



**DNS
RESEARCH
FEDERATION**

NET EFFECTS: an evidence-led exploration of IGF impact

March 2024

**Carolina Caeiro
Dorottya Zsiboracs
Peter Job
Kieren McCarthy
Georgia Osborn
Emily Taylor
Chris Buckridge**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About the DNS Research Federation

The DNS Research Federation is a UK not-for-profit incubated by Oxford Information Labs as a centre of excellence dedicated to advancing the understanding of the domain name system's impact on cybersecurity, policy and technical standards.

About this document

This report was commissioned by the UK Department of Science Innovation and Technology. The study was conducted from October 2023 to February 2024.

Authors: Carolina Caeiro, Dorottya Zsiboracs, Peter Job, Kieren McCarthy, Georgia Osborn, Emily Taylor, Chris Buckridge.

Acknowledgements and disclaimers

The research team thanks the following:

All those who generously agreed to be interviewed for this study. The interviewees are not identified by name, but their geographical location, gender and stakeholder group are set out in the annexes. The interviewees provided insights that guided the research team as we progressed with the study. Any errors and omissions are the responsibilities of the report authors.

The team at DSIT for supporting this project and for your helpful review comments.

The IGF Secretariat for checking statistics on attendance figures, national and regional IGFs.

Rachel Waring for copy editing

Patrick Taylor for report design and infographics

This report is © DNS Research Federation 2023-2024.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Executive summary

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was established nearly 20 years ago to keep the world informed about how the Internet was developing, to discuss and understand the impact of those changes, and to ensure the Internet's potential is experienced equally across the globe.

Next year (2025), the United Nations will consider the renewal of the IGF's mandate, having done so twice before in 2010 and 2015. The goals of this study have been to review what the IGF has accomplished in the past decade and offer evidence-based analysis to support the IGF review process.

What was found

- The IGF has had a **lasting and significant direct and indirect impact** on the development of the Internet and Internet-related policies and laws across the globe, from the largest and richest nations, to the smallest and least well-resourced.
- The IGF serves as a crucial **connection point** for policymakers, business, technologists, activists and academics for both existing and emerging issues within the Internet governance and digital governance worlds.
- The IGF acts as the centre of an **international ecosystem** where other Regional and National IGFs both feed up and pull down from the annual global meeting. Global discussions are turned into local actions, and those local actions are then used as real-world examples at the global level.
- The IGF has provided a **national, regional and global voice** to individuals and groups that would otherwise have struggled to have their concerns or perspectives heard.

Direct impact examples

Specifically, in terms of the direct impact over the past 10 years, the IGF has:

- **Been a key driver in the growth of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs).** IXPs are crucial for connecting people to the Internet, especially in underdeveloped nations. The IGF has helped drive demand, develop regulations, raise funds and build cooperation in local communities that have made the creation of many more IXPs possible. In 2007 there were barely 12 functioning IXPs serving the continent of Africa; by 2023, there were 53 active IXPs located in 47 cities and 36 countries.
- **Served as a catalyst for community connectivity.** Networks owned and operated by local

communities can provide robust connectivity in underserved areas. The IGF has brought local and regional issues to the global level, driven changes in regulation, and helped governmental organisations assist people on the ground to make community networks a reality. Examples include Argentina, Bolivia and Mexico, all of which have introduced an operator licence for community networks and Kenya, which will support some 100 community networks with Universal Service Funds.

- **Grown into a global ecosystem of knowledge sharing.** National and Regional IGF initiatives (NRIs) have continued to grow in size and sophistication and spread the influence and reach of the IGF across the globe. NRIs translate global Internet governance to local realities, encourage open, cross-sector conversations, and connect local governments with their communities.
- **Nurtured the next generation of Global South leaders.** The launch of a Youth Track and related initiatives has supported and developed incoming, young leaders who have gone on to lead capacity building efforts and drive Internet governance issues in their local communities and internationally.

Indirect impact examples

In terms of the indirect impact, the IGF has:

- **Kept the world's institutions abreast of new and emerging digital technologies while maintaining a focus on larger global goals.** Our study has shown that the IGF has the necessary responsiveness and flexibility to reflect the issues of the day while also maintaining a focus on perennial issues, such as Human Rights and Internet access.
- **Paved the way for the successful conclusion of one of the most contentious Internet governance topics: transition of the IANA functions.** The IGF played a critical role in softening entrenched views about the role of the US government in the Internet's infrastructure. It gave the process legitimacy by allowing views from all stakeholder groups and regions to be taken into account before formal proposals were put forward.
- **Shaped high-profile policy discussions, particularly in the case of online harms.** The IGF's structure and systems for discussions have resulted in it being used as a key venue for addressing complex and multifaceted issues, including online safety. The IGF's ability to generate collective knowledge, access expert views, and enable candid conversation, free from negotiated outcomes, is a notable strength. High-profile Internet issues, including global calls to action, new fora and digital legislation have all been directly influenced by discussions at the IGF.

Participation of the Global South

An analysis of IGF participation data shows that the forum offers a venue for Global South participants to engage actively in global conversations on Internet governance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Participation is also growing, and becoming increasingly diverse, within the IGF: since 2019, more than 160 countries have been represented. The location of an IGF has a strong positive impact on participation from that region, and the use of hubs has enabled Global South participation, particularly from the African continent.

The IGF proved remarkably resilient during the pandemic and actually saw an increase in participants, in contrast to similar conferences. The most recent IGF in Kyoto also saw the largest ever number of countries represented – 178 – and was the second largest global meeting since the IGF was established.

Composition of the IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) also shows active participation from the Global South. Remote participation has proved to be an important enabler for diverse participation, and while the IGF has returned to pre-pandemic levels of remote participants, the quality of engagement has improved.

Opportunities to evolve the IGF

Based on official reports, meeting summaries, workshop transcripts and interview responses, the report identifies four potential areas for evolving the IGF. These include:

- Continuing to strengthen global representation and diversity;
- Devising more effective mechanisms to capture discussions;
- Improving curation and ongoing innovation in meeting design; and
- Giving greater strategic and political weight to outcomes.

A world without the IGF

Participants consulted for this study were asked what they would miss were the IGF to come to a close. According to them, a world without the IGF would entail:

- The loss of a valuable source of learning and inspiration;
- A drop in global collaboration and discussion on Internet policy issues;
- The need to spend more time and attend more specialised fora to gain the same breadth of views and awareness;
- Reduced knowledge sharing of current and emerging topics across the globe; and
- A significant loss of influence for Global South countries and small organisations.

It was perhaps best summed up in the words of one interviewee for this study: 'If we didn't have the IGF, we would have to invent it'.

How the study was conducted

This study is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods.

- The research team carried out structured interviews with a group of 48 individuals, all of whom have extensive experience of the IGF.
- Of those, 58% came from the Global South and there were nearly equal numbers of men and women.
- The study also relied on large-scale text analysis of over 1,500 documents, including more than 500 IGF workshop proposals, nearly 1,000 workshop transcripts and dozens of meeting reports from the annual IGF as well as National and Regional IGFs.
- In total, it amounted to over 12 million words.
- The report cites secondary sources to provide evidence and context for the various case studies analysed.
- The team used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to find patterns in the documents and explore specific topics of interest for the report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	11
▶ Text Box 1: What is the IGF and how does it work?	13
1 IGF IMPACT: WHAT DO WE MEAN?	14
▶ Figure 1. The IGF's six impact areas	15
▶ Text Box 2. Support for the IGF's mandate renewal and community perceptions on impact	16
▶ Figure 2. Interview closed questions: IGF mandate and impact	16
2 IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT	17
2. a. Human networks, digital networks: IXPs and community connectivity	18
2. a. i. Improving interconnection in Africa	19
▶ Figure 3. References to IXPs in Regional and Annual Reports, 2006–2023	20
▶ Figure 4. Improving interconnection in Africa, the growth of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs)	21
2. a. ii. Community connectivity in emerging regulation	23
▶ Figure 5. Community networks – topic prominence, 2016–2023	24
▶ Figure 6: Top themes in African Regional IGF reports	26
2. b. National and Regional IGFs: fostering local conversations	28
▶ Figure 7. National and Regional IGFs, spontaneous emergence of local ecosystems	31
2. b. i. NRIs' organic growth	32
▶ Figure 8: Growth of NRIs, 2006–2023	33
2. b. ii. How value flows between NRIs and the IGF	34
▶ Figure 9. National IGFs in G77 nations by 2023	36
2. b. iii. NRIs' impact on local policy outcomes	37
2. b. iv. NRIs, Schools of Internet Governance and capacity building	37
2. c. Nurturing the next generation of Global South leaders	39
2. c. i. Developing capacities and next generation leaders	40
2. c. ii. Youth shaping Internet governance discussions and championing issues locally	41
▶ Text Box 3. The IGF as transformative journey for Global South Youth Leaders	42
▶ Figure 10. Emerging leaders are championing Internet governance issues locally	47
2. c. iii. Ecosystem of cross-regional collaborations	48
3 THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT	49
3. a. i. Popular topics 2016–2023	52
▶ Figure 11. Top 10 themes at the IGF, 2016-2023	52
▶ Figure 12. Top six themes at the IGF, 2016–2023	53
▶ Figure 13. Thematic evolution for Internet Access, 2016–2023	54
▶ Figure 14. Occurrences of 'Bridging the Digital Divide,' 2016–2023	55
3.a. ii. Exploring the IGF's thematic dynamism	56

▶ Figure 15. The IGF thematic dynamism (top 10 themes), 2016–2023	56
▶ Figure 16. Occurrences of ‘Disinformation’ and related terms, 2016–2023	57
▶ Text Box 4. Thematic dynamism – three case studies	58
▶ Figure 17. Evaluation of disinformation and fake news, 2016–2023	58
▶ Figure 18. Thematic evolution for ‘pandemic’, 2016–2023	59
▶ Figure 19. Word cloud for the theme ‘pandemic’	59
▶ Figure 20. Evolution of discussion on health, 2016–2023	60
▶ Figure 21. Thematic evolution for ‘Artificial Intelligence,’ 2016–2023	61
3. b. The IGF facilitating global dialogue: the case of the IANA Transition	62
▶ Figure 22. Occurrences of ‘IANA’ in Annual Reports, 2006–2023	64
3. c. The IGF as a decision-shaping forum	66
The value of the ‘mechanics’ of the IGF	66
3. c. i. The IGF impact on regulation and platform response to online harms	69
▶ Figure 23. Evolution of Online Harms, 2016–2023	69
4 WHAT THE IGF PARTICIPATION TELLS US ABOUT THE VALUE FOR THE GLOBAL SOUTH	73
4. a. Setting the scene: who attends the IGF?	73
▶ Figure 24. Total participants 2016–2023	74
▶ Figure 25. Percentage of newcomers, 2018–2023	74
▶ Figure 26. Participation by gender, 2016–2023	75
▶ Figure 27. Participation by stakeholder group as percentage, 2016–2023	76
4. b. Global South participation	76
▶ Figure 28: Regional participation as percentage, 2016–2023	77
▶ Figure 29: Number of countries attending the IGF	77
▶ Figure 30. Regional breakdown of MAG membership, 2023	79
5 A WORLD WITHOUT THE IGF	80
6 OPPORTUNITIES TO EVOLVE THE IGF	84
7 METHODOLOGY	87
▶ Figure 31: Evaluation framework – impact areas	87
7. a. Expert interviews	88
7. b. Large-scale document analysis	91
▶ Figure 32: Data incorporated into DAP.LIVE for large-scale document analysis	92
7. b. i. Analysis of the IGF’s thematic evolution	92
7. b. ii. Participation data	94
7. c. Desk-based research	94
7. d. DAP and Artificial Intelligence-powered text analysis	94
8 CONCLUSION	95
9 REPORT ANNEXES	97

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

With a 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) set for 2025, the international community will again assess the impact of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and decide whether to renew its mandate.

The IGF is one of the major outcomes of the WSIS process, established through the Tunis Agenda to serve as an open platform to discuss issues at the intersection of public policy and the Internet.

At the time of writing, 18 annual meetings have been convened from 2006 to 2023, and the mandate of the forum has been renewed twice: first in 2010 for five years, then in 2015 with a 10-year renewal.

The complexity of addressing issues from online safety to risks posed by emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, to perennial topics such as Internet access and affordability, pose important challenges but also great opportunities. The WSIS+20 review will be informed by ongoing UN efforts to develop a Global Digital Compact.

This study offers evidence-based analysis to help inform the IGF review. This report:

- Sheds light on what the IGF has accomplished since the last WSIS+10 review;
- Considers the wider role the IGF plays in Internet development and how its unique attributes in terms of structure and participation assist in that; and
- Looks at how the IGF has generated value for the Global South, and in particular the G77 nations.

This report's findings come from a combination of expert interviews, large-scale text mining – enhanced by AI – and independent sources of information.

It concludes that the IGF has fulfilled its mandate and generated significant Internet governance value to the world. Particular benefits for the Global South have included:

- Broader and deeper connectivity;
- The creation and deployment of National and Regional IGFs; and
- The development of a new generation of leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Report structure

The report has six sections:

- Section 1 introduces the evaluation framework used through the report.
- Section 2 covers areas where the IGF has generated direct impact.
- Section 3 looks at the IGF's indirect impact, including its role in facilitating global dialogue and shaping policy decisions.
- Section 4 offers participation analysis and looks at how the IGF has created a space for the Global South to contribute to debates.
- Section 5 considers what a world without the IGF may look like.
- Section 6 contains the report methodology and overall conclusion.

► **Text Box 1: What is the IGF and how does it work?**

- **The forum: what it is.** The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a platform that brings governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, and the technical community together to discuss Internet issues.
- **IGF mandate and review.** The IGF's mandate, outlined in the WSIS 2005 Tunis Agenda, was extended for an additional ten years in 2015. It will be revisited at the WSIS+20 review in 2025.
- **Annual meetings.** The IGF's annual meetings are convened by the UN Secretary-General and hosted by different countries. The latest in 2023 in Kyoto had multistakeholder participation from 9,279 participants from 178 countries.
- **Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG).** The program and schedule of the IGF annual meetings is steered by the MAG in its advisory capacity to the UN's Secretary-General. Through a bottom-up process, IGF participants propose themes and sessions for the meetings.
- **Agenda.** Agenda tracks include the Main Session, High-Level Sessions, workshops, Policy Networks, Dynamic Coalitions, Best Practice Forums, Open Forums and specialised tracks for youth and parliamentarians.
- **Intersessional work.** The IGF also comprises extensive intersessional work throughout the year – from Dynamic Coalitions to National and Regional IGFs.
- **Parliamentary Track.** First piloted in 2011, the Parliamentary Track was reintroduced in 2019. It exists to promote inter-parliamentary dialogue and expose legislators to debates at IGF.
- **High-Level Tracks.** The IGF agenda includes High-Level Tracks featuring senior government officials, industry and technical community executives, as well as thought leaders from civil society and academia.
- **National and Regional IGF initiatives (NRIs).** These are national and regional groups that host Internet governance dialogues following the IGF's open, multistakeholder format. In 2023, there were 162 active NRIs.

1. IGF impact: what do we mean?

'IGF discussions influence what happens, where the decisions are made, it is where policies are shaped. That is a tangible impact.' Interviewee 1, Government, Arab Region.

This report sets out to explore ways in which the IGF has generated value for stakeholders and communities across the Internet governance space. The IGF – through its annual meetings, intersessional work and related national and regional initiatives – lies at the heart of a complex Internet governance ecosystem, comprising diverse organisations, events and fora. This means that policy developments are the result of a multiplicity of factors, in which the **IGF plays varying degrees of influence**.

To reflect these varying degrees of influence, the report is organised in two blocks: direct and indirect impact.

Direct impact covers areas where we found strong evidence that the IGF has directly influenced a given policy outcome. For those, the report reconstructs milestones leading to results, and outlines evidence of impact.

Indirect impact covers areas where the IGF has meaningfully contributed to the evolution of a given issue, but where the outcome has likely been informed by broader ecosystem dynamics not solely attributable to IGF.

Our Impact Framework

For the purpose of this report, impact is measured based on the goals established in the IGF mandate on Paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda (2005). The report identifies six impact areas, across three dimensions. These are:

► **Figure 1. The IGF's six impact areas²**

I. ISSUE-DRIVEN	Clause on Tunis Agenda
1. Discuss existing and emerging issues	72(a), (b), (g), (j).
2. Advise on access and affordability	72(e)
3. Help find solutions to misuse	72(k)
II. ENGAGEMENT-DRIVEN	
4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing	72(b), (c), (f)
5. Exchange information, best practice and capacity building	72(d), 72(h)
I. VALUE-DRIVEN	
6. Uphold WSIS values and transparency	72(i), (l)

In this report, key analysis sections begin with a summary of the impact areas engaged.

Evidence-based analysis

The report documents how the IGF generates value across these six impact areas through evidence-based analysis. Evidence is derived from a combination of in-depth interviews with Internet governance experts and AI-powered, large-scale text analysis of public IGF documents. The report focuses on the period 2016–2023 following the 2015 WSIS+10 review.

- **Expert interviews:** : the research team interviewed 48 individuals, with 58% participation from the Global South, and nearly 50% women.
- **Large-scale text analysis of public IGF documentation:** the research team used advanced, large-scale text analysis techniques to identify thematic trends and track the evolution of specific topics over the years. The analysis considered over 1,548 documents – amounting to 12 million words, and relied on AI-powered techniques.

² Paragraph 72, clauses (a-l), are summarised into six impact areas. For details, please refer to Annex 1.

1- IGF IMPACT: WHAT DO WE MEAN?

The research team also engaged in **secondary, desk research** to support the findings with complementary resources. For detailed information on the methodology used, please refer to **Section 6** of this report.

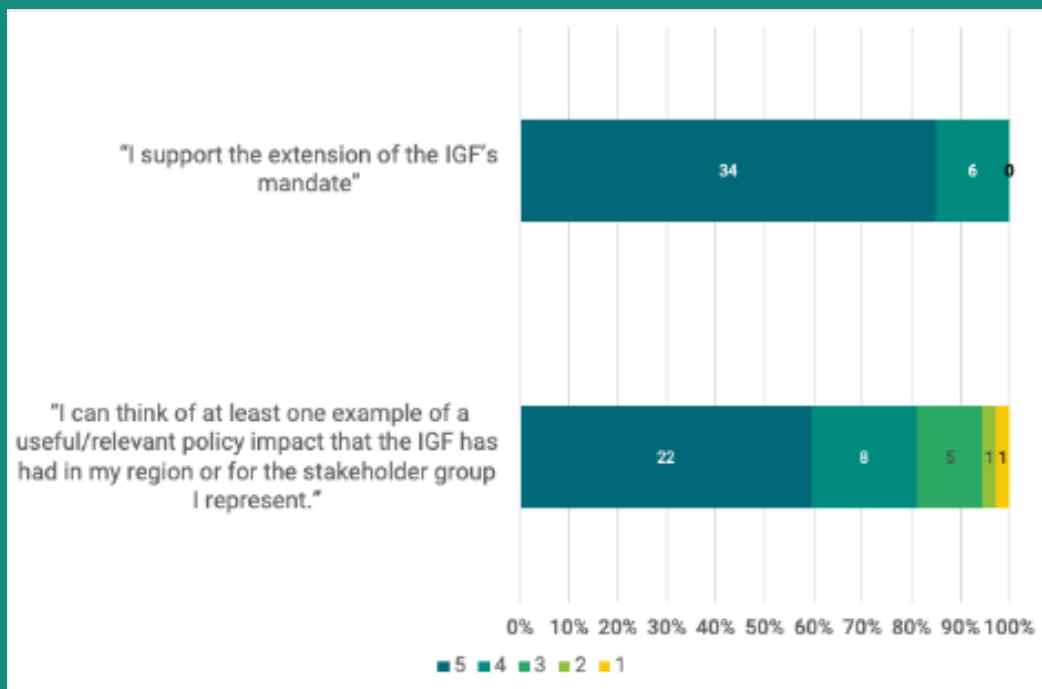
► Text Box 2. Support for the IGF’s mandate renewal and community perceptions on impact

Experts interviewed for the report were asked whether they supported the IGF’s mandate renewal and their perceptions on the IGF’s value. Responses were on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated minimal impact or support, and 5 signified complete support or impact.

Results indicate a strong support for the renewal of the IGF, with 93% of the respondents ranking the statement 4 or higher, and the average answer being 4.9.

On whether the IGF has generated relevant policy impact for their stakeholder group or region, 70% of the respondents ranked the question as 4 or higher. The average answer was 4.3, indicating general agreement among global experts that the IGF has indeed delivered value across regions and stakeholder groups.

► Figure 2. Interview closed questions: IGF mandate and impact



2. IGF's direct impact

This section of the report considers the IGF's direct impact: where the forum has been the main driver or catalyst for other activity.

Through actions identified below, the IGF has fulfilled its mandate to discuss public policy issues, facilitate information exchange, and, specifically for the developing world:

- Advised stakeholders how to accelerate Internet availability and affordability;
- Strengthened stakeholder engagement in Internet governance; and
- Contributed to capacity building.

We have found that the IGF:

- Has played a **pivotal role in expanding Internet access** to developing countries and underserved areas by providing a reliable source of information, expertise and knowledge sharing;
- Formed the centre of a **growing international ecosystem of National and Regional IGFs** that has been able to collectively address complex issues and which has led to tangible actions and improvements; and
- Helped **establish and nurture a new generation of leaders** in Internet governance, particularly from the Global South.

In terms of specifics, the IGF has:

- Acted as a **key driver in the growth of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs)** in Africa through the provision of expertise and knowledge at the global, regional and national levels. A complex range of issues including technical knowledge, funding, regulation and local cooperation have all found a home within the IGF structure. The result has been a fivefold increase in African IXPs.

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

- Helped **make the Internet available and affordable in underserved regions** by supporting and encouraging the introduction of community networks across the globe. For over a decade, the IGF has been a consistent and valuable source of information about these networks, and has taken what was a local issue up to the global policy level and back down again into real-world installations in Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico and Kenya.
- Embraced the **creation of Regional and National IGFs (NRIs)** that have allowed for issues discussed at the global level to be brought down to the national level and turned into practical solutions that account for local laws, regulations and customs. Those results are then fed back to the Global IGF, creating broader understanding and knowledge. Since 2011, the number of NRIs have multiplied more than six times, standing at 162 in 2023.
- Served as a **welcoming and nurturing environment for young people** to raise and discuss Internet governance issues, enabling the IGF to keep pace with the Internet's development and impact while also allowing for a new generation of leaders to emerge, particularly from the Global South. A grassroots organisation, Youth SIG, now boasts 2,200 members from 68 countries.

