity Building, Stakeholder, Engagement, & Representation



Ensuring Youth Voices are Heard in Internet Governance

Issue

Effective Internet governance requires participation from all segments of society—including youth. While young people are the most connected age group online, early Internet governance discussions did not include a space for their voices. According to [ITU 2024 data](#), nearly 80 percent of individuals aged 15 to 24 use the Internet. Their perspectives are essential to current debates as well as the next generation of Internet governance leaders.

IGF-Related Activity

Youth-focused initiatives in the IGF network began emerging in 2011. Since then, over 50 [youth initiatives](#) have been officially recognized. These include standalone Youth IGFs and youth engagement tracks within national and regional IGFs (NRIs).

They aim to meaningfully engage young people in Internet governance discussions and complement broader efforts by the IGF

community to intergenerational participation. Support has included training programs and funding opportunities to attend IGF meetings.

Developments/Current Status

Youth IGFs have played an important role in local capacity building and growing the next generation of Internet leaders. They actively provide input into Internet governance and policy-making processes, many of which extend beyond the IGF and NRIs. For example, the Youth Internet Governance Forum Germany regularly participates in ITU CWG Internet open consultations. They have submitted [input](#) on public policy's [role of promoting the multilingualization of the Internet](#) and on the developmental aspects needed to strengthen the Internet. In December 2020, Youth IGFs organized a series of global debates (Youth Battles), and outcomes were discussed at IGF Open Forums in 2021 and 2022. These efforts resulted in the [Youth IGF submission to the Global Digital Compact](#), marking their growing role in formal Internet governance processes.



Growing the Next Generation of Internet Leaders through Schools of Internet Governance

Issue

The Working Group on Internet Governance, created as a part of the original WSIS process, identified in its [2005 report](#) that capacity building was a major gap in ensuring the effective participation of all stakeholders in Internet governance decisions. To help address this, the first Summer School on Internet Governance, the [European School on Internet Governance](#) (EuroSSIG), was launched in 2007 in Meissen, Germany. Since then, more than 40 schools on Internet Governance (SIGs) have been established globally, each adapting its curriculum to local needs and contexts.

IGF-Related Activities

In 2017, the IGF launched the [Dynamic Coalition on Schools of Internet Governance \(DC-SIG\)](#). The Coalition brings together representatives from different SIGs to share experiences and strengthen instructional design. While each school operates independently, the DC-SIG is a dedicated platform for the schools to come together. It has helped them exchange models, admission criteria, and other program

characteristics. Throughout its work over the past few years, the DC-SIG created a Schools on IG [Taxonomy](#), which includes information on focus and topics, funding models, requirements for acceptance, and other elements of the schools. The DC-SIG produces an annual report and typically holds a session at the global IGF. It also keeps track of the [SIGs](#) around the world and supports ongoing coordination among organizers, faculty and alumni.

Developments/Current Status

The DC-SIG has become a key platform for knowledge-sharing and capacity building. It has provided a space where SIGs can work together to exchange experiences, curricula, and information on educational practices. It has also helped build a network for faculty and alumni and provided an overview of schools for potential fellows.



Addressing Accessibility and Disability Challenges to Ensure Meaningful Stakeholder Participation

Issue

About 16% of the global population—approximately 1.3 billion people—live with significant disabilities, [a number that is rising due to an aging population and increasing rates of noncommunicable diseases](#). According to the U.N., this group represents the world's largest minority, and their disability-related challenges affect all aspects of life, including their experiences online. Many encounter barriers to accessing the Internet and digital services as well as also substantial obstacles to participating in Internet governance discussions and policy processes.

IGF-Related Activity

The Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability (DCAD) was established at the second global IGF in Rio in 2007 to ensure that information and communications technology (ICT) accessibility issues are addressed within Internet Governance discussions. Over the years, DCAD has worked to make Internet Governance discussions accessible for persons with disabilities; in both physical and

remote meeting spaces. It developed the [IGF Accessibility Guidelines](#), which aim to improve meeting accessibility, eliminating barriers and promoting equitable participation. In 2023, DCAD also launched a [participant support grant program](#) to facilitate the attendance by persons with disabilities and disability advocates at the global IGF.

Developments/Current Status

DCAD's advocacy has contributed to tangible improvements in how IGF meetings accommodate persons with disabilities. For example, International Sign Language interpretation is now provided in IGF main sessions and plenaries. While these efforts support participation in IGF meetings, DCAD's impact extends beyond event logistics. The Coalition also raises awareness, promotes technical standards and tools that reduce accessibility barriers, such as the [W3C Accessibility Standards](#), and provides [input](#) into international processes including the GDC.



The examples provided represent just a few of the countless ways stakeholders have used the IGF network to help shape the Internet they want. Every person who attends the IGF, whether for the first time or the twentieth, will have their own stories of how a workshop, a corridor conversation, or a new connection influenced their thinking or actions. We invite you to reflect on your own IGF footprints.





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