2. a. Human networks, digital networks: IXPs and community connectivity

One of the core elements of the IGF mandate is to advise on ways to accelerate Internet access and render Internet connectivity more affordable across the Global South. Despite rapid growth in Internet uptake since the Tunis Agenda (2005), nearly twenty years on, **Internet access continues to be a key challenge** and a central area of interest for the IGF and G77 nations. As key aspects of life – from education, to health, or access to state services – become digitised, groups that remain offline face greater marginalisation without universal access.

The present section analyses how **the IGF has been responsive to the challenge of Internet access**, and enabled valuable exchange and subsequent action on two key areas: interconnectivity through the creation of Internet Exchange Points, and community connectivity as a way to provide Internet access to underserved areas.

These cases illustrate how **information and best practice flow in both directions between the global and regional level**. In the case of IXPs, recommendations for improving interconnection flowed from the Global IGF to the regional and local level, resulting in the proliferation of Internet Exchange Points; in the case of community networks, what was initially devised as a local solution was transformed into a global conversation through the IGF, helping to unleash required regulatory updates across the Global South.

2. a. i. Improving interconnection in Africa

Interconnection in Africa – impact areas

2. Advise on access and affordability
4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing
5. Exchange information and best practice

Internet Exchange Points, or IXPs, are a vital component of a healthy and robust Internet ecosystem.

IXPs grow a country or region's connectivity, lower costs, improve performance and increase resilience. They also encourage the creation of local content and attract investment in the local economy.

There are, however, challenges to setting up and running an IXP: they require a high degree of trust and understanding within the local Internet community; they can be difficult to launch if the regulatory environment is misaligned; and they rely on specific technical skills and knowledge to run effectively.

The **IGF has proven to be a key driver in the growth of Global South IXPs**, particularly in Africa. In 2010, there were 19 IXPs in Africa; a decade later, they had more than doubled, reaching 46 IXPs. In 2023, there were 53 active IXPs located in 47 cities and 36 countries.³

'When we started [in 2007], there were barely 12 functioning, responsive IXPs across the continent. So there's been huge growth and the IGF played an important role in enabling that. At the very onset, we started conversations around Internet Exchange Points and it became a big conversation. I remember being a panellist in a number of IXP panels at the Global IGF between 2007 and 2012; it had a major effect here in Africa.' Interviewee 2, Technical community, Africa.

What is unique about the case of the IGF and IXPs, however, is how **the conversation filtered down from the Global IGF to Regional, and then National IGFs**, with the topics evolving at each stage as they led toward the establishment of physical exchange points.

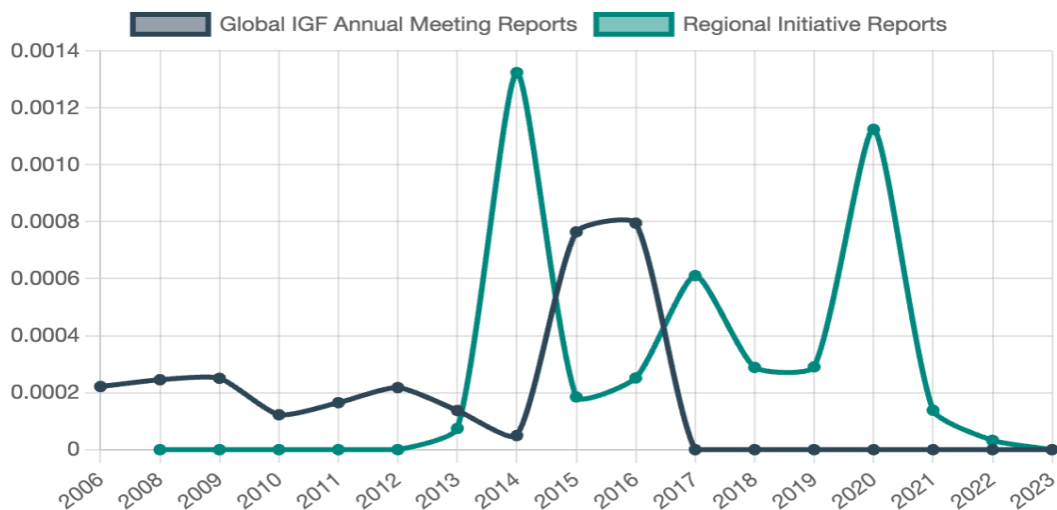
Once the importance of IXPs was understood, conversations at the global level moved to looking at what was preventing underserved regions from establishing more of them. That led to complex conversations about the rules and regulations that govern communications, the barriers that existed to competition and data sharing, and what was needed, technically and politically, to establish a new IXP.

³ The African IXP Association provides an updated list – <https://www.af-ix.net/ixps-list> – and map – <https://www.af-ix.net/ixps-map> – of them.

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

► Figure 3. References to IXPs in Regional and Annual Reports, 2006–2023⁴

Relative frequency of IXP and synonyms for Regional and Annual reports by Year



Having agreed that more IXPs were needed, **Regional IGFs became the venues where strategic action was taken** (see Figure 3). Starting in 2012, the conversation shifted to how to fund an expansion. Regional IGFs provided vital meeting and organising platforms for collective action. New associations were created to combine resources.

One regional organiser used the IGF process to apply for and receive a grant to develop regional and national IXPs. Other sources of funding and projects followed as the positive results were fed back into the process, with funding from the Government of Luxembourg⁵ and the new EU-Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund⁶ being two examples.

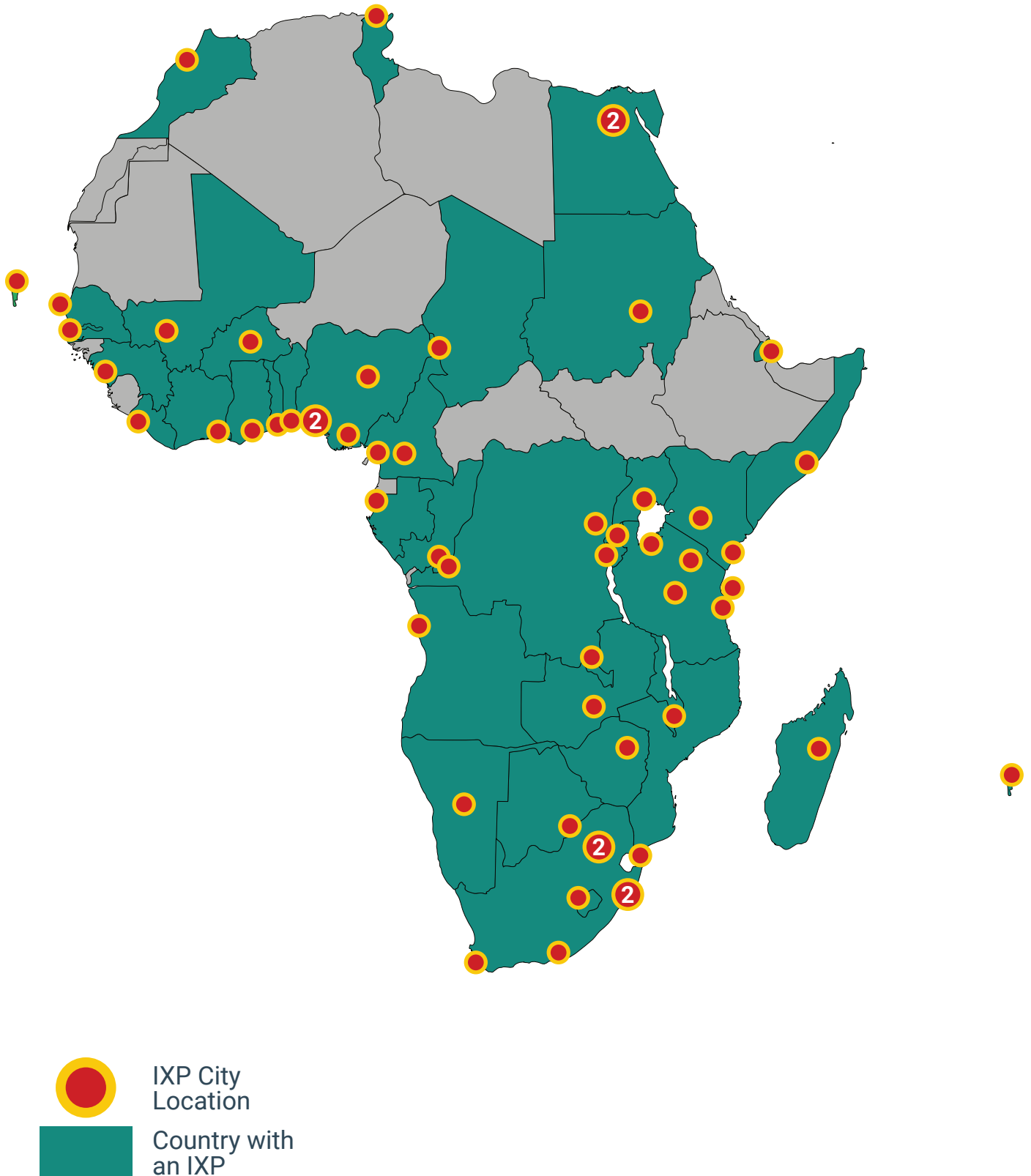
While cross-border interconnection and funding became the focus of Regional IGFs in Africa, **the conversation at the national level moved to practicalities**: bringing the local Internet community together with policymakers and regulators to talk through issues such as the regulatory environment, the ability to keep traffic within national borders local and affordable, and practical solutions to barriers. The National IGFs served as neutral conveners and facilitators between competing network operators who began to see the advantages of exchanging traffic.

⁴ Figure considers relative frequency of IXPs and synonyms, as they feature on Regional and Annual IGF Reports.

⁵ <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/archive/stocktaking/Project/Details?projectId=1515506053#:~:text=The%20African%20Internet%20Exchange%20System.and%20Regional%20Internet%20Carriers%20in>

⁶ <https://www.eu-africa-infrastructure-tf.net/activities/grants/axis-african-internet-exchange-system.htm>

► Figure 4. Improving interconnection in Africa, the growth of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs)



2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

Trust was built through positive conversation: what more could be done with an expanded infrastructure? What is the next phase of development? What are the best practices to follow?

As a result of these **national conversations**, three types of outcome occurred:

- There was an **evolution in the existing policy and regulation**.
- **New laws** were written to open up the market to competition – in part because an IXP needs the participation of at least three operators.
- Clarifications were issued for existing laws: for example, whether a licence was needed or not to run an IXP.

Workshops at the 2017 Global IGF in Geneva were focused on what needed to be in place to assist the creation of IXPs:

'You have to start with the people, training people, building capacity, building a community. And a neutral Technical Community. If you don't have that neutrality at the Internet exchange point, you'll have nothing.' – WS58 Internet Inclusion Solutions: Shaping the Digital Future

'The government, in cooperation with the private sector, [has helped establish an] Indonesian exchange point. Now we are discussing current policy and regulation.' – Global Impacts: How Can International Multistakeholder Cooperation Address Internet Disruptions, Encryption and Data Flows?

'We have small grants that help you get started on Internet exchange points and community networks.' – WS4 Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Roundtable

Whereas, at the Pacific and African Regional IGFs that same year, the focus was on the cost and cost-benefit of setting up an Internet Exchange Point: :

*'The Internet Exchange Point (IXP) issue was discussed to keep costs down with PNG introducing an IXP and Vanuatu reviewing their approach. APNIC suggested an IXP can be set up for USD \$1,000.'*⁷

*'The moderator kicked off by informing the meeting that Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) play a critical role in reducing the cost of Internet by keeping Internet traffic local.'*⁸

As IXPs were put in place, **the Regional and Global IGFs served as a mechanism for reporting back**.

The 2018 African IGF remarked on 'the notable achievements which include the African Internet Exchange Point System (AXIS) and that some of these IXPs have been supported technically and financially to grow as regional IXPs.'⁹

⁷ From the Pacific Internet Governance Forum (2017) Executive Summary, under Affordability.

⁸ From an IXP workshop summary at the African Internet Governance Forum (2017), Annex 8.

⁹ Speech from the Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy at the African Union Commission given at the opening ceremony.

A session at the 2018 Global IGF in France noted that 'discussions at the Bosnia IGF on Internet exchange points led to the creation of an Internet exchange point in the country.'¹⁰

In a sign that the Global IGF has been a catalyst, the topic of IXPs shifted in focus and the **Global IGF discussions went from recognising the need for IXPs to debating and reviewing rollout programmes**, highlighting good practices and knock-on impacts.

In effect, the IGF served as a policy funnel through which the issues of Internet Exchange Points were directed, with the measurable result that many new IXPs were established. According to one interviewee:

'There were opportunities to meet either at the subregional level or the regional level or the Global IGF level with the experts who could actually help start the conversation at the national level.' Interviewee 2, Technical Community, Africa.

The process also **brought together communities that then started work on other projects**, such as the deployment of anycast root server instances, further strengthening the resilience of the global Internet.

The success of IXPs, and the IGF's role in helping establish many more of them, particularly in the Global South, is illustrated by the fact IXPs were referenced in the official summing up of the Global IGF in eight of the nine years from 2008 to 2016.

2. a. ii. Community connectivity in emerging regulation

Community connectivity – impact areas

2. Advise on access and affordability
4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing
5. Exchange information and best practice

As of 2022, 35% of the world's population remained unconnected to the Internet.¹¹ This means that the IGF mandate to advise on Internet access remains an area of utmost importance for both the forum and its participants.

The IGF's work on community connectivity emerges as a concrete example of direct impact. Community networks are local networks owned, operated and managed by local communities.

¹⁰ "Developing Youth Participation at the IGF", held on Day 1.

¹¹ World Bank, individuals using the Internet (% of population) 1960–2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>. Accessed 28 December 2023.

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

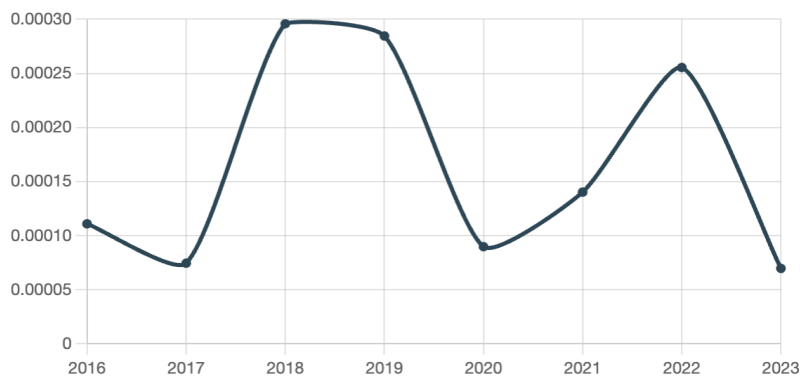
Community networks emerged as a solution for addressing connectivity gaps, particularly for connecting regions where it is unprofitable for Internet providers to deploy their services, such as remote rural communities.

The IGF has been a crucial space for the community networks movement. The **IGF elevated what was a local and regional conversation into the global realm**.

Community networks began featuring on the IGF agenda, as early as 2008, around discussion on Internet access.¹² Conversations on **community networks first peaked in 2018–19, as policymakers and regulators began considering their potential to close the digital divide**. Mentions peaked again in 2022, during the IGF in Ethiopia, where several sessions discussed the role of community networks across the host continent, Africa.¹³ Overall, community networks have remained a topical issue; from 2016–2023, 118 sessions – from workshops to High-Level Tracks – have included mention of community networks.¹⁴

► Figure 5. Community networks – topic prominence, 2016–2023¹⁵

Relative frequency of "community network" and "community networks" by Year



There are two main spaces within the IGF that deal with community networks and connectivity challenges: the Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity (or DC3) and, most recently, the Policy Network on Meaningful Access.

The **DC3 has been pivotal in the adoption of enabling regulatory frameworks to foster community networks**. Following initial discussions on community connectivity at the IGF 2015, the coalition emerged as a multistakeholder space dedicated to the analysis of community networks within the

¹² See quote by Rajnesh Singh (formerly ISOC) during a panel discussion on Access at IGF 2008:https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3367/6.

¹³ During the 2022 IGF, several sessions discussed the role of community networks in the host continent, and the multistakeholder cooperation required for ensuring and enabling access. See: https://mail.intgovforum.org/IGF2022_summaryreport_final.pdf.

¹⁴ This considers transcripts only from 2016–2023. The 118 sessions include workshops, Main Sessions, High-Level Tracks, Best Practice Forums and Dynamic Coalitions.

¹⁵ Graph measures relative frequency of phrase 'community network/s' on the IGF agenda.

IGF.¹⁶ The work of the DC3, its member organisations and supporting donors, paved the way for community networks to gain traction at the IGF. The DC3 was especially successful in engaging policymakers and influencing policy:

'Much of what is now the community networks [movement], with all the political and regulatory impact it is having across multiple countries, comes from the work of the Dynamic Coalition on community connectivity – the work coordinated by the D3C, and the partnerships that have originated from that space.' Interviewee 3, Civil Society, Western Europe and Others Group.

The **DC3 achieved policy impact through the visibility it garnered at the IGF**. Early funding from IDRC and SIDA in 2016 laid the groundwork, with a strong foothold on the IGF as a space for convening. The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Rizomatica (Mexico) were two of the organisations that spearheaded the work. The role of the IGF was crucial both in achieving visibility and leveraging influence:

'It was like a domino effect that started because the community networks gained space, so we could explain their complexity, their relevance, [...] how they offered a solution for areas that the market was not finding a solution for. And there were donors, and individuals, development agencies that saw the need to support the work, and through that support a lot was accomplished.' Interviewee 3, Civil Society, Western Europe and Others Group.

Multiple countries have seen the adoption of enabling regulation since conversations picked up at the IGF. This is particularly true across Africa and Latin America, where large segments of the population still face connectivity challenges:

'In Latin America alone, I can think of seven or eight governments that passed regulation to allow community networks to operate; they've been granted licences, and some spectrum allocations.'¹⁷ Interviewee 4, Technical Community, Latin America and the Caribbean.

'Some of the IGF recommendations in Latin America actually became law. When it comes to community networks for rural areas or connectivity for rural areas, one example is Mexico, the [regulation] in Colombia which is recent, and the one in Argentina.' Interviewee 34, Civil Society, Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the case of Africa, the conversation at National and Regional IGFs is informing regional communities and policymakers:

'Connecting the Unconnected is becoming an important topic across National IGFs, Subregional and Regional IGFs in Africa. The main conversation is around community networks. What are they? How are they set up? [...] Now there's also an ongoing conversation around how to use Universal Service Funds to support community networks at National IGFs because some governments are keen on doing it and it's a platform where they can engage more stakeholders at a broader level.' Interviewee 2, Technical Community, Africa.

¹⁶ <https://comconnectivity.org/>

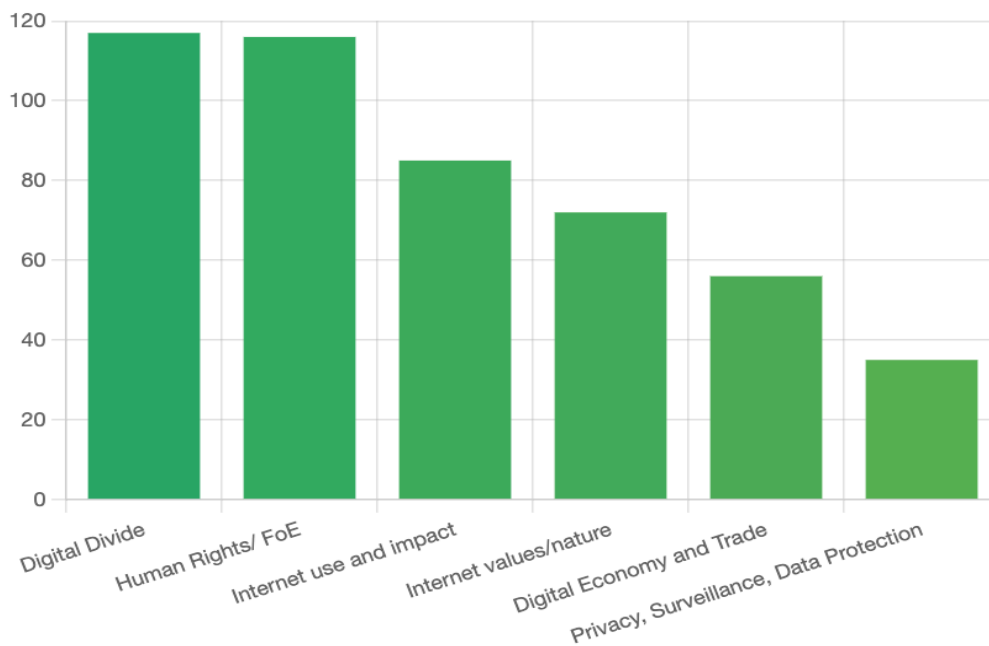
¹⁷ This is corroborated by a 2018 study by the Internet Society, which found that seven countries in Latin America had some form of enabling regulation for community networks (either the country offers a specific licence for rural areas, recognise community operators/non-profit operators, and/or offer a simplified licence for rural areas). See page 35: <https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-Community-Networks-in-LAC-EN.pdf>

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

As shown in Figure 5, this is backed by analysis of regional and subregional reports from the African region, where the issue of closing the Digital Divide is the most discussed theme, closely followed by Human Rights and Freedom of Expression. Community networks, in particular, feature in at least 10 regional reports to the IGF in the period ranging from 2016–2022. This includes reports from the African IGF, the West African IGF, LACIGF, the Caribbean IGF and the Southeast Asia IGF.

► **Figure 6: Top themes in African Regional IGF reports¹⁸**

Total Frequency of Themes in the African NRIs



Specific examples of Global South countries that have incorporated feedback from these discussions into public policy include **Argentina, Bolivia, Kenya and Mexico all of which have introduced an operator licence for community networks.**¹⁹ Kenya, in particular, has committed to support around 100 community networks with Universal Service Funds.²⁰ South Africa is discussing regulatory reform which would introduce access to spectrum allocations for community networks.²¹ Other countries, mentioned by individuals consulted for this report, that have adopted enabling regulation, include Colombia, Mexico and Paraguay.²²

In this context, the **IGF stands out as a source of guidelines for policymakers and a forum to share**

¹⁸ Considers regional and subregional reports from NRIs in Africa from 2012–2023

¹⁹ See “Kenya adopts community networks licensing framework”: <https://www.apc.org/en/news/kenya-adopts-community-networks-licensing-framework#> and Community Networks in Latin America: Challenges, Regulations and Solutions: <https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-Community-Networks-in-LAC-EN.pdf>.

²⁰ <https://www.apc.org/en/blog/universal-service-funds-financing-mechanism-community-networks-kenya>

²¹ <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/36204/>

²² For a complete list of enabling regulatory frameworks, please see: <https://policy.communitynetworks.group/country-profiles/start>

best practices. Brazil's telecom regulator, Anatel, in recognising community networks in 2020, cited the "Community Networks Manual", an official outcome of the UN IGF Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity, in its announcement.²³ In terms of sharing best practices, Argentina's telecom regulator, ENACOM, participated at the IGF 2018, speaking about spectrum assignments for rural connectivity, connected to their support to community networks.²⁴



²³ <https://www.gov.br/anatel/pt-br/regulacao/universalizacao/redes-comunitarias>

²⁴ "IGF 2018 WS #428 Spectrum for Community Networks: A "Must" That Is Hard to Get": <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2018-ws-428-spectrum-for-community-networks-a-must-that-is-hard-to-get>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xym221FB3EE&start=2180>

²⁵ <https://twitter.com/1lucabelli/status/1230583867024855040>

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

2. b. National and Regional IGFs: fostering local conversations

NRIs' impact on IGF mandate/impact areas

1. Discuss existing and emerging issues
4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing
5. Exchange information and best practice

'The value of the IGF actually sits in the NRIs.' Interviewee 20, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

The **Global IGF gave rise to the spontaneous emergence of National and Regional IGFs** or NRIs, which have consolidated as **local ecosystems to discuss Internet governance issues**. NRIs are Internet Governance Forums organised locally in individual countries, or on a Regional or Subregional level; these include the Youth Initiatives that seek to actively involve young people in Internet governance discussions.²⁶ NRIs facilitate multistakeholder discussions on Internet governance, replicating key features of the Global IGF at the local level.²⁷

NRIs have existed as long as the IGF itself, with the first Regional IGF – the Caribbean IGF – emerging as early as 2005 in preparation for the first Global IGF, held in 2006.²⁸ The **NRIs place domestic prerogatives at the centre of their agendas**, grounding Internet governance conversations in local realities and challenges.

'The NRIs are where local communities can really set the topics that they feel are of most concern to their communities in a local setting. The real action and where things are happening and where people are really talking about issues that mean something to them is at the NRI level.' Interviewee 20, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

The value of the IGF in taking conversations to the local level was recognised by the IGF community early on. In 2010, Markus Kummer spoke about the value of emerging NRI initiatives across the world at the USA-IGF. Quoting an unnamed speaker, Kummer argued that **'good Internet governance begins at home'**²⁹, a sentiment that has been echoed repeatedly in the years since.

NRIs have grown dramatically in number and significance over the lifespan of the IGF. Of the 40+

²⁶ For the purpose of this report, Youth Initiatives are considered alongside NRIs. The next Section, 2.c. discusses their impact in greater detail.

²⁷ To be officially recognised as an NRI by the IGF Secretariat, initiatives must meet a number of criteria outlined in the NRI's toolkit: being open and transparent; inclusive; bottom-up; non-commercial; and multistakeholder. Please see toolkit: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3568/480

²⁸ See CIGF records here: <https://ctu.int/caribbean-internet-governance-forum-cigf/>. Beyond the Caribbean IGF, other NRIs began emerging as early as 2008, such as EuroDIG (see according to the IGF's joint proceedings report for IGF 2006+IGF 2007: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3367/5) and LACIGF (see 'Mapeo de las Iniciativas de Gobernanza de Internet Nacionales en América Latina y el Caribe' by Aguerre et al: <https://repositorio.udes.edu.ar/jspui/bitstream/10908/15567/2/%5bP%5d%20%5bW%5d%20Aguerre%20-.pdf>).

²⁹ See "Markus Kummer says good Internet begins at home" USA-IGF 2010: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhoCBXe_lk4

experts consulted for this study, **17 interview participants spoke of the value of NRIs, describing them as one of the success stories of the IGF.**

Importantly, **NRIs are initiatives structured around the Global IGF, meaning they exist as a result, and as part, of the ecosystem that is the IGF.** The IGF Secretariat has established a series of requirements for NRIs to be recognised officially which include: being open and transparent; being inclusive and non-commercial; and having multistakeholder participation and bottom-up decision-making processes.³⁰ The IGF Secretariat currently has a full-time staffer serving as 'Focal Point for NRIs Engagement' to support these coordination efforts among NRIs.

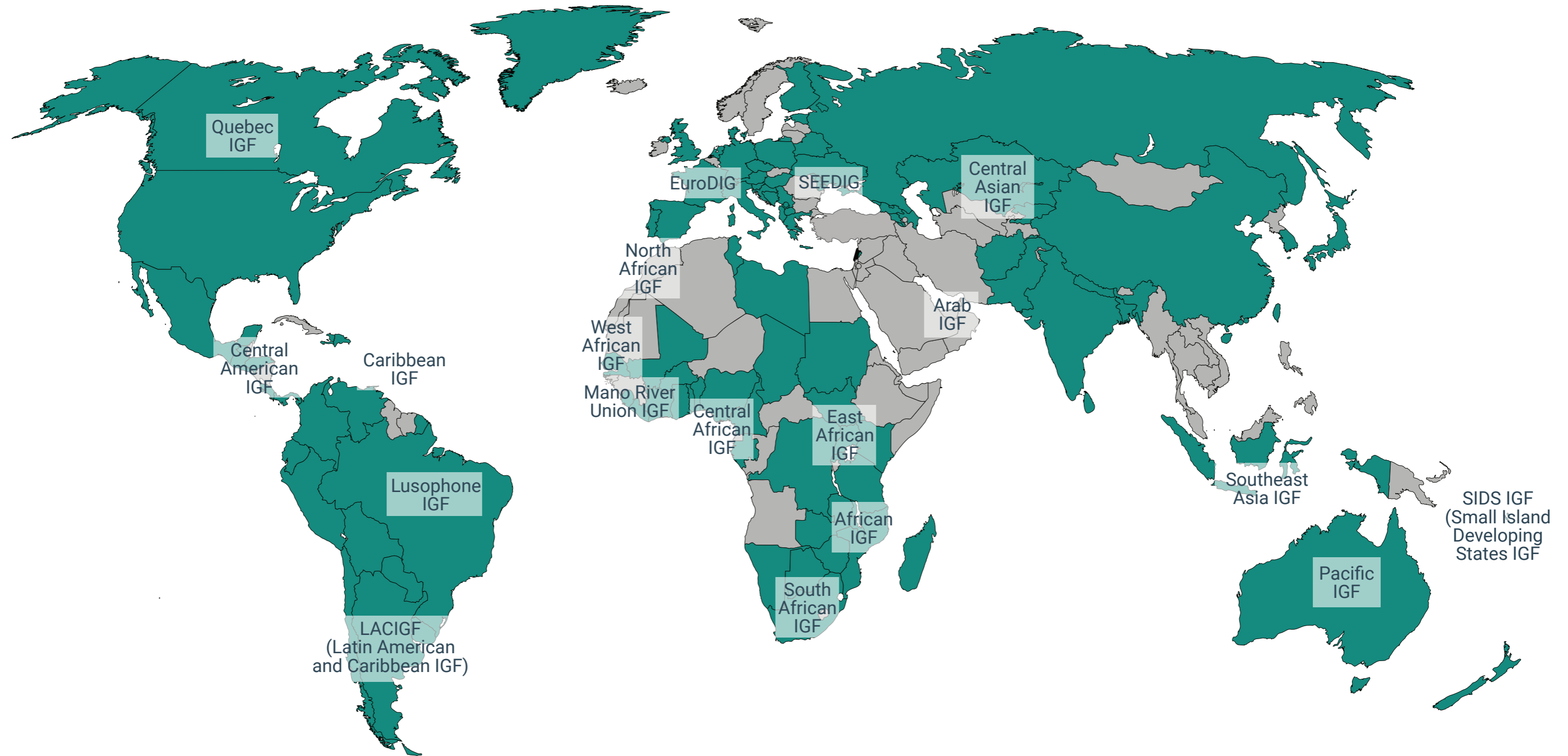
If it were not for the IGF, this rich network of local communities and dialogues may well fade away or cease to uphold the principles of openness and multistakeholder participation that characterise the IGF. NRIs would also lose the technical and cross-NRI coordination support that they currently receive from the IGF Secretariat.

Four concrete aspects highlight the impact generated by the IGF's NRI network:

- Their organic growth;
- How the IGF and NRIs enrich one another;
- How NRIs impact local policy outcomes; and
- The impact of NRIs on capacity building.

Each of these points are developed in turn below.

³⁰ As per the IGF website, NRIs are required to: (a) have a multistakeholder organising team with representatives from at least three different stakeholder groups, with intention of evolving toward the inclusion of all stakeholder groups; (b) identify a contact person who takes on the role to commit to act as a liaison between the initiative, wider community, IGF Secretariat and the NRIs network; (c) create a website, (d) maintain a working email address, and (e) provide support to social media accounts for conducting effective outreach. See "Who organizes the NRIs meeting(s)?: <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-nris>. NRIs are also required to submit an Annual Report on their activities and participate in the working calls organised by the NRIs Network – where NRIs undergo a preparatory process ahead of IGF and coordinate sessions to be hosted at the annual event.



► Figure 7. National and Regional IGFs, spontaneous emergence of local ecosystems

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

2. b. i. NRIs' organic growth

The most outstanding aspect about the NRIs is their **organic rise and growth**:

'The proliferation of the National and Regional IGFs are concrete examples of a global impact of the IGF. They are growing in a very organic manner, where institutionally, the IGF does not call for any formations of these types of capacity development initiatives, yet they are in place.' Interviewees 45 and 6, IGO, WEOG and Africa.

The NRIs emerged as 'a group of grassroots self-initiated multistakeholder communities' (Interviewee 5, Technical Community, Asia Pacific Region) that gathered to discuss Internet governance issues and prepare national and regional positions ahead of the Global IGFs. Soon, **these spaces evolved as venues to hold local conversations about how global issues impacted on local realities.**

Most notably, **the NRIs were not mandated by the Tunis Agenda, and yet spread quickly** shortly after the creation of the Global IGF. This was acknowledged as early as 2010:

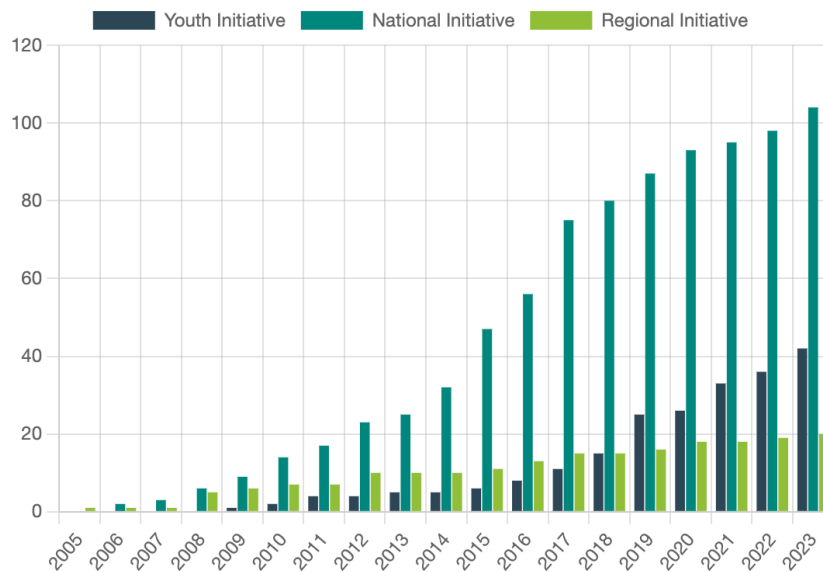
'This is actually quite amazing. The Tunis Agenda did not talk about National and Regional IGF type meetings, it only talked about one Global IGF, but in the past few years they have begun spreading like mushrooms, and it's tempting to say they're all over the world.' Markus Kummer at USA-IGF 2010.

As shown in Figure 6, **NRIs have grown from just 26 initiatives in the initial years from 2006–2011, to 162 officially recognised active initiatives in 2023** – including National IGFs, Regional IGFs and Youth Initiatives.³¹ The number rises to over 200 when considering the 42 Schools of Internet Governance.³²

³¹ Numbers calculated based on the list of officially recognised NRIs provided by the IGF secretariat.

³² For active schools, please refer to: <https://www.igschools.net/sig/sig/schools-overview/>.

► **Figure 8: Growth of NRIs, 2006–2023³³**



An initial spike is observed in 2015, coinciding with the IGF's mandate renewal, with 61 NRIs operating globally. This led the IGF Secretariat to engage proactively with existing NRIs, support emerging ones, and give NRIs a more prominent space in the Global IGF agenda. **In 2016, the Global IGF in Guadalajara featured for the first time a Main Session focused on NRIs.**³⁴ Today, the NRIs have multiple spaces on the agenda, including an NRI Coordination Session, a Main Session and a booth at the IGF village; NRIs, individually or jointly, can apply to host additional activities on the agenda. They also receive various degrees of financial and in-kind support from the IGF Secretariat.³⁵ Interviewees report that additional efforts could be deployed to strengthen their incorporation and influence in the main agenda.

While NRIs have had disparate degrees of success, and not all have managed to become sustainable over time,³⁶ they have diversified the composition of the IGF, and enriched it through the development of local conversations and communities. **NRIs are described as having generated an ecosystem around the annual IGF event:**

'Everything the Secretariat does to facilitate the NRIs and the Schools of Internet Governance has strengthened the space. It's like an immense spider web that grows and grows [...] and the IGF is present and participates in that development.' Interviewee 7, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

³³ Includes National IGFs, Regional IGFs and Youth Initiatives. The chart does not include Schools of Internet Governance.

³⁴ <https://igf2016.sched.com/event/8ht6/national-and-regional-igfs-nris>

³⁵ For information on financial support, view <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-call-for-nris-grants>.

³⁶ Five Regional and Subregional NRIs have gone inactive as per the data provided by the IGF; no data on the number of national initiatives that have gone inactive is available. Reasons for NRIs to dwindle down vary but include, among others, insufficient resources and funding, leadership moving on without clear replacements, or agendas being covered by other existing or emerging NRIs.

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

'The IGF has evolved from an event into an ecosystem which has NRIs, the intersessional work, the Policy Networks, Best Practice Forums and Dynamic Coalitions.' Interviewee 15, Civil Society, Africa.

2. b. ii. How value flows between NRIs and the IGF

NRIs and the Global IGF have developed as a symbiotic relationship, with information flowing: (a) from the Global IGF to regional and national discussions, and (b) from the NRIs back to the Global IGF.

(a) The impact of the IGF on NRIs

One of the primary ways the Global IGF feeds into national and regional conversations is through the **translation of global policy issues to the local level**. These might not address all local needs, but are an effective means of ensuring knowledge transfer from the global to the local level:

'You compile things, and you put those policy recommendations out there for the benefit of the regional governments so that they have something to refer to. For example, policy priorities in infrastructure development or Internet abuse. It might not have everything you want in there, but certainly it's a good place to start.' Interviewee 16, International Governmental Organisation, Latin America and the Caribbean.

This influence is described as a form of **'soft impact'** of the IGF:

'The IGF is meeting its mandate, and is doing much more. For example, the power the NRIs bring: they take back what is being discussed here into their communities, their countries, where they articulate them in their policies. So that's also an impact. It's a soft impact, [...] but you can underline it.' Interviewee 17, Civil Society, Asia Pacific.

While information flows from the Global IGF to local initiatives, much of the value comes from the nuance that local content and stakeholders bring to the conversation. However, **emulating the IGF's multistakeholder discussion model guarantees that such conversation take place in an open, collaborative manner**:

'There are NRIs that are strong. There's consistency, as they follow the multistakeholder model. And that strengthens these voices at the regional level.' Interviewee 18, Civil Society, Africa.

By following the working formats of the Global IGF, **NRIs have served to encourage multistakeholder conversation, bringing local governments closer to expert communities in their countries**, particularly across Latin America and Arab states:

'The NRIs that work well offer mechanisms for people to learn how to interact. Whenever they have been successful at bringing all the stakeholders to the table, NRIs offer a neutral environment [...]. That was a big improvement, because in Latin America, the government is up there. NRIs bring them down to earth. And being able to have a conversation with them was a big step forward.' Interviewee 4, Technical Community, Latin American and the Caribbean.

In some cases, the Global IGF has enabled the development of those communities of interest between governments and industry experts, with these networks subsequently being nurtured at the local level:

'Our country had a multistakeholder dialogue on telecom policies and Internet policies before the IGF [...] but for some reason, the stakeholder group that came to the IGF were people that we hadn't met before. So we basically got together as a network on a regional level and even on a national level and we got to know each other. And this network continues to exist today.' Interviewee 1, Government, Arab Region.

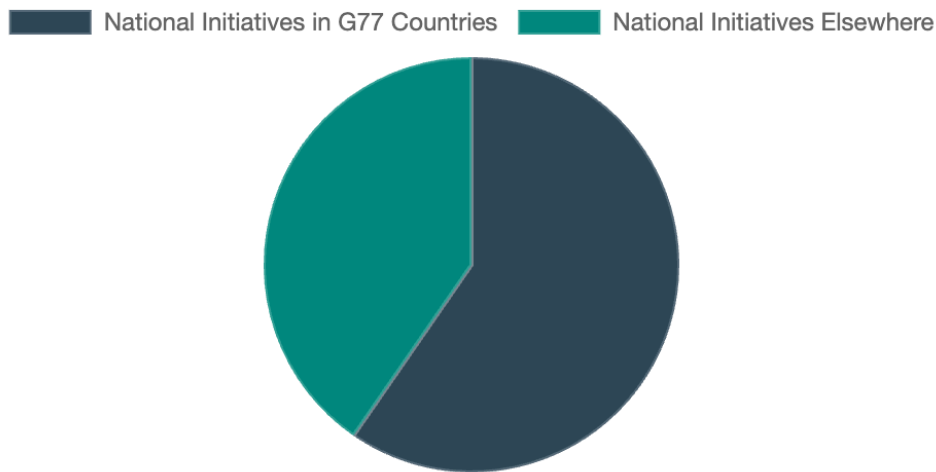
(b) The impact of NRIs on the IGF

NRIs also contribute to the Global IGF. As shown in Figure 8, National IGFs have been especially prolific among G77 countries where 60% of all national initiatives take place. This indicates that **NRIs enhance representation from the Global South** at the IGF, and facilitate Internet governance conversations across developing regions. The 15 Regional and Subregional IGFs in the Global South – the Lusophone IGF, LACIGF, the Caribbean IGF, the Central American IGF, the Arab IGF, the African IGF, the Central African IGF, the East African IGF, the North African IGF, the Asia Pacific IGF, the Pacific IGF, the Southeast Asia IGF, SIDS IGF, the Southern Africa IGF and the West African IGF – also contribute to achieving this diversity.³⁷

³⁷ SEEDIG (South Eastern Europe (SEE) Internet Governance Dialogue) is excluded from the list as SEE countries are not in the G77, however multiple countries fall into the IMF designation of developing country.

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

► Figure 9. National IGFs in G77 nations by 2023



Global South representation, together with the multistakeholder nature of IGF-inspired NRIs, **fosters an inclusive discussion of Internet governance challenges** and their societal impacts:

'If you look at IGF, there is a lot of the Global South now participating specifically with hybrid meetings and the NRI also. The alternative would be a multilateral kind of a thing where governments decide. But if you want nuanced decisions, you need to have the voices of the people and other stakeholders at the table to discuss things in different ways.' Interviewee 17, Civil Society, Asia Pacific.

The NRIs have also contributed to **talent renewal and the emergence of new leadership**. One of the interviewees explained: 'some people gain legitimacy at the NRI level, and then they are able to jump to the global level and come to the IGF' (Interviewee 19, Government, Western Europe and Others Group). This is important to encourage both leadership and generational renewal:

'We have lots of people that started as Youth IGF-ers and then gained the knowledge and now, five years later, they have something to say at the national and the international levels. Bringing new people in is fundamental.' Interviewee 19, Government, Western Europe and Others Group.

The NRIs' influence on leadership is palpable in the IGF's governance structure such as the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, or MAG. While the MAG does not reserve seats for NRI members, **since the growth of NRIs spiked, so did the number of MAG representatives who led national and regional initiatives:**

'There was a noticeable jump of NRI members on the MAG. In 2018, there were five or six NRI coordinators that became MAG members. That came from that NRI growth in 2015 that, two or three years down the line, shifted the composition of the MAG.' Interviewee 5, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

It is important to highlight that NRIs develop local communities and agendas that do not get entirely picked up by the Global IGF. Multiple interviewees explained that the NRIs were originally meant to feed into global discussions. While reporting from NRIs to the Global IGF does occur, the NRIs' impact on

the IGF agenda appears unclear, or at best, non-linear. Similarly, while NRI communities have some representatives that participate in the Global IGF, the two ecosystems do not entirely overlap. However, a full overlap in themes or participants does not seem to be expected or required for NRIs to be considered a value-add of the IGF.

2. b. iii. NRIs' impact on local policy outcomes

The NRIs acknowledge that devising effective solutions to Internet governance challenges requires local action:

'The development of that NRI network recognises that, notwithstanding the Global IGF, as far as the government is concerned, Internet governance requires local implementation.' Interviewee 16, International Governmental Organisation, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The importance of the local focus becomes especially significant when addressing specific Internet governance challenges, such as connecting the unconnected, or tackling Internet misuse:

'When it comes to solutions to various forms of Internet abuse, we have the IGF which is a discussion forum. But when it comes to the translation of those discussions, then it's rather at a regional level or at a national level where solutions need to be found.' Interviewee 33, IGO, Western European and Others Regional Group.

The previous two case studies on **IXPs and community networks** highlight the role of NRIs in shaping local policy outcomes. The discussion of **cyber laws in Uganda** emerges as another example where local policy benefited from multistakeholder feedback through the local NRI:

'Between 2009 and 2010, Uganda was developing cyber laws and the Uganda IGF was the platform for discussing these policies, for bringing it all together. The ministry could present, and get stakeholder input.' Interviewee 18, Civil Society, Africa.

Another interviewee highlights a similar situation in the context of Arab countries, where key stakeholders that participate in the Regional IGF had an important role in shaping the **Arab Digital**

Agenda:

'Within the regional process, you always keep an eye on what is happening globally but you also incorporate your own agenda. Something that materialised very recently is Arab governments have launched a joint Arab Digital Agenda, and this was mainly facilitated by key players from within the Arab IGF community.' Interviewee 1, Government, Arab Region.

2. b. iv. NRIs, Schools of Internet Governance and capacity building

'Most of any capacity building that happens is happening at the NRI level.' Interviewee 20, Technical Community, Asia Pacific Region.

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

The IGF mandate has a capacity building component.³⁸ The NRIs – together with the regional and national Schools of Internet Governance that have also emerged in an organic manner – have been instrumental in contributing to this objective.

NRIs are viewed as a space where **individuals develop the knowledge and capacities to engage effectively at the global level:**

'NRIs, we do a lot of capacity building in the regions and in the National IGFs, I think that is where the value also lies. Then those people come to the IGF better prepared.'
Interviewee 5, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

The fact that the IGF Secretariat does not embark on more extensive capacity building is seen as a resourcing issue. This has led to the **IGF community stepping up to create the Schools of Internet Governance:**

'The UN IGF Secretariat has a capacity building pillar in their work budget, but they have resourcing problems. But at the NRI level, there's a lot going on. So you've got the Schools of Internet Governance. We have at least two regional ones in Asia Pacific.'
Interviewee 20, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

The **growth of the Schools of Internet Governance is seen as a central component of the ecosystem that the IGF has generated**, even while the IGF Secretariat does not lead those initiatives itself:

'What is interesting – looking at it from an ecosystem perspective – is that lots of capacity building initiatives have been generated around the IGF – Schools of Internet Governance, universities taking on the issues. There are also the ambassador and scholarship programs in Asia Pacific, Brazil and the ISOC programs. So at the end, it is not that the IGF is leading the development of capacities, but it is part of it.' Interviewee 11, Private Sector, Latin America and the Caribbean.

As of 2023, **there are over 50 Schools of Internet Governance operating worldwide.**³⁹ The schools seek to provide formal education and capacity building on Internet governance issues and engagement practices, often in close collaboration with academic institutions and practitioners. **The schools, much like the NRIs, contribute to enhancing participation from the Global South:**

'That is why we started with the Southern School of Internet Governance, so that Latin America could have a more relevant representation, [...] we started the school with the idea of educating people so that they could come to the Internet governance meetings better prepared.' Interviewee 12, Government, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Schools of Internet Governance have become an integral part of the IGF ecosystem, and also feature in its agenda, in part through the development of its own Dynamic Coalition in 2017.⁴⁰ They are referenced in 12 IGF sessions related to capacity development, peaking in 2017 when the Dynamic Coalition was created.

³⁸ See paragraph 72, clauses (f) and (h) of the Tunis Agenda.

³⁹ <https://www.igschools.net/sig/sig/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/dynamic-coalition-on-schools-of-internet-governance-dc-sig>

In sum, the real value of NRIs appears to be not so much their bottom-up influence on the global agenda, but rather how they foster useful coordination and local implementation at the national and regional levels. NRIs also support the development of human capacity across the Global South and the onboarding of emerging leadership in Internet governance. Overall, NRIs have enhanced the IGF's ability to deliver on the key elements of the Tunis Agenda, namely facilitating engagement and interfacing, and enabling exchange of information, best practices and capacity building.

2. c. Nurturing the next generation of Global South leaders

Young leaders from the Global South – impact areas

1. Discuss existing and emerging issues
3. Help find solutions to misuse
4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing
5. Exchange information and best practice

'The IGF is a global, multisectoral space where the future is built, where connections are made, where lives are changed.' Interviewee 13, Youth IGF, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The IGF has enabled the **emergence of a community of young leaders from the Global South**. The forum makes concerted efforts to involve youth perspectives in Internet governance and develop capacities for the next generation of Internet governance professionals. This is reflected in the IGF's annual agenda which has incorporated the Youth Track, and in addition, several IGF workshops either centre around the youth or involve youth representatives as speakers.⁴¹

This section draws on the experiences of **rising leaders from Latin America and Caribbean, Africa and the Asia Pacific regions**. Evidence of three forms of impact emerge from the IGF's work with youth:

1. *Capacity building for youth and emergence of next generation leaders;*
2. *Consolidation of youth as local champions and active participants in Internet governance; and*
3. *Emerging ecosystem of cross-regional collaborations among youth initiatives.*

These are each developed in turn below.

⁴¹ Examples include: "Youth-Driven Tech: Empowering Next-Gen Innovators" in 2023; "Global youth engagement in IG: successes and opportunities"; "Youth lenses on Meaningful Access and Universal Connectivity"; "Youthful approach at data protection in messaging apps" in 2022; "Youth in IG policy-making process: Let's talk about the MHLB"; "Digital Cooperation process – Analysis from Youth lenses" in 2021; "Youth participation in Internet Governance"; and "Youth Engagement in Internet Governance Ecosystem: Current Scenario, Controversies and Future Action" in 2017. For additional information, see: <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-youth-track>.

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

2. c. i. Developing capacities and next generation leaders

'Participating first in the National IGF and then the Global IGF was a life changing experience.' Interviewee 13, Youth IGF, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The IGF fosters a deep understanding of Internet governance issues among youth participants.

Attendees, particularly from regions like Latin America and Africa, find the IGF to be a welcoming and inclusive space, serving as a hub for learning and networking. The impact extends beyond the event, with young leaders initiating educational programs and Regional Youth IGFs, addressing knowledge gaps and promoting cross-cultural exchange, and advocating for policies that enhance Internet governance in their respective countries.

The IGFs and NRIs are commonly regarded as fora which support the development of capacities among participants and a strengthened understanding of Internet governance challenges.⁴² For the youth participants, the IGF serves as a knowledge hub and learning platform, which enables informed policy analysis and facilitates engagement with government officials when they return home:

'I can attend programs at the IGF like cybersecurity, I can discuss the Digital Divide and creating technical policy on AI and see how best I can bring it down to my country. And policymakers at home bear with us; we've been having a series of meetings with them to see how best we can come up with adequate Internet policy at home.' Interviewee 14, Youth IGF, Africa.

The IGF is also recognised for being an especially welcoming forum for newcomers:

'The IGF is a learning space, it's a networking space [...] And I just find that I'm constantly talking to people [...] I find it actually a very un-intimidating space [...] I think the IGF makes it quite easy for people to self-identify as novices and to participate even if they don't have expertise.' Interviewee 15, former MAG, Civil Society, Africa.

But capacity building is not only reserved for those who attend the Global IGF. Young IGF participants who have gone on to take leadership roles in IGF Youth Initiatives have also served as force-multipliers in the IGF's capacity development work.

In the aftermath of the 2015 Global IGF in João Pessoa, Brazil, the participants from that meeting coalesced to establish the Youth SIG, formerly known as the Youth Observatory. This platform has since evolved to encompass 68 countries and engage 2,200 global members, representing youth worldwide.⁴³

The João Pessoa IGF also sparked the creation of a Regional Youth IGF in Latin America in 2016

⁴² At the Global IGF as well, providing and enhancing digital skills training for the youth is often at the forefront of discussions. For example, norms, shared principles and best practices around youth digital skills training were shared at the IGF workshop, "Digitally Skilling our Youth: Varied Global Approaches" in 2019. (<https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2019-ws-342-digitally-skilling-our-youth-varied-global-approaches>).

⁴³ <https://youthsig.org/>

which brings together regional young leaders interested in addressing Internet governance issues in the continent.⁴⁴ Promoting cross-cultural knowledge exchange in the vast and diverse Latin America and Caribbean region, the Youth

LACIGF emphasises the significance of understanding varied realities and perspectives, enabling participants to bring back a wealth of shared knowledge and to foster a safer and more inclusive Internet in their respective countries.⁴⁵ Moreover, the Youth LACIGF launched an open preparatory course, which offers several online modules on the challenges, opportunities and main actors in Internet governance.⁴⁶

The Youth LACIGF emerged as a catalyst for educational programs, thereby addressing the knowledge gap:

'After the IGF was hosted at home, people started to see that there was a knowledge gap so we started some projects to go to schools, go to public places and talk about the Internet, talk about the potential of the Internet and how people could use it for the better, for their own objectives.' Interviewee 13, Youth IGF, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Similar examples emerge from across the African continent. One such example is West Africa, where, acknowledging the significance of education, **the Internet School of Governance in Liberia** emerged as a pivotal mechanism to support capacity development, with the Youth IGF playing a substantial role in its organisation:

'We usually host the Internet School of Governance and we host Youth IGF in Liberia. [...] the head of the Youth IGF speaks on our program, talks to many stakeholders in the country, and speaks to many government officials about how we can support policy.' Interviewee 14, Youth IGF, Africa.

Within Ethiopia, **capacity building efforts are understood as a prerequisite to enable the local community's effective engagement** in policy. Empowering local youth emerges as a crucial objective:

'Empowering young people – it can be through webinars, it can be through workshops. The young people need to know, the community needs to know what we're talking about, what is IGF by itself. And after that we can advocate for policies that have an impact on issues such as digital literacy, skills development and data protection.' Interviewee 21, Youth IGF, Africa.

2. c. ii. Youth shaping Internet governance discussions and championing issues locally

The participation of **youth has had a positive effect shaping both Global and Regional IGF agendas**. Themes such as Sustainable Development and Data Protection and Net Neutrality for combatting

⁴⁴ <https://youthlaciqf.lat/>

⁴⁵ <https://giswatch.org/en/internet-governance/youth-igf-latin-america-and-caribbean-youth-laciqf>

⁴⁶ <https://youthlaciqf.lat/curso-abierto/>

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

disinformation are consistently championed by youth representatives, influencing discussions within the IGF and policy decisions in their countries.

The Global IGF has contributed to **youth being perceived as key actors in the Internet ecosystem, instead of mere end users:**

'We can say that the IGF is a high-impact global political mediation space, and so it is important to have youth at the table. Youth representatives were seen as just end users, but they are here to shape the future, to make the new technologies that we are seeing today. So it's really important to have youth as a stakeholder, not just someone who accesses the Internet.' Interviewee 13, Youth IGF, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Youth representatives consistently **advocate for issues seen as a priority to new generations** – such as sustainable development and environmental issues as they relate to Internet governance – asserting a robust stance within the IGF discussions. The IGF Youth Track has centred around themes of environment, sustainability and security, conveying the collective sentiments of the youth as articulated during the Global IGF events through impactful messages.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ For example, messages from the IGF 2022 Global Youth Summit demanded, 'in the context of digital sustainability include social inclusivity of digital solutions, greener tech to reduce negative impacts on the environment, and open policy processes.' (https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/257/24058)

► Text Box 3. The IGF as transformative journey for Global South Youth Leaders

The IGF plays a transformative role in the lives of youth participants. Highlighting examples from Latin America, Africa and Asia Pacific, this section discusses how younger generations have taken on leadership positions within the IGF framework. These emerging leaders have not only influenced their domestic communities but have also forged connections, leading to specialisation in Internet policy, career opportunities and consolidation as regional experts and mentors for future generations to follow their paths.

Latin America

In the context of Youth LACIGF, the younger generation is actively encouraged to assume leadership roles within the evolving frameworks of the Global IGF. A notable example is the inclusion of a Youth LACIGF representative in the Policy Network of Artificial Intelligence during the Global IGF in 2023.

Africa

Multiple young people from Africa have also risen to leadership roles. After enrolling through the African School of Internet Governance, an emerging young leader from Togo was eventually appointed as an IGF MAG member. Over the ensuing years, she played a pivotal role in establishing both the West Africa Youth IGF and the Togo Youth IGF, attaining leadership positions that spanned from the Regional to the Global IGF platforms. This progression is indicative of the impact emerging leaders can have in their domestic communities.

In Northeastern Africa, the establishment of the Youth IGF was catalysed by a young advocate's participation in the Global IGF in Ethiopia in 2022. This individual serves as the founder and coordinator of the Ethiopian Youth IGF. Furthermore, she holds the position of Generation Connect Youth Envoy at the ITU, a group that welcomes talented students or young professionals with a passion for ICTs and digital development.

Participation in the IGF is also a means to forge connections that catapult young professionals into specialising in Internet policy, consolidating as regional experts. This is the case of a young leader from the Democratic Republic of Congo:

'There is this research happening in the region where I became involved as a consultant and built expertise because I met the person at the IGF and because I am from this part of the world.'
Interviewee 22, Youth IGF, Africa.

Asia Pacific

An Asia Pacific youth representative secured a position at NetMission.Asia, a collaborative effort focused on youth engagement, attaining a significant career milestone through the IGF. A former attendee of the Global Youth IGF, she transitioned into the role of coordinator for the Youth Track at the Global IGF, bringing in and training the next generation of young leaders in Internet governance. Concurrently, she also assumed a general coordination role for the Asia Pacific Youth IGF.

2 - IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

But perhaps most importantly, **leaders emerging from the IGF Youth Initiatives are championing Internet governance issues locally.** Powerful examples emerge from across both Africa and the Asia Pacific.

In the case of **Western Africa**, youth assumed a pivotal role in advocating for adequate **data security in the continent's digital transformation.** This is exemplified by their emphasis on the importance of instituting data protection laws prior to the implementation of AI models within the region. In Togo, youth see the country's growing role as a Global South leader in cybersecurity as a development informed by the IGF recommendations:⁴⁸

'The IGF offers recommendations; we are taking them into account, we are using them inside our regions, inside our country. And now, for example, Togo is the focal point for the cybersecurity forum.' Interviewee 23, Youth IGF, Africa.

African youth attending the IGFs have played an active role in **advocating for the implementation of the African Union's Malabo Convention** to strengthen cybersecurity in the continent:

'So, I've been raising the issue of the Malabo Convention on cybersecurity in my country. I've been advocating for my country to join, make sure that we get this issue on the map.' Interviewee 14, Youth IGF, Africa.

Discussions held at the IGF played a pivotal role both in raising awareness about the Malabo Convention among youth, as well as garnering support for its enforcement. The convention focuses on cybersecurity and data protection and marked a significant milestone in the region in terms of 'personal data protection; electronic commerce; and cybersecurity and cybercrimes.'⁴⁹ Before the Malabo Convention entered into force in June 2023, several discussions at the IGF had taken place to encourage its ratification.⁵⁰

In the case of the DRC, the **DRC Youth IGF is championing conversations on disinformation, misinformation and hate speech on the Internet** in close collaboration with the East Africa IGF. As the question of access to quality information has consolidated in the national agenda, local initiatives have taken it onboard, such as Afia Amani Grand Lac, an organisation dedicated to combating fake news.⁵¹ These emerging leaders engage closely with IGF communities. For example, the coordinator of Afia Amani Grand Lac presented at the 10th East Africa IGF in 2023.⁵²

⁴⁸ See <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/september-2022/togo-and-un-sign-mou-establish-african-cybersecurity-centre> and <https://www.togofirst.com/en/itc/3105-10062-togo-joins-forum-of-incident-response-and-security-teams>

⁴⁹ <https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-african-unions-malabo-convention-on-cyber-security-and-personal-data-protection-enters-into-force-nearly-after-a-decade-what-does-it-mean-for-data-privacy-in-africa-or-beyond/>

⁵⁰ See, for example, "Trusted Digital Space viaPRIDA–Informed Transformed Africa", where speakers called out the audience to encourage their countries to ratify the convention, arguing that the significance of it depends on a large adoption of African states setting norms and standards. <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2020-ws-43-trusted-digital-space-via-prida%E2%80%93informed-transformed-africa>

⁵¹ <https://afia-amanigrandslacs.info/>

⁵² <https://twitter.com/NadineKampire/status/1698967750696140939>

Other examples emerge in the context of the Asia Pacific. The IGF ignited an interest among newcomers in the Net Neutrality debate. Subsequently, **Net Neutrality was championed by local young leaders in India:**

'There was one year where lots of newcomers and younger participants were advocating for Net Neutrality. Eventually India banned initiatives such as Free Basics.'
Interviewee 24, Youth IGF, Asia Pacific.

India's 2016 Free Basics ban correlates with discussions held at the IGF, particularly addressing the prohibition of zero-rating policies.⁵³

⁵³ Free Basics by Facebook was banned in 2016. Before and after, discussions had been taking place at the Global IGF to raise awareness, facilitate and monitor policy changes on Net Neutrality. For example, the 2018 IGF workshop entitled "Net Neutrality and Beyond: Ensuring Freedom of Choice Online". <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2018-ws-180-net-neutrality-and-beyond-ensuring-freedom-of-choice-online>

2- IGF'S DIRECT IMPACT

2. c. iii. Ecosystem of cross-regional collaborations

The youth representatives interviewed for this study view the IGF as a dynamic ecosystem. **Youth Initiatives effectively operate as a set of cross-regional networks** that allow young leaders to tackle local challenges and gain insights from others contending with similar issues:

'There is collaboration between the different youth organisations, whether it's Asia Youth IGF, European Youth IGF or North America. They are learning from each other. We are part of a global ecosystem where we exchange information.' Interviewee 23, Youth IGF, Africa.

Leveraging connections cultivated during Global **IGF participation became both a source of valuable knowledge and a means of securing financial support** for initiatives such as the West Africa Youth IGF.⁵⁴ For example, the West African Youth IGF adopted some elements of the organisational model of the European Youth IGF, highlighting the concrete influence of the Global Youth IGF networks. This strategic move facilitated enhanced organisation and, consequently, more impactful regional representation. As a result of organised advocating for better regional representation, the West African Youth IGF now participates in discussions in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

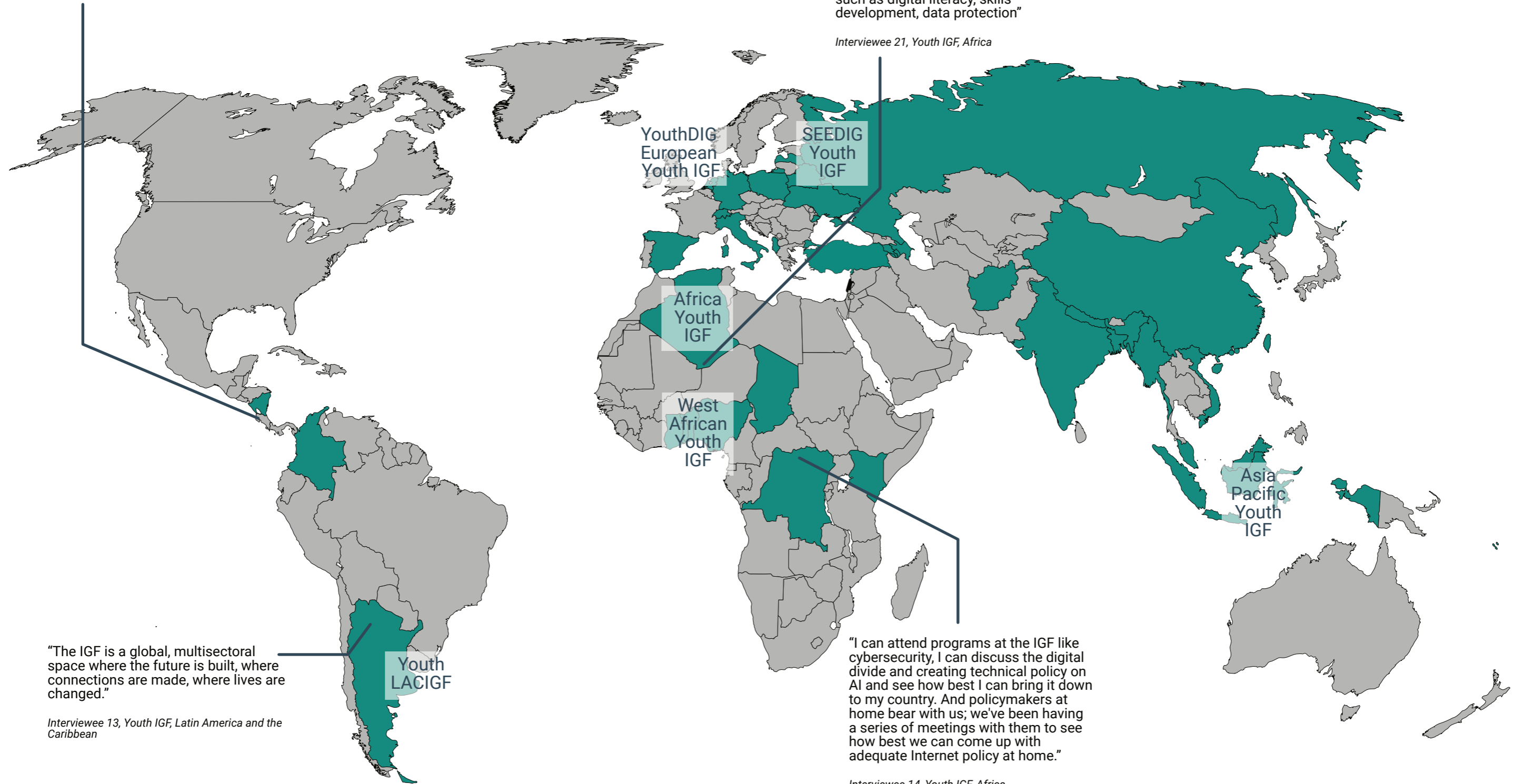
The emphasis on cross-regional collaborations among Youth IGFs underscores a collective endeavour to nurture a global network of well-informed and actively engaged young leaders. For example, **South-to-South, cross-regional cooperation led to valuable exchanges** between people in Bangladesh and the DRC:

'There are the partnerships and collaborations that have arisen from the IGF, locally and regionally as well. Also from region to region as well, such as between the DRC and Bangladesh. Without the IGF, this would have never happened. The Bangladesh IGF has set up the Bangladesh Kids IGF. That is an initiative. A unique one. So we really realise that from the start, we have to involve the youth from a very young age in the IGF discussions, such as cybersecurity.' Interviewee 22, Youth IGF, Africa.

⁵⁴ See sponsors, such as the West Africa Internet Governance Forum: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3568/1673

"Some of the IGF recommendations in Latin America actually became law. When it comes to community networks for rural areas or connectivity for rural areas, one example is Mexico, the regulation in Colombia which is recent, and the one in Argentina."

"Empowering young people – it can be through webinars, it can be through workshops. The young people need to know, the community needs to know what we're talking about, what is IGF. And after that we can advocate for policies that have an impact on issues such as digital literacy, skills development, data protection"



► Figure 10. Emerging leaders are championing Internet governance issues locally

3. The IGF's indirect impact

This section of the report turns to the IGF's indirect impact: where the forum has played an important part in Internet governance issues by pushing, building on, or amplifying, discussions held in other venues.

In this way, the IGF has fulfilled its mandate to facilitate discourse between different bodies as well as to interface with other organisations and institutions.

We have found that the IGF:

- Has a **dynamic structure that enables discussion of new and emerging issues**, often long before more traditional institutions;
- Provides a venue where what are **formal negotiations in other organisations are discussed in a more open and relaxed fashion**, contributing to broader understanding and awareness;
- Offers a **stable and consistent location to address broader Internet governance themes** including Freedom of Expression, Human Rights, Accessibility, Access and Privacy; and
- Is often the **first place people turn to when they want to understand the impact of larger events on the Internet**, or what role the Internet played in them.

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

In terms of specific examples, we note that the IGF:

- Was among the first organisations to discuss: **Disinformation** following the Cambridge Analytica scandal; the **IANA Transition** following the US government's announcement that it would relinquish its role; **e-health** following the COVID-19 outbreak; **content moderation** following proposed legislation to clamp down on harmful content; and **Artificial Intelligence**, years before it entered mainstream awareness;
- Played a **crucial role in the eventual success of the IANA Transition** by using dialogue to overcome entrenched views, and allowing different ideas to be put forward, discussed and tested outside the official process;
- Served as a **policy-shaping forum** when legislators decided to tackle online safety issues; and
- Provided each stakeholder group with specific benefits, including: **collective knowledge** on broad topics; **expert knowledge** on narrow topics; **direct engagement** with policymakers; **advocacy** opportunities; **deeper and more thoughtful conversations** on societal impact; **education, best practice and information-sharing**; and a **platform for different perspectives**, mainly from the Global South, that are heard less frequently or clearly in other fora.

3. a. Text analysis: the IGF's thematic dynamism over time

Thematic dynamism – impact areas

1. Discuss existing and emerging issues
2. Advise on access and affordability
3. Help find solutions to misuse
6. Uphold WSIS values and transparency

The agenda of the **IGF is dynamic**, formed through a bottom-up application process with workshops and other sessions proposed by community members.⁵⁵ This allows for the **regular introduction of new topics, but issues also fall away as they are resolved**. In the context of Internet and policy bodies, this is a positive, if not unique, feature that gives the IGF a distinct vibrancy and vigour.

Based on the AI-enhanced, large-scale text analysis described in the methodology, the report introduces the **most popular topics** discussed at the IGF during the period 2016–2023. The report then explores specific topic areas to demonstrate the thematic dynamism of the IGF agenda.

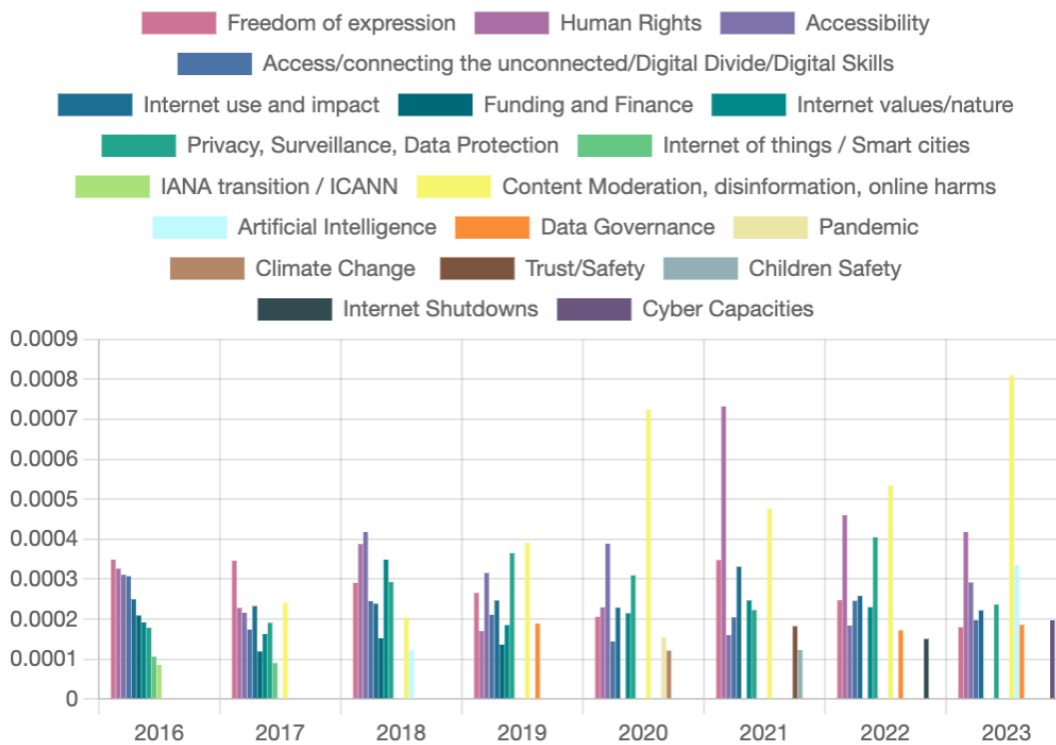
⁵⁵ Sessions proposed by the community are debated and prioritised by the IGF's MAG. Opening sessions and High-Level Tracks are jointly organised by the MAG with the support of the IGF Secretariat, and seek to respond to current or otherwise noteworthy issues that year.

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

3. a. i. Popular topics 2016–2023

The top 10 themes by year shows that **the IGF agenda evolves to reflect the issues of the day**.

► **Figure 11. Top 10 themes at the IGF, 2016-2023**

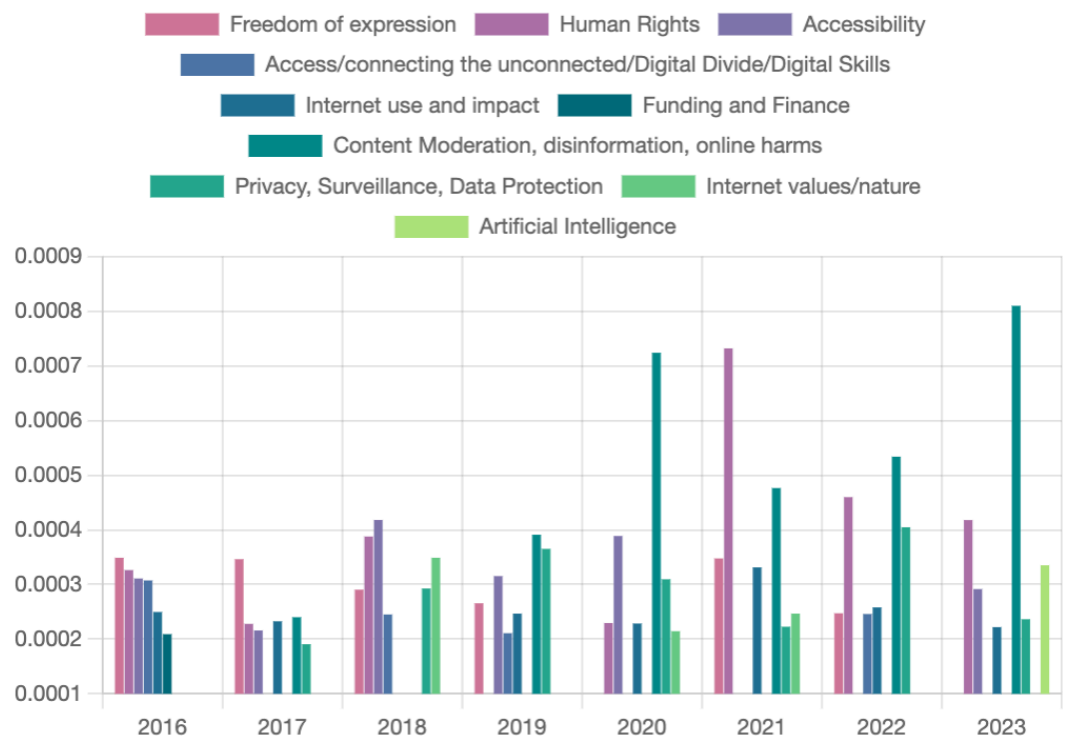


Of the twenty topics that appeared within the top 10 over the eight-year period of analysis, six themes appear every year. Some peak once – such as the IANA Transition in 2016, the pandemic in 2020, or Internet Shutdowns in 2022. Others, such as AI, come and go, enjoying an early peak in 2018 and then returning as the third most popular topic in 2023. Trends are discussed around (a) perennial themes; (b) inclusion of Global South perspectives in discussion of main themes; concluding with (c) a deep dive on the theme of Internet Access.

(a) Six perennial themes

Six themes appear in the top 10 most discussed topics in every year of our analysis. **They are (a) Freedom of Expression; (b) Human Rights; (c) Accessibility; (d) Internet Access; (e) Internet Use and Impact; and (f) Privacy, Surveillance and Data Protection.** The intensity with which those perennial themes are discussed varies from year to year.

► **Figure 12. Top six themes at the IGF, 2016–2023**



(b) The IGF structurally includes Global South perspectives – and it works

Of the six perennial themes identified in the analysis, Connecting the Unconnected reflects a direct prerogative of Global South countries, as well as the global commitment to bridging the digital divide.

The other five perennial themes are issues of global concern where the **IGF has enabled the inclusion of Global South perspectives**. For example, workshops on Privacy and Data Protection over the years consistently highlight Global South perspectives. Some include Internet Data Protection Under Different Jurisdictions in 2020,⁵⁶ Value and Regulation of Personal Data in the BRICS in 2019,⁵⁷ Digital development & Data Protection in the Global South: MENA Region as an example in 2018,⁵⁸ Emerging challenges for data protection in Latin American countries,⁵⁹ and Biometrics and identity in the Global South⁶⁰ in 2017.

Structurally, **this diversity is supported through the requirements of the session proposals**, which favour multiple perspectives and global representation. From the 2023 call for proposals:

⁵⁶ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2020-ws-204-internet-data-protection-under-different-jurisdictions>

⁵⁷ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2019-ws-211-value-and-regulation-of-personal-data-in-the-brics>

⁵⁸ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2018-day-1-salle-iii-ws407-digital-development-data-protection-in-the-global-south-0>

⁵⁹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2017-ws-113-emerging-challenges-for-data-protection-in-latin-american-countries>

⁶⁰ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2017-ws-282-biometrics-and-identity-in-the-global-south>

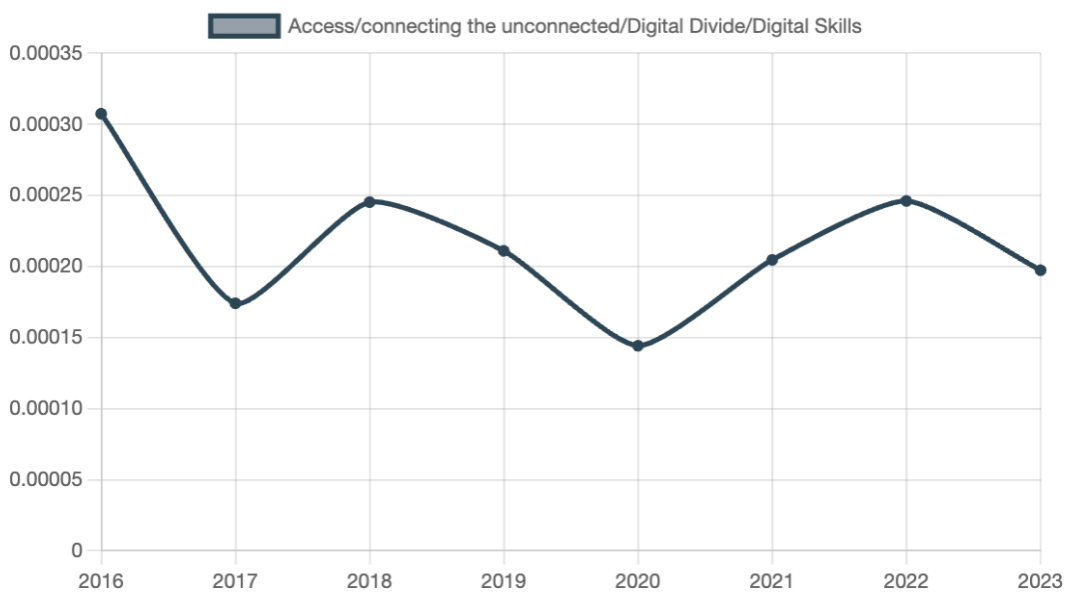
3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

*'Proposers are strongly advised to pay attention to diversity of perspective, supported by experience, gender, region, stakeholder group, and inclusion of youth, persons with disabilities and persons from other under-represented or marginalised groups, within their organising teams as well as listed speakers, as these will be reviewed against the key diversity measure.'*⁶¹

The MAG's maintenance of thematic tracks also ensures that themes such as 'Digital Divides & Inclusion' (from the 2023 agenda) are sustained.

(c) Digital Inclusion and Internet Access

► **Figure 13. Thematic evolution for Internet Access, 2016–2023**

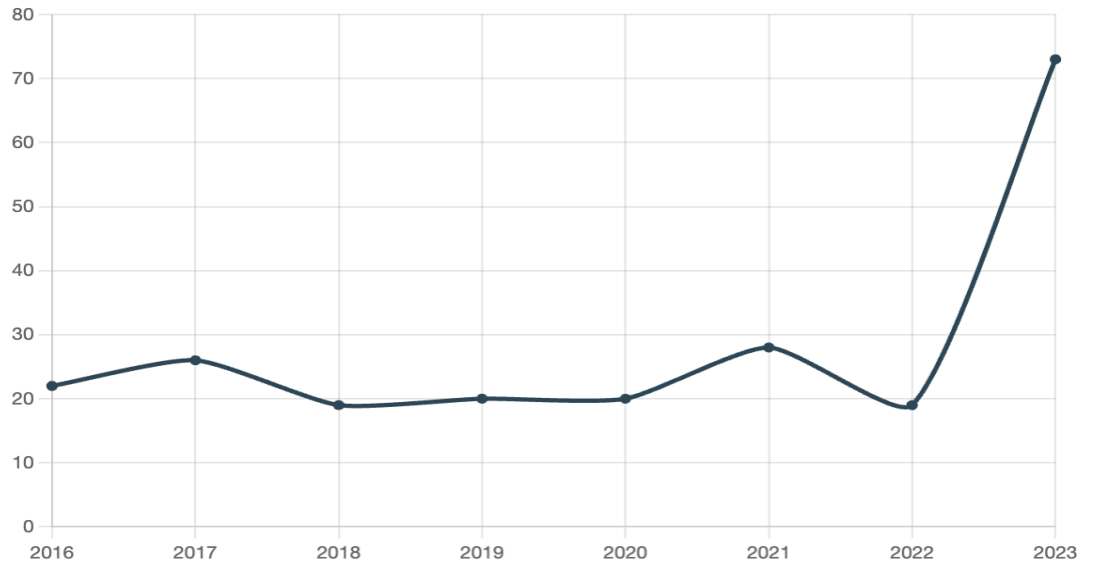


While a **sustained thematic focus** on digital inclusion and Internet Access is evident in the IGF proceedings, **discussions under this theme have evolved over time**, responding to and supporting discussions on specific issues and challenges, while simultaneously contributing to clear shifts in attitude or focus.

⁶¹ IGF call for proposals, 2023: <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2023-call-for-workshop-proposals>

► **Figure 14. Occurrences of 'Bridging the Digital Divide,' 2016–2023**

Occurrences of Bridging the Digital Divide and similar phrases by Year



In recent years, under the overarching theme of Internet Access, **there has been a rise in discussions relating to Bridging the Digital Divide** (Figure 12). As the pandemic accelerated basic Internet access in the Global South, the emphasis post-pandemic has shifted to questions of meaningful connectivity and the closing of the digital gap.

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

3.a. ii. Exploring the IGF's thematic dynamism

This section demonstrates the ebb and flow of topics through the IGF, highlighting that the **IGF is often early to explore issues that subsequently become mainstream**, such as Disinformation and Content Moderation.

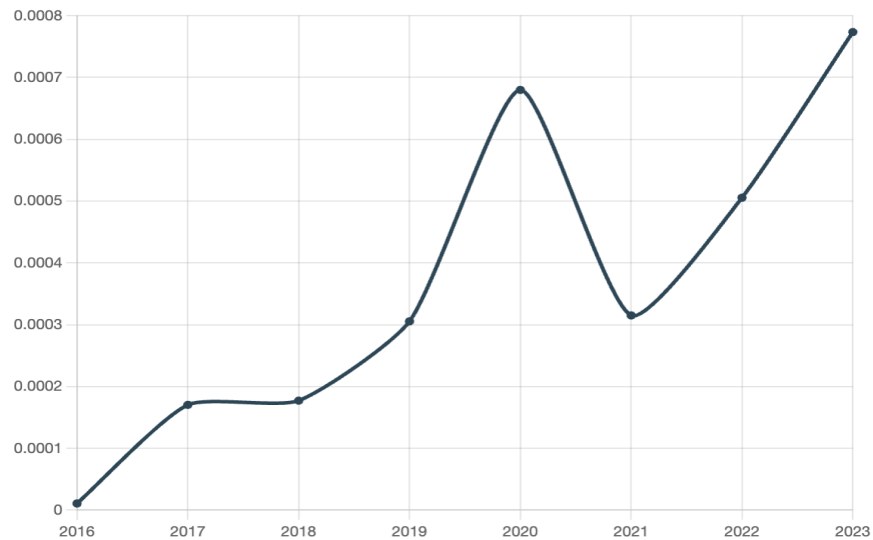
► Figure 15. The IGF thematic dynamism (top 10 themes), 2016–2023

Theme	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Human Rights	2	4	2	9	4	1	2	2
Accessibility	3	5	1	3	2	9	8	4
Privacy, Surveillance, Data Protection	8	6	4	2	3	6	3	5
Internet use and impact	5	3	7	5	5	4	4	6
Access / Connecting the Unconnected / Digital Divide / Digital Skills	4	7	6	6	9	7	6	7
Freedom of Expression	1	1	5	4	7	3	5	10
Internet Values/Nature	7	8	3	8	6	5	7	
Content Moderation, Disinformation, Online Harms		2	8	1	1	2	1	1
Funding and Finance	6	9	9	10				
Internet of Things / Smart Cities	9	10						
Data Governance							9	9
Artificial Intelligence			10					3
Internet Shutdowns							10	
Trust/Safety						8		
Child Safety						10		
Pandemic					8			
Climate Change					10			
IANA Transition / ICANN	10							
Cyber Capacities								8

These emerged into the top 10 in 2017 – the year that the digital policy world became aware of the Cambridge Analytica scandal and widespread disinformation tactics in multiple elections during 2016 (Figure 13). Questions around Disinformation and Content Moderation have stayed there ever since, as illustrated in Figure 14 below.

► **Figure 16. Occurrences of 'Disinformation' and related terms, 2016–2023**

Disinformation and related phrases occurrence by Year



Conversely, **the bottom-up IGF agenda setting reflects declining interest in topics that organically dwindle down.** During 2016–2017, there was substantial discussion of the Internet of Things and Smart Cities, but the topic has not appeared in the top 10 themes since then.

The IGF's thematic dynamism is explored below through brief case studies of disinformation; the COVID-19 pandemic; and Artificial Intelligence.

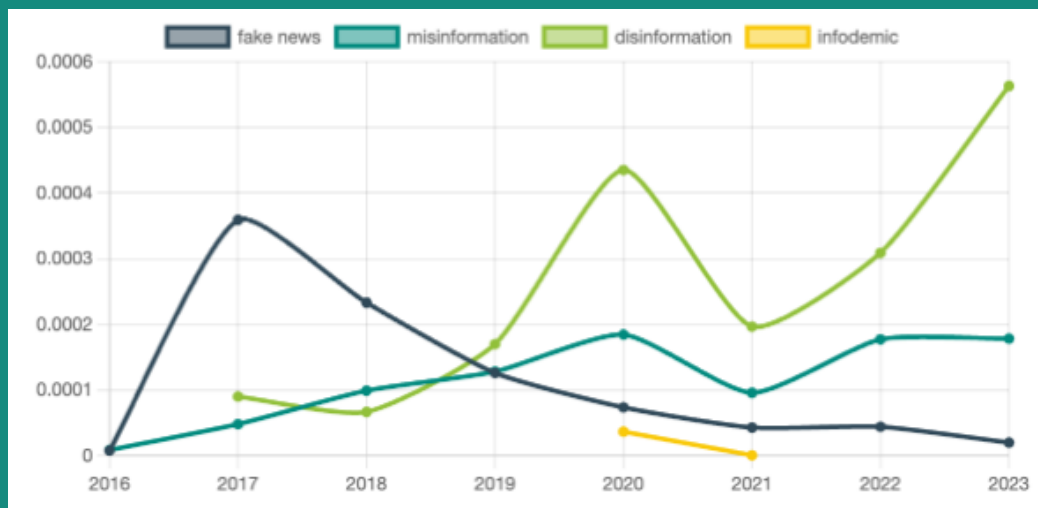
3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

► Text Box 4: Thematic dynamism – three case studies

Case Study 1: From fake news to infodemic

The Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2017 – which exposed widespread use of disinformation in the US presidential elections and around the world – sparked an interest in disinformation, or ‘fake news’ as it was initially termed. In 2016, there were two sessions that mentioned ‘disinformation’, and six that mentioned misinformation. In 2017, there was a rapid increase, with numerous references to disinformation, misinformation, fake news, and a dedicated plenary session on Day 2, a “High Level Thematic Session – Impact of Digitization on Politics, Public Trust, & Democracy.” The IGF discussions made an early link between disinformation and the threat to democratic processes and institutions.

► Figure 17. Evaluation of disinformation and fake news, 2016–2023



Levels of discussion on disinformation-related themes peaked in 2020, and the term ‘infodemic’ makes a brief appearance at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting the evolution of disinformation techniques from electoral influence to spreading false COVID-19 origin stories and, through 2021, anti-vaccination narratives. Continuing growth in interest in disinformation is reflected in continued growth of this topic through to 2023, where 34 sessions mentioned disinformation-related issues.

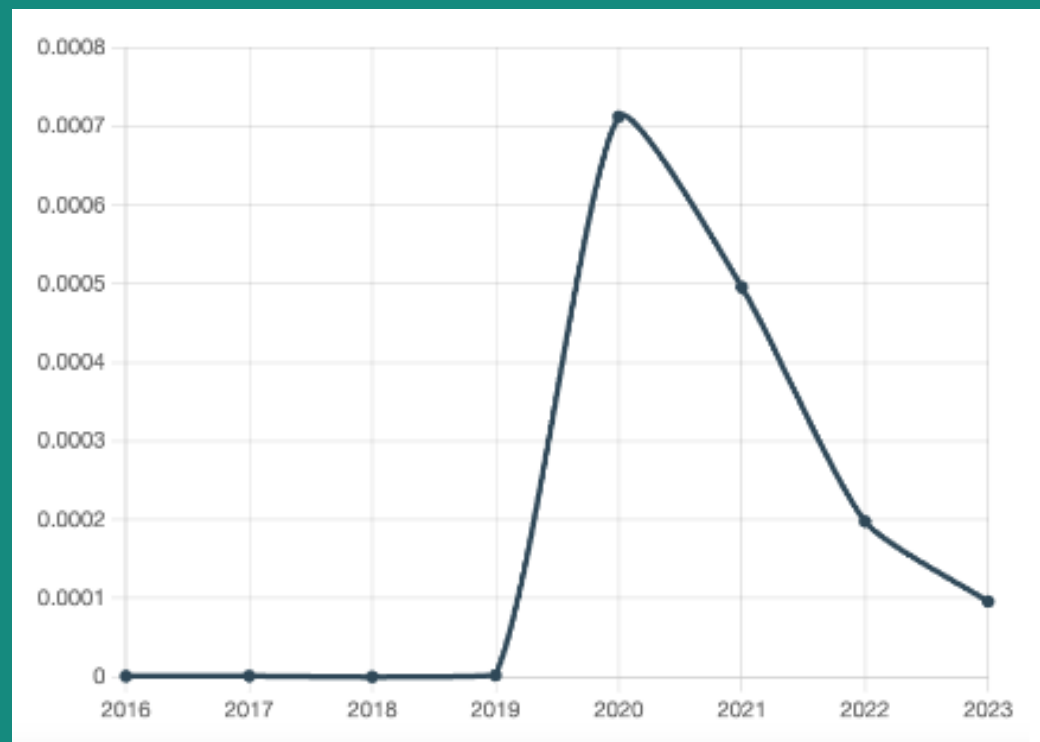
The thematic analysis also reflects the way that terminology has evolved, and the progress of the debates. Whereas in 2017, phrases incorporating ‘fake news’ were prevalent, by 2023 the terminology had settled into ‘disinformation’ and ‘misinformation’.

Whereas in 2017 and 2020, sessions were describing the emerging phenomenon of disinformation, by 2022–2023, the themes of Disinformation are often discussed in the context of content-related regulation such as the EU’s Digital Services Act, or the UK Online Safety Act.

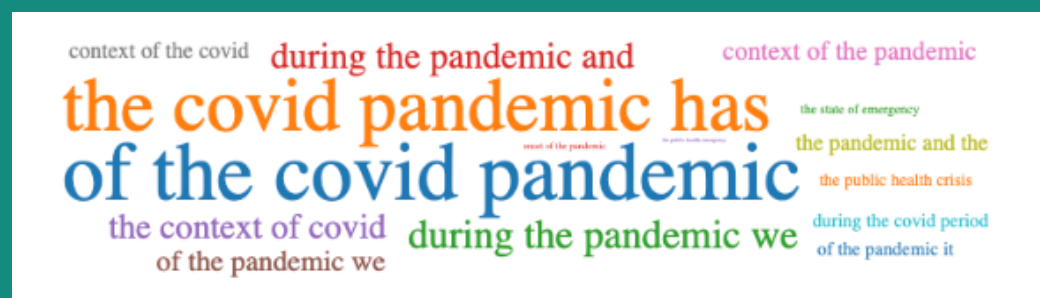
Case Study 2: Pandemic and e-health: rise during COVID-19

The pandemic is an example of a topic that was non-existent prior to 2020 (note the x axis of the chart above has no data for the period 2016–2019 inclusive). The discussions peaked in 2021 before fading in 2023. The word cloud for this topic features the COVID-19 pandemic heavily. Likewise, health-related topics show a peak in 2020 from a low base in 2016.

► Figure 18. Thematic evolution for ‘pandemic’, 2016–2023

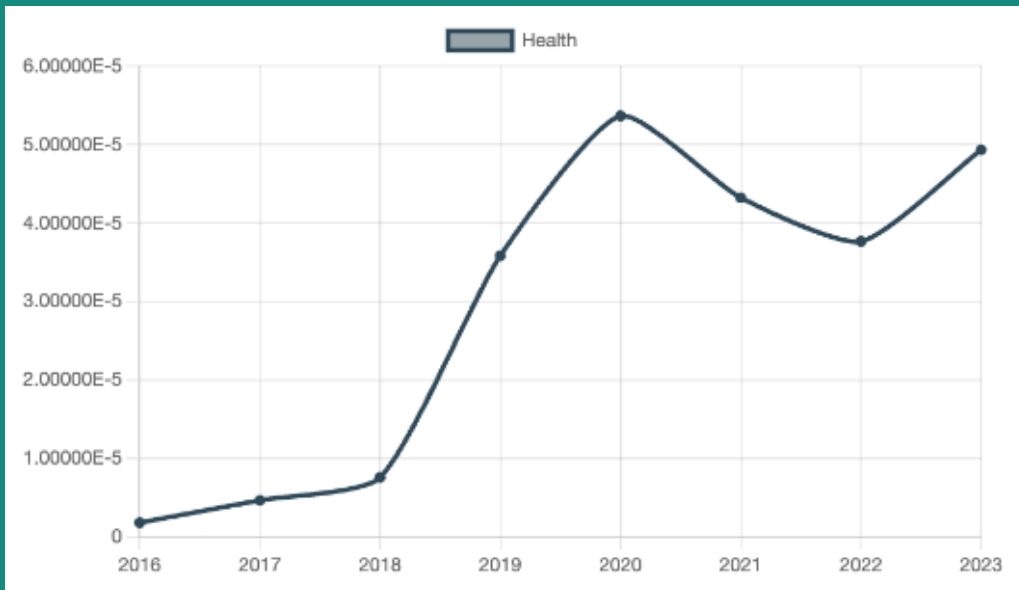


► Figure 19. Word cloud for the theme ‘pandemic’



3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

► Figure 20. Evolution of discussion on health, 2016–2023

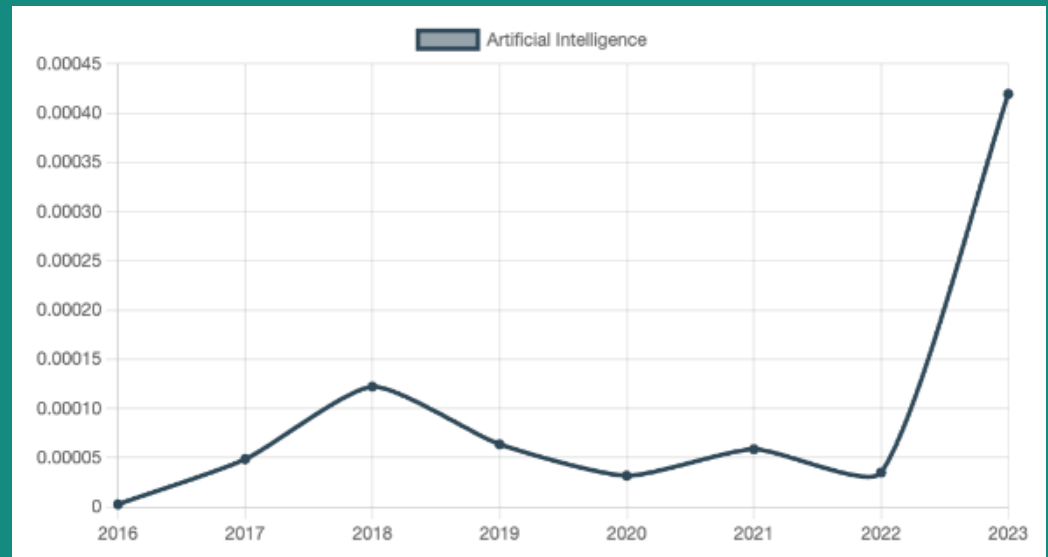


Case Study 3: Emerging technologies: the AI-GF

Conversely, topics can arise rapidly, and gain traction across the agenda over time. Artificial Intelligence is a recent example. From almost no activity in 2016, there was an early peak in 2018. While the most popular topics were 'use of AI' and 'development of AI', there were discussions on the future of work, AI in education, and AI and ethics.

In 2023, there were 27 sessions that mentioned Artificial Intelligence topics, to the extent that some attendees nicknamed the Kyoto meeting the 'AI-GF'. Sessions included a Main Session, two High-Level Panel Sessions, the Parliamentary Track, numerous workshops and Dynamic Coalitions, as well as a Regional Report from EuroDIG. By 2023, the dialogue had developed. In the year where ChatGPT dominated tech news stories and the technology caught up with the predictions for mass usage of AI, 'use of AI' peaks in 2023. For the first time in 2023, discussions relating to 'generative AI' and 'ChatGPT' began to feature as some of the most popular AI-related sub-topics.

► Figure 21. Thematic evolution for 'Artificial Intelligence,' 2016–2023



The text mining of 1,548 documents from 2016–2023 reveals the IGF’s thematic dynamism. While there are perennial policy issues that are discussed every year, such as Internet Access, **the intensity of discussion on those perennial topics varies**. Analysis of the top 10 topics per year shows that the IGF is where **emerging issues are discussed promptly** – whether that be disinformation, Artificial Intelligence (with its early peak in 2018, and dominance of ChatGPT in 2023), or the pandemic from 2020.

Within the thematic buckets, the analysis shows how **the dialogue develops and becomes more focused over time**. Following the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2017, early IGF discussions show peaks in ‘fake news’, over time, the language evolves into discussions of solutions such as Content Moderation, and regulations such as the Digital Services Act and the UK Online Safety Act. Likewise, discussions on Internet Access have evolved and today see a more recent emphasis on bridging the Digital Divide.

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

3. b. The IGF facilitating global dialogue: the case of the IANA Transition

IANA Transition – Impact Areas

1. Discuss existing and emerging issues
4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing
6. Uphold WSIS values and transparency

The **oversight role that the US government** retained over the Internet's Domain Name System (DNS) **was a focal point of the 2005 WSIS** and continued to be a divisive issue across the IGF's initial 10-year mandate.

In 2014, the United States announced it would to step back from its role⁶² and asked the Internet community to develop a **transition plan** for it to review and approve.

That plan took two years to develop. **The IGF was a critical component in the development of the IANA Transition plan and its eventual success.** By providing a venue for open debate in which all stakeholders could take part, but where discussions did not form part of an official record or position, the IGF helped **soften entrenched views** on all sides and cleared a path through a complex landscape:

'The IGF was the place where the IANA Transition was socialised. ICANN itself could not have had the type of engagement on the broader politics of that transition that it did; it needed the IGF for that.' Interviewee 15, Civil Society, Africa.

There was **no single or agreed understanding** of what the role was that needed to be carried out, or what would be the best structure or process to achieve that transition. The whole process faced failure through misunderstanding:

'The IGF did play a very big, pivotal role in the IANA Transition in terms of helping the community understand what the issue or issues were about, and then, sort of galvanising community effort [...] The last few years of that transition, the IGF(s) were a critical gathering place for people to talk through those issues and try to get to, not the settlement, but the resolution of that.' Interviewee 20, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

⁶² On 14 March 2014: <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/press-release/2014/ntia-announces-intent-transition-key-internet-domain-name-functions>

The IGF's unique position allowed those in charge of drawing up the plan to **hear, respond, and react to, a wide range of others' views** ahead of developing an official approach.

'At the IGF, I could talk to people casually. I could talk to people bilaterally. I could sit in sessions. I could participate in sessions. And I could pull all these things from what's happening around me. And that was reflected in policy recommendations. A successful policy choice needs to bring everybody with you.' Interviewee 25, Government, North America.

The same benefit was reported across all sectors with government, technical and civil society representatives all making the same broad point:

'[The IGF] creates a space [...] to engage in a broader cross-sector of communities. From a policy impact perspective, I think it just makes them more aware of what the views are and what the issues are.' Interviewee 15, Civil Society, Africa.

This increased understanding of others' viewpoints, reflected back in speeches, papers, comments and panel discussions, **took much of the heat out of a topic that had previously been highly contentious:**

'I don't think the IANA Transition – the international resolution – would have happened without the IGF. It's not the only reason but it is a key reason that drove comfort.' Interviewee 26, Civil Society, Asia Pacific.

There was also a sense that the IGF's flexibility might allow for **more creative solutions:**

'There was a willingness to see if the IGF could provide some solutions, or answers, that could dispel the mistrust hanging over the community.' Interviewee 5, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

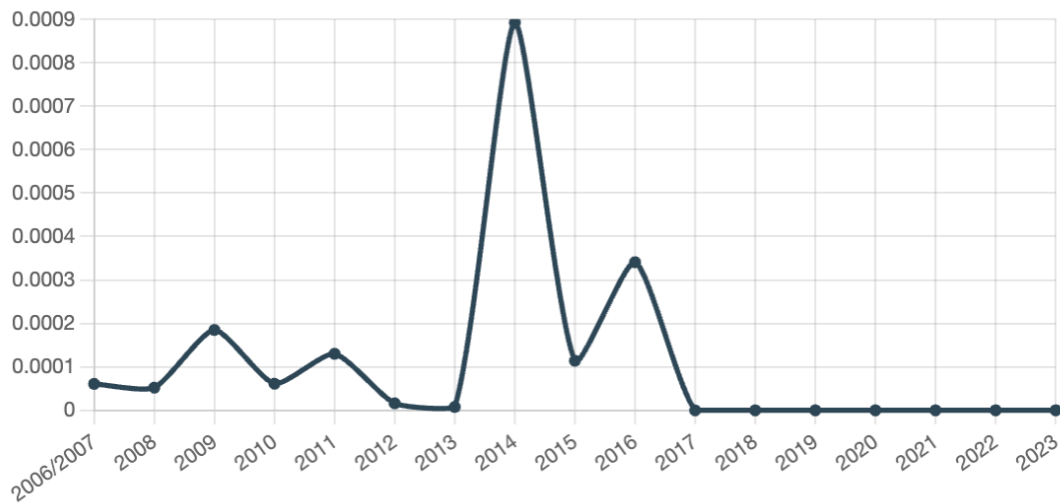
An issue that drove perception of the Internet itself

Prior to the IANA Transition process, there had been years of formal **intergovernmental discussion** about oversight of the Internet, but they had resulted in growing tensions, rather than a gradual resolution.

Those **tensions came to a head in 2012 at the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT)**, when what was increasingly presented as a binary choice between two governance solutions led to a breakdown in negotiations, with the United States and 55 other nations walking out or refusing to sign new international telecommunication regulations.

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

► Figure 22. Occurrences of 'IANA' in Annual Reports, 2006–2023



When the **IANA Transition process started in March 2014**, there was a fear that a similar political impasse and breakdown could occur. Instead, the process was characterised by gradual progress toward an agreed solution – and the IGF is widely acknowledged as having helped achieve that result.

The above Figure 20 shows how frequently the issue of IANA was discussed in the IGF Annual Report since the IGF's inception in 2006. It was a source of frequent, often contentious, discussion at the forum. But **the significance of the issue is clear in the peak in 2014** – when the US government announced its decision to transition away from its role.

It was, for that year, the single **largest Internet governance question**. Due to the deadline set for resolution, conversation died down in 2015 when the plans passed into a next stage of more formalised discussion and negotiation. The **second peak in 2016 occurs as the Internet community discussed the end result** of the policy process and its possible impact.

And then, suddenly, with the transition completed, what had been the most contentious topic in the Internet governance world did not even merit a mention in the IGF Annual Report. There is perhaps no clearer sign that **the end result – significantly shaped and socialised at the IGF – was universally accepted**.

The IGF moved fast to discuss the issue

The **African IGF in Abuja was the first IGF forum to address the news** from the US government, noting during a dedicated session on 12 July 2014 that it has already formed a multistakeholder group 'with 27 members from different occupations and backgrounds to follow up on implementation of that initiative.'

The **Global IGF in Istanbul in September 2014 overhauled its schedule to introduce a 'highly topical' main session** on the last day titled: "IANA Functions: NTIA's Transition and ICANN's Accountability Process."⁶³ The transition was seen as a sign 'that Internet governance had reached a pivotal moment in its development.'⁶⁴

The process became a **frequent topic of discussion for the next two years** in main sessions and workshops at both the Global IGF and in Regional IGFs, including EuroDIG, the Pacific IGF and the African IGF.

On 30 September 2016, oversight of the **IANA functions shifted from the US government to the global internet community.**

Two months later, **the Global IGF in Guadalajara hailed it a success** at both a Main Session and during the High-Level Leaders Track. 'The successful transition of the IANA functions to the multistakeholder community in October 2016 marks an important milestone for the Internet governance community', notes the official summary, adding that 'various workshops and sessions endeavoured to learn from the successes and challenges of this multistakeholder exercise.'⁶⁵

In 2017, it was noted that the 'ability to understand different positions and the willingness to compromise' was 'a key outcome from the IANA transition process.' The process was hailed in 2022 in a Main Session in Addis Ababa as an example of where flexibility within governance institutions had helped secure the right result.

The **IGF 'talking shop' had helped a complex and emotive Internet governance issue be resolved** and concluded successfully in two years, in large part by listening to what others had to say.

'If you are responsible for drawing up the policy recommendations, you sit in the room because you want to hear what's happening. You talk to people, test out ideas. You are then better able to describe the stakeholders in each situation and what their opinions would be of any of the proposals put forward.' Interviewee 25, Government, North America.

⁶³ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/iana-functions-ntia%E2%80%99s-stewardship-transition-and-icann%E2%80%99s-accountability-process>

⁶⁴ Chair's summary of IGF 2014:

⁶⁵ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3367/1048

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

Conversations at the IGF led to **solutions** being developed that **resonated more broadly with others** because their views had been taken into account before formal proposals were put forward.

3. c. The IGF as a decision-shaping forum

'Even though the IGF is not a decision-making forum, it's a decision-shaping forum.'
Interviewee 5, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

Multiple examples in the report thus far show how the IGF has impacted decision-making and the design of solutions to multiple Internet policy challenges. But **what does it mean for the IGF to be a decision-shaping forum?** And how does the IGF contribute to shaping decisions and policy? The report finds that:

- **Multistakeholder dialogue** is a distinctive feature of the IGF appreciated across government, the private sector and civil society. It is credited with enabling the IGF to develop **collective intelligence**.
- The absence of negotiated outcomes enables **candid conversation** and more direct **engagement with policymakers**. The Parliamentary Track is particularly appreciated.
- The IGF is a **one-stop-shop for Global South** stakeholders on everything Internet governance-related. This is beneficial as they have fewer resources available for engagement.
- The IGF emerges as a place to access **expert knowledge**, engage with **diverse communities** (particularly the Global South) and discuss **societal impacts**.
- The IGF **forges collaborations** that set the basis for the development of solutions outside the IGF. The forum shapes policy and solutions.

The value of the 'mechanics' of the IGF

Internet policies are more robust when they deliver solutions that properly consider their impact on the overall Internet ecosystem. The IGF brings together multiple stakeholders and enables open conversation and exchange. Most interviewees highlight the **value of this multistakeholder dialogue as a distinctive feature** of the IGF.

'The IGF showed us a way to work together among different stakeholders, and so I value the mechanics more than the outcomes. The IGF wasn't meant to produce substantive outcomes.' Interviewee 4, Technical Community, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The opportunity to bring multiple stakeholders together is reported to be **mutually beneficial**, and to generate a form of mature, **collective knowledge**:

'The IGF is still the core space for convening stakeholders and having fruitful discussions about Internet governance. While conversations might be getting more complex, they still have an added value and create a long-term collective intelligence.' Interviewee 8, Civil Society, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The fact that no binding outcomes emanate from the process also means conversations benefit from less pressure, which in turn, enables **candid debate**. While some consider it a weakness, **interviewees point to the absence of negotiated outcomes as being an asset**:

'I appreciate the fact that people can speak freely because we're not trying to negotiate a document, we're not hedging our words. Even government representatives are much more willing to speak freely on different topics and I think the same thing with industry folk too; they are more willing to engage with the conversation instead of thinking "I can't say this, I can't say that."' Interviewee 5, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

The benefit of not pursuing negotiated outcomes appears to enable diverse stakeholders to have direct **engagement with policy-makers**:

'In the IGF, all country delegations come with their guard down. They come to have conversations, to learn, and that is invaluable because there is no space like the IGF in all other forums that exist. The IGF gets critiqued for not having teeth; I think it is the other way around. That's what gives it value.' Interviewee 7, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

'Leaving yesterday's Day Zero panel, I ran into a senator from Mexico and struck up a conversation about recent events there. A sidebar conversation that was 15 minutes on the stairs provided more insight into what happened with Mexico's policy engagement here.' Interviewee 9, Private Sector, Europe.

Both government and private sector interviewees highlight the role of the IGF in **accessing expert knowledge and engaging with diverse communities**:

'The IGF is a place to bring the communities together and find, perhaps, joint narratives about the important issues of the digital domain in a more or less structured way. As government representatives, it helps us understand some topics that perhaps are not as clear to us.' Interviewee 10, Government, Latin America and the Caribbean.

'Speaking from the law enforcement national security perspective, 90 plus per cent of our engagements outside the IGF are essentially transatlantic. It's US, UK, EU. [...] It goes to show you just how important it is to bring in the Global South and the rest of the world. They're dealing with the same issues and they have the same concerns.' Interviewee 9, Private Sector, North America.

For companies, the IGF enables broader conversations about societal impacts of technology that extend beyond negotiations between government and the private sector:

'For the private sector it is a good "containment box." It's good for certain issues to come up here first [...], because it gives us an opportunity to discuss them in an open, free way – for example, content moderation, data flows, algorithmic transparency – before they get picked up by regulators.' Interviewee 11, Private Sector, Latin America and the Caribbean.

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

'We don't have offices around the world as a small company. So, particularly when you get outside of the G7 countries, it gets harder for us to have meaningful engagement. If it's something in the Global South, we will have a very limited understanding of the issues. And so for us, the IGF – because of its global representation – forms a very useful place for us to talk to people we would otherwise have great difficulty talking to.' Interviewee 27, Private Sector, Europe.

Some **civil society** participants report that the IGF facilitates their advocacy efforts, but they also view the IGF as a space to **enable greater policy coherence**:

'To me, the role of the IGF would be to bring in some more coherence into this space instead of straight away impacting policy. Coherence might come in different ways, by allowing diplomats to talk to each other, by allowing regulators to understand what each of them is doing.' Interviewee 8, Civil Society, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The IGF emerges as an especially useful, **one-stop-shop for Global South stakeholders**, where they can walk away with a more comprehensive understanding of issues and positions by stakeholders:

'One of the benefits of the IGF for Global South is to have a one-stop shop kind of thing. Going to a single place to discuss everything related to Internet governance works perfectly for developing countries in general because we cannot follow many threads as typically a more developed, richer government could. We don't have the people or the budget for travelling.' Interviewee 4, Technical Community, Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition, the **IGF is seeking to actively enhance how the space articulates with governments**. During the IGF 2011 in Kenya, the global forum hosted for the first time a **Parliamentary Track** – one of the innovations in process and format that has characterised the IGF over time. The initiative was taken up again in 2019, with the Global IGF holding structured conversations with policy-makers to strengthen participation from the government and facilitate multistakeholder dialogue with parliamentarians:

'Actually I've heard people saying that the Parliamentary Track is the most valuable part of the IGF for them. I think most people don't even remember that it didn't always exist. It was first hailed in Kenya in 2011.' Interviewee 28, Private Sector, Africa.

Lastly, the IGF emerges as a decision-shaping forum for its ability to **forge collaborations that result in solutions and action beyond the IGF**. Not all issues get hashed out or solved within the IGF, but what this brewing ground offers is the benefit of **shaping policy through informed, collaborative discussion**:

'While the solutions don't quite get teased out here, I think the value of the IGF is to be able to find collaborators that will then move it forward. For example, for child online safety, there's a lot of child rights organisations and institutions that used the IGF and Dynamic Coalitions to prepare for the General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.' Interviewee 5, Technical Community, Asia Pacific.

3. c. i. The IGF impact on regulation and platform response to online harms

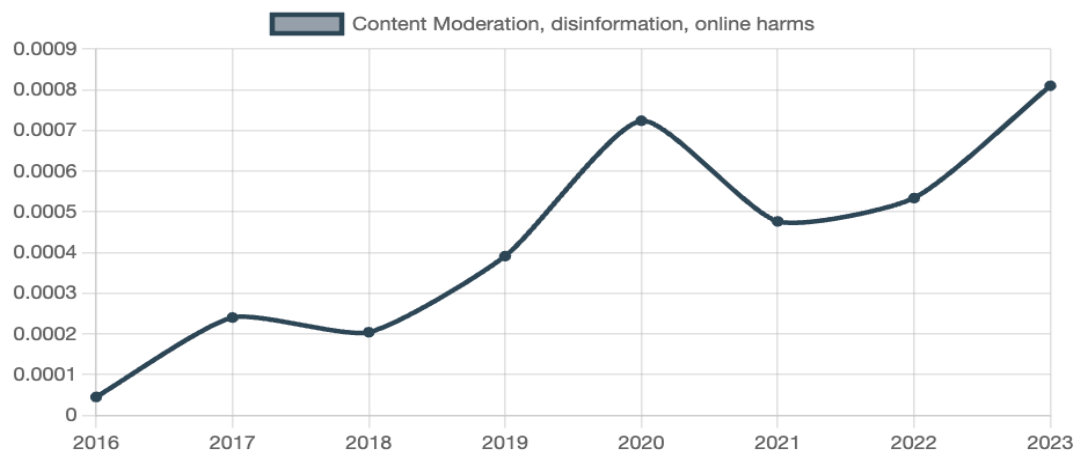
- Online harms – impact areas*
1. Discuss existing and emerging issues
 3. Help find solutions to misuse
 4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing
 5. Exchange information and best practice

The report will now turn to a specific example: the IGF’s **impact in shaping decision-making around Online Harms**. While Online Harms is a broad category which covers a wide series of themes, the present section will focus on **Disinformation and online, gender-based violence**.

Online Harms is an issue area that the IGF has **covered regularly since 2016**. Debate around online harms has spiked three times over the period of study: in 2017 with the surge of disinformation concerns and the introduction of the concept of fake news; in 2019 with the aftermath of the Christchurch shooting, in 2020 with pandemic-related disinformation; and again in 2023 with renewed focus on hate speech, violent and extremist content, the political impact of disinformation and continued debate around governance and regulation.

► **Figure 23. Evolution of Online Harms, 2016–2023**

Relative frequency of Subdictionaries over time



Online Harms is highlighted as an area where the IGF has **supported cross-sector coordination to devise solutions**. One such example is the development of the Christchurch Call, where the IGF played

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

a role in sketching what different stakeholder groups could bring to the table.

'In my experience, the most tangible impact of the IGF was shaping the evolution of the Christchurch Call to Action and the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism based on conversations we had, particularly in Berlin, where we helped evolve the multistakeholder model into truly understanding the critical roles that you need.' Interviewee 9, Private Sector, North America.

Within the realm of online harms, **disinformation specifically is a major concern** for both governments and private services that host content. Disinformation online can impact the political debate and election outcomes. Disinformation campaigns can also affect other spheres of life such as human health, as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, content moderation and content removal, whether mandated by law or deployed by private companies, can have important ripple effects on Freedom of Expression. The **complexity of the issue calls for effective cross-sector collaboration** to devise adequate and proportional policy solutions.

The development of **Brazil's so-called 'Fake News Bill' is an example** of how collective knowledge amassed in the IGF informs decision-making. When the IGF's Parliamentary Track was reintroduced in 2019, a number of Brazilian parliamentarians participated in the event in Berlin to gain a more comprehensive understanding of policy discussions on disinformation. According to one interviewee, that participation influenced the creation of Brazil's bill to regulate disinformation in the country:

'Some of those debates translated into the fake news draft bill in Brazil. The Brazilian parliamentarians came here, they joined the debates, they heard about what would be the EU Digital Services Act. Interestingly enough, one of them authored the fake news draft bill one year after the IGF.' Interviewee 8, Civil Society, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The IGF also served for Brazilian parliamentarians to connect with national experts, and informed the bill's subsequent consultation processes:

'The parliamentarians we had conversations with in 2019 were also the ones inviting us to the first meetings when they started drafting the bill. That was amazing. We had a presentation right after the IGF about the ideas.' Interviewee 8, Civil Society, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Regardless of political affiliation, the participation of parliamentarians at the IGF appears to enrich their perspectives and deliver better policy solutions:

'When you bring in policymakers, they might be from the right, they might be centre, but that's still interesting because they get to hear and learn from a lot of us and they get to have exchanges with the IGF participants.' Interviewee 8, Civil Society, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Similar dynamics are reported in the **African region** on the issue of fighting misinformation, where

stakeholders find opportunities to interact with policy makers:

'We had discussions with policymakers and decision-makers about disinformation and misinformation, hate speech on the Internet. We are at a period of war, we are living in a period of political tension. These tensions lead to spread of misinformation with very serious consequences. For the East African IGF, we went up with the community, sharing what we are doing, sensitising the population to not spread discourses of hate speech and misinformation.' Interviewee 22, Youth IGF, Africa.

Equally, policy-makers benefit from the multistakeholder debate. Prevention of violent extremism is one such example where not all solutions can come from governments. Subject matter expertise and

cross-sector collaborations benefit policy-makers:

'If you're trying to tackle a societal-level harm that plays out online and offline, then how do you really have a model that brings together technical expertise with subject matter expertise from a policy perspective? Multistakeholderism is always going to play a role. We, in the private sector, embrace regulation on terrorism and violent extremism content online. But if you want to advance prevention, you need to have those spaces for that true multistakeholder engagement.' Interviewee 9, Private Sector, Europe.

Beyond the Global IGF, NRIs offer a valuable meeting point for governments to collaborate with other stakeholders. Markus Kummer posed this idea as early as 2010, which still holds true for complex issues such as online harms:

'In many countries people feel the need to discuss these issues in a multi-stakeholder settings as they realise that one stakeholder group cannot do it alone, governments cannot do it alone, [...] the techies cannot do it alone either.' Markus Kummer, USA-IGF, 2010.

The IGF's role in positioning the **issue of online, gender-based violence among governments and the private sector** also illustrates the impact the forum has had on the online harms debate. Online, gender-based violence refers to forms of gender-motivated violence that are facilitated or enhanced by digital, online means. The text analysis conducted for this report shows that the issue gained traction in the IGF agenda thanks to the work of the Best Practice Forum on Gender, which was initiated in 2016 and actively debated through 2021.

The debate of gender-based violence sparked action by the private sector:

'I think what happened was positive because the work on online gender-based violence did make platforms aware that they need to be more concerned about this, and it was an opportunity for engaging with platforms.' Interviewee 15, Civil Society, Africa.

The work has had a legislative effect as well, though civil society reports fearing it is invoked in support of regulation that may be well-intentioned in theory, but is problematic in practice:

'The work on online gender-based violence made governments aware as well. But nowadays, I think it's also initiated or supported a sort of legislation which is good in intention, but could also be problematic in some contexts.' Interviewee 15, Civil Society, Africa.

3- THE IGF'S INDIRECT IMPACT

4. What the IGF participation tells us about the value for the Global South

The IGF serves as a **crucial space for the cross-regional, multistakeholder Internet community to participate in the global discussion** around Internet governance. The diverse members of that community are generally defined according to five global stakeholder groups: (a) the technical community, (b) the private sector, (c) civil society and academia (though the latter is sometimes grouped with the technical community), (d) government and (e) international organisations. The IGF enables the different stakeholders to gain important insights into global issues and contribute to the discussion. This section of the report analyses the **IGF participation data**, drawing on key insights and trends, to show how the IGF has evolved into a **valuable space for Global South contributors**.

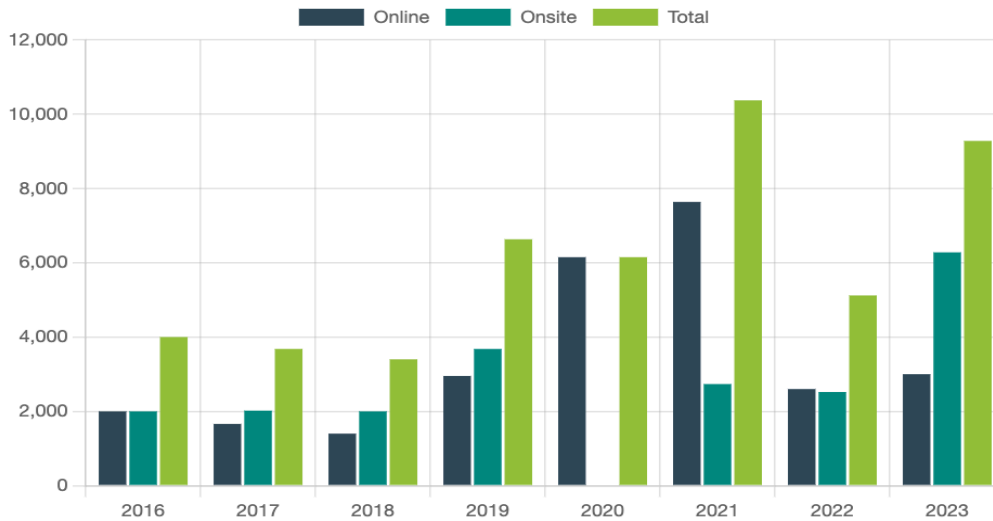
4. a. *Setting the scene: who attends the IGF?*

Focusing on the period of study 2016– 2023, Figure 22 shows that, while participation in the IGF has fluctuated, overall there has been a **growth in participation, indicating that the forum has gained in momentum since 2016**. Overall, participation in the IGF has increased since 2018, with 2021 (Katowice, Poland) marking an all-time high point with 10,371 participants, of which 7,600 participated remotely. After a dip in registrations in 2022, the **Kyoto meeting in 2023 saw a recovery in onsite participation** for the first time since the pandemic, with more than 6,000 onsite participants. The charts below will show the trends in participation from 2016–2023.

4- WHAT THE IGF TELLS US

► **Figure 24. Total participants 2016–2023**

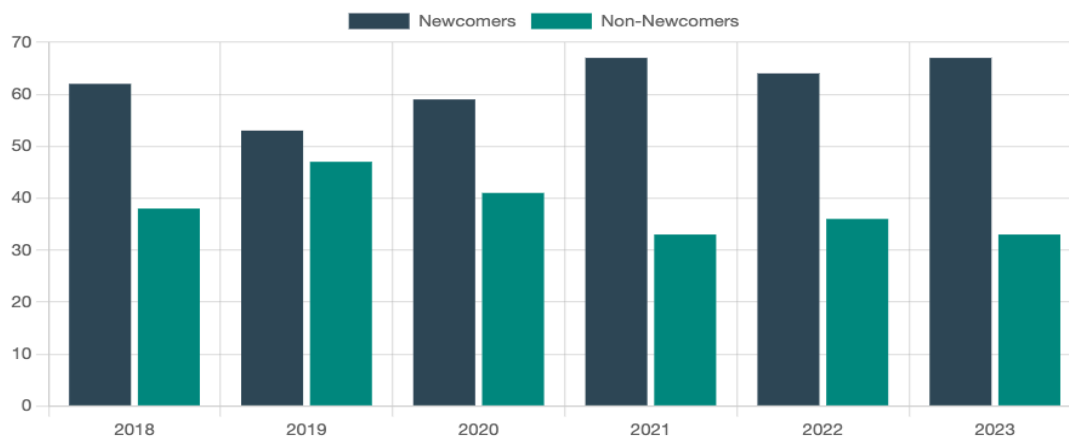
Total Participation by Year



Growth in IGF participation has been accompanied by a **significant number of newcomers**, which, year after year, continue to outnumber non-newcomers as shown in Figure 23. The IGF has consistently seen above 50–60% newcomers in attendance for the period 2018–2023.⁶⁶

► **Figure 25. Percentage of newcomers, 2018–2023**

Percentage of Newcomers by Year

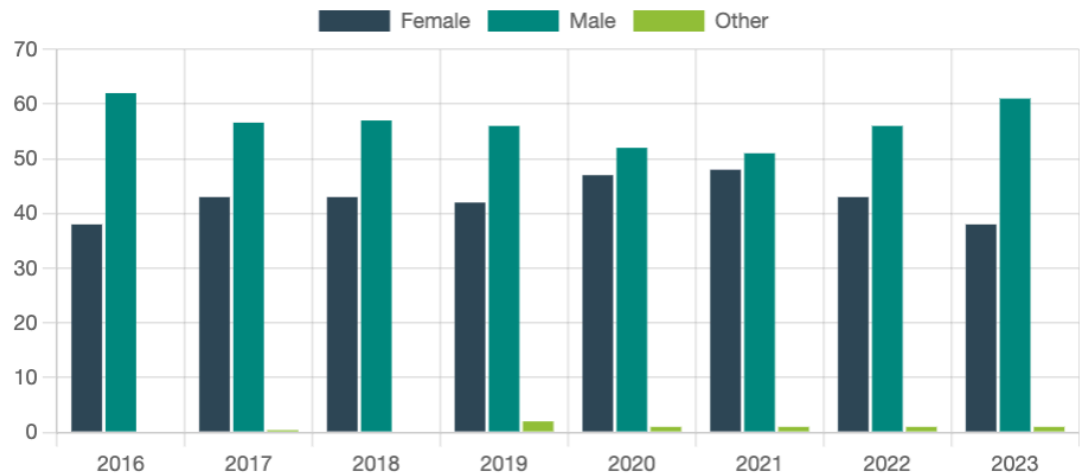


In addition, the **percentage of women attending the IGF has been steadily over 40%**, nearly reaching parity in 2020 and 2021, as illustrated in Figure 24. **These levels of gender parity are exceptional**, especially when compared to other forums, such as ICANN, where the attendance of women peaked at

⁶⁶ No data was available for newcomers for the period 2016–2018.

37%.⁶⁷ This **parity is also reflected in IGF leadership**; 50% of the MAG members in 2023 are women. In 2017, the IGF Secretariat began collecting data on individuals self-identifying as other; non-binary participants make a small percentage of participation, but this has remained somewhat steady since 2019.

► **Figure 26. Participation by gender, 2016–2023**



Multistakeholder engagement at the IGF is crucial for a balanced representation of perspectives when addressing global issues that require a collective response.

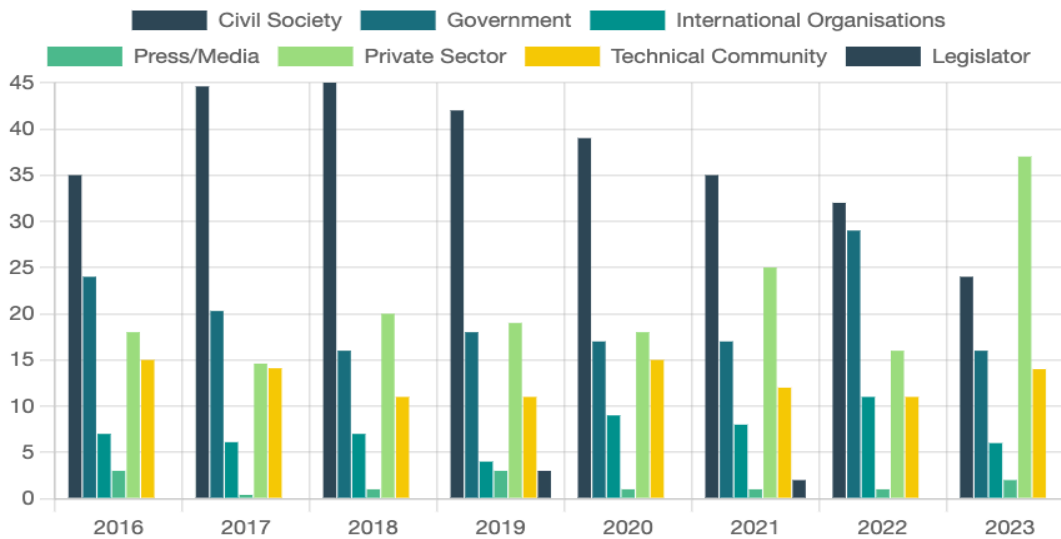
Figure 25 shows that **civil society and academia made up most of the participants** between 2016–2021. The **technical community and private sector have consistently attended in strong numbers** and in 2023, the private sector made up most participants, outnumbering civil society/academia for the first time in the period of study. Most notably, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the **private sector participation has grown** and civil society participation has decreased. Apart from 2023, **government** participation has always remained commensurate with the private sector participation. With the reintroduction of the Parliamentary Track in the IGF 2019 (Berlin), the participation of **legislators** has become more consistent and has been measured separately from other government representatives.

⁶⁷ <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/gender-survey-complete-11oct17-en.pdf>, <https://www.dotmagazine.online/issues/building-the-internet-of-tomorrow/article-28-nis2-directive-and-dns-industry/impact-of-women-on-dns#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20clear%20outcomes,women%20%E2%80%93%20and%20sky%2Drocketed%20to>

4- WHAT THE IGF TELLS US

► **Figure 27. Participation by stakeholder group as percentage, 2016–2023**

Stakeholder Groups participation by Year



4. b. Global South participation

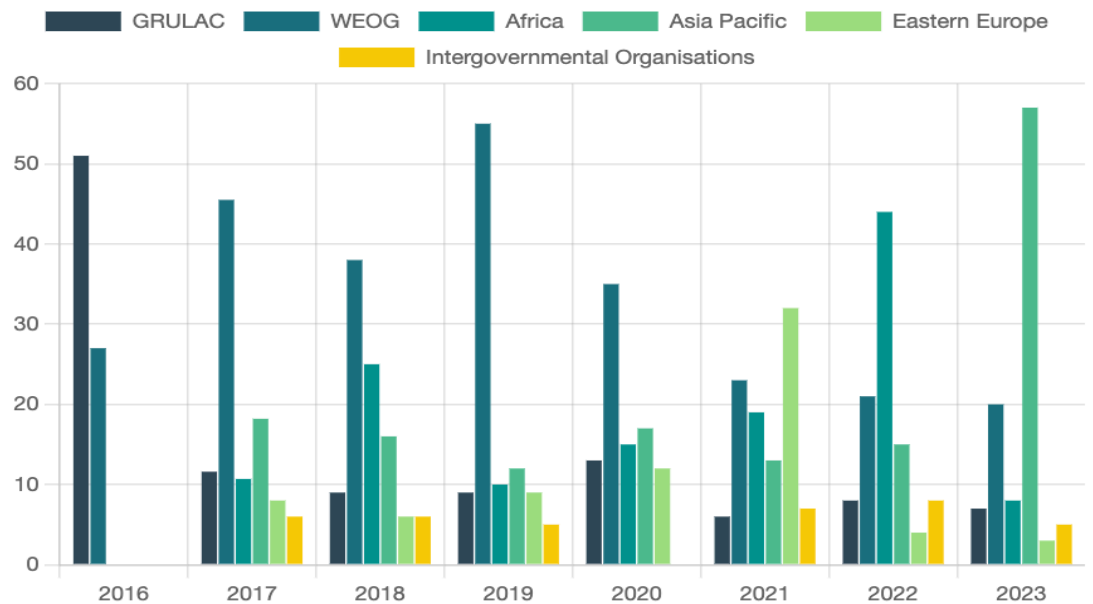
The IGF offers opportunities for stakeholders in the **Global South to participate in multistakeholder governance of the Internet**. As discussed in previous sections, NRIs are particularly active among the Global South and illustrate that participation in the IGF is of value.

The level of global representation observed in the IGF means that the forum has succeeded in enabling a more inclusive discussion of Internet governance challenges. Analysis of participation data identifies **six trends**.

1. When the IGF happens in a given region, there is more participation from that region. The regional participation statistics collected show the breakdown of participation from the regions of Africa, Asia Pacific, Eastern Europe, GRULAC (Group of Latin America and the Caribbean) and WEOG (Western Europe and Others). Figure 26 shows that participants from WEOG have had a significant presence at the IGF, though their participation appears to be increasingly on par with that of other regions starting in 2021. The data also shows that, for most years, the largest regional group correlates to the region of the host country. For example, the Asia Pacific region was the largest group of participants for the IGF held in Kyoto in 2023; the African Group was the largest group of participants in 2022 when the IGF was held in Ethiopia, and in 2021, when the IGF was hosted by Poland, the highest attendance rate was from Eastern Europe. This trend is expected to continue and shows the significant role of the host country in the IGF. The only exception appears to be the IGF 2017 (Guadalajara) where GRULAC was the third most represented region.

► **Figure 28: Regional participation as percentage, 2016–2023⁶⁸**

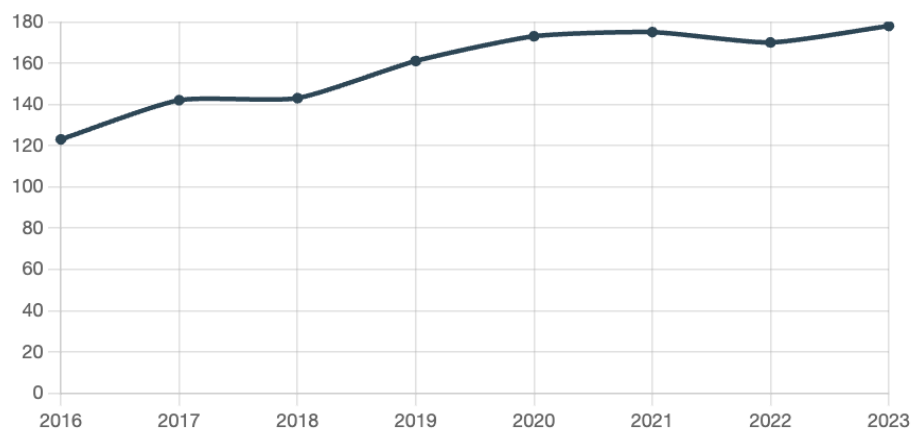
Participation of each Region by Year



2. Participation is increasingly diverse in terms of country-level representation. Figure 27 shows how the number of countries participating in the IGF has experienced a steady increase, with nearly 60 new countries represented since 2016. Over 160 countries have been consistently represented at the IGF since 2019, peaking at the Kyoto meeting in 2023 with participants from 178 countries. This increase in geographic representation is consistent with the high attendance of newcomers reported above.

► **Figure 29: Number of countries attending the IGF**

Number of countries attending IGF by Year



⁶⁸ The statistics for 2016 in the regional participation are not complete as we were not able to collect a full, accurate breakdown of the participants.

4- WHAT THE IGF TELLS US

3. The IGF offers a test bed for Global South initiatives. The IGF has been a key forum for exchanging ideas and frameworks around the challenges facing the Global South. The IGF has represented an opportunity for the Global South to present and receive feedback on ongoing regional developments. This is the case, for example, of the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020–2030 by the African Union, which highlights the importance of the African Internet Governance Forum to the regions.⁶⁹ Digital transformation strategies in Africa have been broadly discussed at the IGF, most recently at the IGF 2023 in Kyoto.⁷⁰ The role of the IGF as a test bed for forthcoming initiatives and regulation is reflected in the interviews conducted for this study:

'The IGF brings in Global South voices. It is a platform where people can come and discuss. Even governments can come, if they are planning to come up with some regulation, use it as a test bed, and find out what others are doing.' Interviewee 17, Civil Society, Asia Pacific.

4. Remote hubs have facilitated the participation of the Global South. Remote hubs, often organised via NRIs, enable the IGF participants in a given area to gather and collectively follow proceedings remotely during the annual Global IGF meetings. Remote hubs help support participation, in particular from the Global South, with the African region having the most remote hubs during the period of study. Although in 2023 the amount of remote hubs had decreased, their role in facilitating inclusion has empowered remote participants from across the globe.

5. The pandemic has improved the quality of remote participation. Remote participation has long been a distinctive feature of the IGF, and one that has become ever more prominent after the pandemic. A growth in remote participation was observed during the pandemic. While remote participation has gone back to pre-pandemic levels, the pandemic is perceived to have enhanced the integration of remote participants in the overall event and rendered it more effective. This is evidenced in some of the interviews.

'During the COVID period, I think it's fair to say that remote participation functioned pretty well, certainly better than other conferences that hadn't got used to wider remote participation [...] I think the IGF was one of the first to really seriously think on how to do it.' Interviewee 17, Civil Society, Asia Pacific.

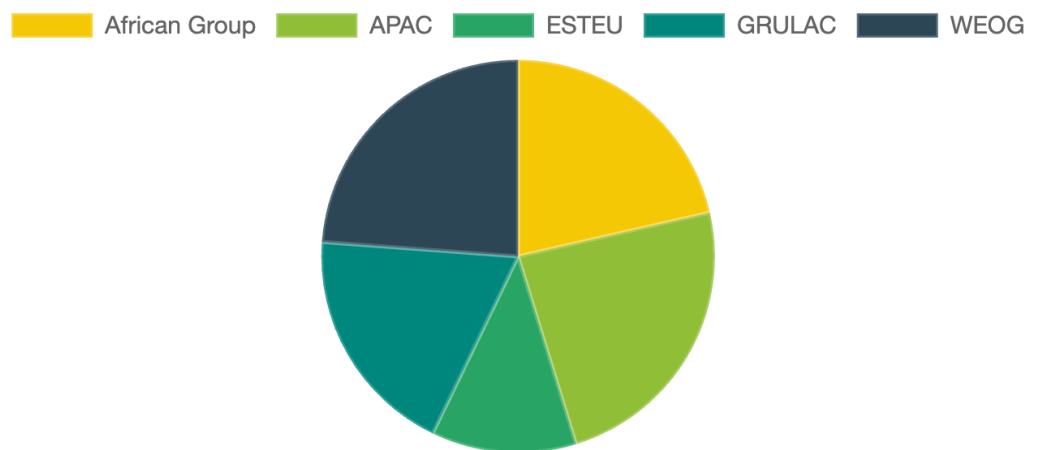
Remote participation is an essential tool for Global South participation, and for stakeholder groups with fewer resources to allocate to travel.

⁶⁹ https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/33909-ex_cl_decisions_986-1007_e.pdf

⁷⁰ See Open Forum "National Digital Transformation Strategies in Africa": (<https://intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2023-open-forum-124-national-digital-transformation-strategies-in-africa>). This session examined case studies and adoption of Digital Transformation Strategies and Roadmaps. It explored how the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030) was aligned with the UN Sustainable Development goals.

6. Active Global South participation in IGF leadership positions. The composition of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) shows active participation from the Global South in IGF leadership. In 2023, there were 40 members in the MAG as well as the chair and co-chair.⁷¹ Among these, over 50% were from the Global South, as illustrated by Figure 28. Leadership from the Global South is across stakeholder groups, with salient representation from Global South governments. Government representation plays a pivotal role in the digital transformation journeys of a country including in the area of capacity building and participating in global discussions on Internet Governance. The profiles of Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) members reveal key trends and many MAG members, particularly from Africa, have strong ties to national and regional initiatives.⁷²

► **Figure 30. Regional breakdown of MAG membership, 2023**



⁷¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/mag-2023-members>

⁷² In addition to the MAG, the IGF Leadership Panel is also made up of diverse members. The IGF Leadership Panel, chaired by Vint Cerf, is inclusive of the technical community, government, civil society, private sector member At Large and also some MAG members. See <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-leadership-panel-members>.

5. A world without the IGF

'If we didn't have the IGF, we would have to invent it.' Interviewee 19, Government, Europe.

In an ever-expanding and complex digital landscape, the IGF continues to stand out as a platform where people converge to discuss, learn and collaborate on key policy issues.

We **asked interviewees to contemplate a world without the IGF**. We then asked them what they would miss about it. This produced an array of considered, sometimes emotional, responses, which we drew into five key areas.

'Would people be able to move on without the IGF? That's the question. Are they prepared to go on without it?' Interviewee 23, Youth IGF, Africa.

Learning from, and being inspired by, others

'This is a space where we can learn together; [where] I can feel my voice being heard.' Interviewee 13, Youth IGF, Latin America and the Caribbean.

There is no shortage of conferences that cover the digital sector, but attendees feel one of the IGF's key attributes is how it serves as a **dynamic learning environment**.

The IGF provides a huge range of workshops and sessions: those that address technical complexities, explore a broad range of digital policy topics, and share best practices, among many others. **Informal discussions** are given space within the structure, and are viewed as **valuable in their own right** rather than ancillary to the main agenda.

Our thematic analysis (see above) shows a **significant degree of dynamism at the meetings**, with new and emerging topics often being given their first full hearing at the IGF. The diverse range of attendees then contributes an equally broad range of perspectives and so allows a new issue to be seen in a broader context almost immediately. **Attendees find this uniquely valuable**.

Were the IGF to disappear, it would create a gap in the global community's ability to collectively detect and review trends, risks and opportunities in the rapidly evolving digital policy and regulatory space. It would also remove a source of innovative thoughts from the Internet governance world:

'I would miss the various perspectives that I get on such a broad range of topics. Just sitting in a meeting, listening to the people talking, I generate pages of things to do, or ideas that should be pursued.' Interviewee 29, Technical, North America.

Networking and collaboration

'There's no place that brings this conglomeration of people together from different silos, even within tech, that I know of. You'd miss the ability to bring totally different groups of people together on one topic.' Interviewee 25, Government, North America.

The forum's deliberately open approach has resulted in **meeting spaces that contain few geographic or sectoral boundaries**. This is also reflected and to some degree imposed⁷³ – in scheduled events.

A culture of encouraging casual conversation, open discussion and maintaining the event as a neutral space, has had the result of bringing together **diverse voices** – from civil society, to business, to government, from the Global South and North – on topics of mutual interest. That has in turn **led to broader networking and collaboration opportunities** than are experienced at comparable events:

'We would lose an opportunity to engage with parts of the world that we don't necessarily directly have relationships with [...] It's hard to get people to do stuff if they don't know you and you don't know them. We'd lose that ability to connect to people in places that are not our obvious constituencies.' Interviewee 30, Intergovernmental Organisation.

The annual cadence of the IGF meetings – globally, regionally and nationally – has also helped organisations, especially smaller and less well-resourced ones, to organise and prepare, giving a broader range of voices the opportunity to be heard and have their issues more fully considered:

⁷³ Since at least 2017, there has been a workshop manual outlining guidelines that workshop proposers are expected to meet. One of the main criteria is diversity, including whether speakers are 'diverse in terms of views, gender, region, stakeholder group, age (e.g. youth) and physical ability (e.g. persons with disabilities)'.

5- A WORLD WITHOUT THE IGF

'We would lose a lot of very important user perspectives. And I think we would lose the crossover of the technical community getting together with the political part: having governments, having parliamentarians, being in the same room as a technical community.' Interviewee 31, Private Sector, Europe.

Global dialogue and cooperation

'If I am a policymaker, it's the one place I would end up going to have divergent views around a particular issue that then helps inform some of the policy, regulatory and business decisions that need to be made. To me, this is really essential for creating a neutral evolution of the Internet.' Interviewee 2, Technical Community, Africa.

As a global forum focused on ensuring diversity in thought and representation, the IGF is an **effective vehicle for global dialogue**. With significant digital disparities across the globe, the **IGF has enabled Internet governance to be more equitable, inclusive and accountable** than it would otherwise be.

The partnerships and collaborations that arise from the IGF, both regionally and globally, contribute to a **shared understanding of challenges and potential solutions** and shifting norms. The forum's multistakeholder model allows for open discussions that bridge gaps between different communities, preventing a siloed approach to Internet governance.

Breadth and impact on policy discourse

'A lot would be lost. Where would we have the luxury of discussing the breadth of Internet governance and digital policy issues?' Interviewee 32, Civil Society/Academia, Europe.

The **breadth of issues** dealt with at the IGF, often in some depth, is a highly valued aspect of the forum.

It serves as a space to address critical issues such as Data Governance, the Digital Divide, and Internet Accessibility, to name just three, and is constantly shifting topics as new issues emerge while others become less pertinent.

By bringing together a broad range of expertise and voices, the IGF can often prove **influential** in shaping the thoughts of key individuals in digital policy areas who then take home their insights. It enables those involved in the digital policy space to **stay up-to-date** on what is happening across the world and often meet the key people involved.

The forum also provides a degree of **public scrutiny**, making it easy for people to draw attention to potentially harmful approaches or policies – and, conversely, **encourage new thinking**. The IGF is instrumental in shaping the digital policies that govern our interconnected world:

'It would be much harder to actually have a sense of what the trends are, what the issues are, what the risks are, what the opportunities are in the digital policy and regulation space, or who the people are. Imagine the amount of time I'd have to spend on the Internet.' Interview 15, Civil Society, Africa.

Empowerment and knowledge distribution

'The knowledge sharing; I would miss that. You listen to someone from maybe North Africa, or you meet someone from Cambodia, or you meet someone from Canada. You are all looking at the same thing, but with different approaches. So you get to listen to something, pick and say: I can implement this back home.' Interviewee 18, Civil Society, Africa.

Over nearly two decades, the IGF has become a key platform where the technical community, business, government, end users and others can congregate to discuss all aspects of Internet governance.

It also provides a platform for advocacy and promoting voices that struggle to be heard in other fora. The loss of the IGF would lead to **a significant reduction in the broader understanding of the impact, on people across the globe, of new issues**, with cumulative effects over time.

'A lot of voices would be lost, and that would be the worst thing that could happen to the evolution of the Internet. And which voices do you think would be lost? Who would suffer most? Unfortunately, the same ones that are lost most of the time: the Global South, marginalised communities, those who do not have the means to shout from the rooftop and be heard.' Interviewee 44, Civil Society, Western European and Others Group.

As we navigate the complexities of the digital age, the continued existence and support of an established platform would help provide continuity while maintaining a collaborative, inclusive and accountable approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the interconnected world.

'The IGF must change, it must evolve, but not disappear.' Interviewee 13, Youth IGF, Latin America and the Caribbean.

6. Opportunities to evolve the IGF

The IGF's flexibility, as well as its openness to new ideas and approaches, has been behind much of the organisation's value to the broader Internet governance world.

The upcoming review and renewal of the IGF's mandate presents an opportunity – the third since it was created – to consider how the IGF can adapt and evolve so it can continue to serve the Internet of 2035.

A review of official reports, meeting summaries and workshop transcripts, as well as a specific question to interviewees about how the IGF could improve has pointed to four potential areas:

Greater global representation and diversity

Rotating meetings to different parts of the world has a significant impact on the number of new attendees and where they come from, expanding the IGF's influence and relevance, and allowing for broader understanding of Internet governance issues across the globe.

The IGF's open and flexible model allows for topics of interest to local attendees to be discussed, and its focus on knowledge sharing presents significant opportunities to cover new and interesting ideas.

Clearer recognition of this dynamic, with a conscious focus on taking the IGF to underserved parts of the world, as well as ensuring that topics of local interest are given attention early in the planning process, would continue to build on this positive contribution and strengthen the IGF as a whole by keeping it relevant and up-to-date.

More effective capture of discussions

This report was able to uncover a wealth of information and knowledge by using modern technology and techniques, including Artificial Intelligence, to download, ingest and analyse the extensive output from the Global IGF, and its Regional and National equivalents.

While some of that knowledge is picked up and shared by attendees at the time, much of it will be missed and its value will fade over time. Considering how the IGF produces and shares its work output, and in what ways it could be most effectively captured and shared, would greatly contribute to the IGF's overall value, and may make its own case for greater resource allocation.

Greater attention could also be given to capturing how the IGF influences, and is influenced by, discussions in other fora – including its own national and regional meetings – in order to better understand and improve the IGF's role in the overall Internet governance ecosystem.

Improved curation and ongoing innovation in meeting design

Interviewee recollection and content analysis both point to the risk that the IGF's openness can lead to oversaturation of current topics, or duplication of efforts, resulting in an expansive agenda that reduces, rather than enhances, overall understanding of a topic.

Efforts to put a firmer structure around conference sessions could, however, limit one of the IGF's most valuable attributes: its flexibility. The IGF has been able to discuss topical issues in a more timely fashion than other more traditional institutions and has been open to approaching topics in different ways: such as through Dynamic Coalitions, Best Practice Forums, and through different 'Tracks' – Parliamentary and Youth as two examples.

Careful consideration could be given to how the IGF balances its openness and flexibility while remaining effective and timely. Careful curation would likely enhance the IGF's overall appeal and value but should avoid being too prescriptive.

6- OPPORTUNITIES TO EVOLVE THE IGF

Greater political weight given to outcomes

Given the accumulation of thought, understanding, knowledge and expert opinion that the IGF consistently manages to achieve, on both emerging issues and perennial topics, its outcomes are too often not properly examined by other institutions.

Consideration of how the IGF's output can be better captured and communicated would benefit both the IGF and other organisations that are seeking to better understand specific issues, or harmonise approaches, or ensure a more diverse representation of views.

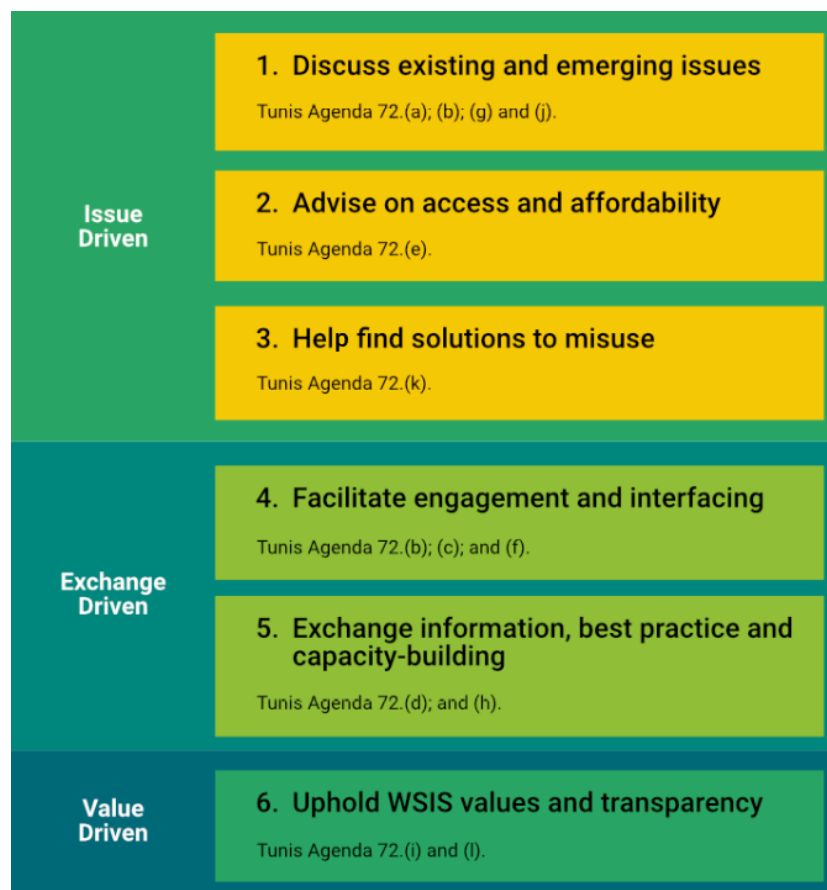
Ensuring that greater political weight is given to IGF outcomes would require looking at how the IGF structures its work and how stakeholders could get the most out of their time at a conference. It would also be worth considering how the IGF and its attendees interact with other organisations, both before and after meetings, and if those interactions can themselves be captured.

7. Methodology

This report set out to document the direct and indirect ways in which the IGF has generated a positive impact. The project focuses on 2016–2023 – the period following the latest WSIS review – and considers, when relevant, developments since the creation of the IGF.

Paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda (2005), which establishes the mandate of the IGF, is the departing point of the study, and used as the basis for the Impact Framework illustrated below in Figure 28. The Impact Framework synthesises the 12 clauses of Paragraph 72 into six impact areas. The various case studies introduced throughout the text indicate how the IGF has generated impact across those six areas.

► **Figure 31: Evaluation framework – impact areas**



The report relies on a dual-method approach to construct a comprehensive report on the IGF's value:

7- METHODOLOGY

- **Interviews with Internet governance experts.** A total of 44 interviews, with 48 participants, as certain interviews included two interviewees, were conducted with frequent IGF participants and Internet governance thought leaders.
- **Large-scale document analysis of public IGF documents.** A total of 1,549 documents were analysed using large-scale analysis techniques and AI to explore thematic and participation trends.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis of both interviews and public documents was complemented by **desk research** to develop the case studies included in the report and provide supporting evidence to the points raised by the interviewees.

The following sections describe the methodologies employed for each.

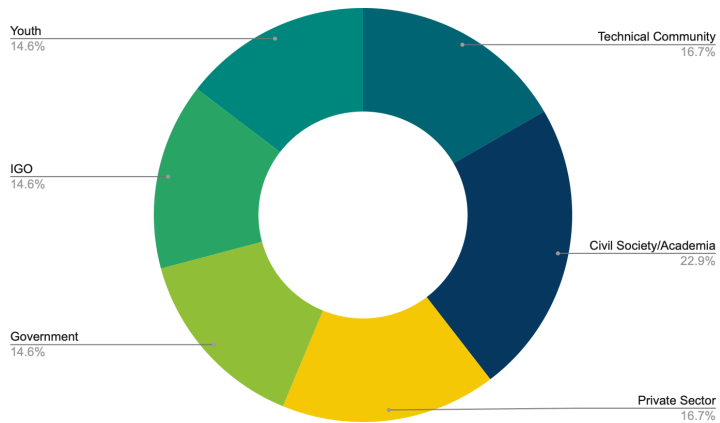
7. a. Expert interviews

Individuals interviewed have attended at least two IGFs and/or have been involved in Internet governance leadership for several years. While the IGF presents uneven and fluctuating participation patterns, the project's sampling design sought to ensure balanced representation of stakeholders and regional groups, with special emphasis on documenting perspectives from the Global South.⁷⁴

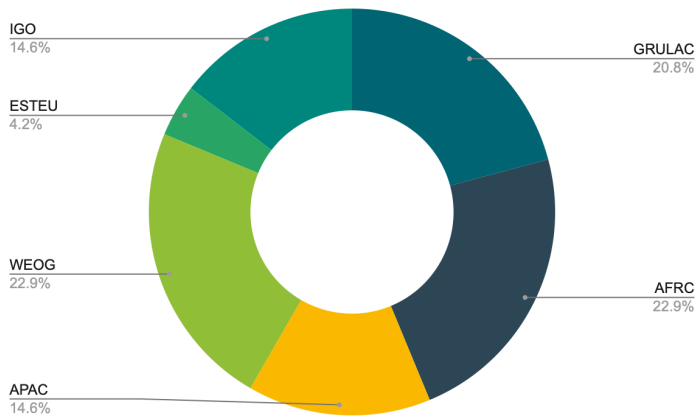
Whenever patterns emerge, impact analysis references how the various regions and stakeholder groups have participated, been affected or benefited.

The interview participants came from a diverse variety of sectors and regions encompassing the wider policy and regulatory environment: key stakeholders were selected from the technical community, the private sector, government, civil society, Youth Initiatives, and IGOs – such as representatives from UNESCO, ITU, UN Staff and the IGF Secretariat (full interview list attached as Annex 4; names are anonymised).

⁷⁴ This does not necessarily follow the actual participation statistics of IGF but rather ensures diversity.



In terms of regional groups, the interviews included a diverse selection of stakeholders from Western Europe, US and Canada (WEOG),⁷⁵ Eastern Europe (ESTE U) and the Global South: Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC), Asia Pacific (APAC), and Africa (AFRC), which makes up almost 60% of all interviews.⁷⁶



To ensure that interviewees were well-versed in Internet governance, the team prioritised interviewing individuals who also held leadership roles within the IGF – such as current and former members of the MAG, points of contact for Dynamic Coalitions (DCs) or Policy Networks (PNs), Youth Initiatives and NRIs – or that held leadership roles within the Internet industry – such as members of Internet governance organisations and the private sector.

⁷⁵ As per the IGF’s participant segmentation, WEOG stands for Western Europe and Other Group and includes the US and Canada.
⁷⁶ The Global South excludes Eastern European countries, even though some are considered developing economies as per the World Bank, and face similar challenges to Global South participants.

7- METHODOLOGY

So far as feasible, the research team sought to ensure parity in the representation of women. The sample does not contain non-binary participants.



The interview questionnaire covered a series of closed and open-ended questions designed to assess perceptions around the value and impact of the IGF and the extent to which the forum has met its mandate. The questions also sought to document success stories and recommendations for improvement (interview questions attached as Annex 2). Open-ended questions provided rich qualitative data for analysis; when applicable, statements by interviewees were supported with external data sources and insights from the text analysis. The interviews served to identify success stories – introduced in this report in the form of case studies – which illustrate one or more areas of impact of the IGF and reflect recent successes of the forum.

The interviews took place in a hybrid format: the majority (29) of the interviews were conducted in person at the 18th Annual Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum, in Kyoto, Japan, from 8 to 12 October 2023. The rest (15) were conducted online.

The team analysed interview responses through thematic clustering. This entailed identifying emerging themes and narratives around success stories, and exploring the impact of the IGF across specific regions or stakeholder groups. The team also employed text analysis techniques using the DNSRF's Data Analytics Platform (DAP.LIVE), which enabled thematic searching across all interview transcripts and identification of phrases of similar semantic meaning through the use of AI.

Interviews were recorded for note-taking purposes. Interviewees were asked for permission to record interviews, and for use of quotes in anonymised format (e.g. 'Interviewee 23, Civil Society, Africa').

7. b. Large-scale document analysis

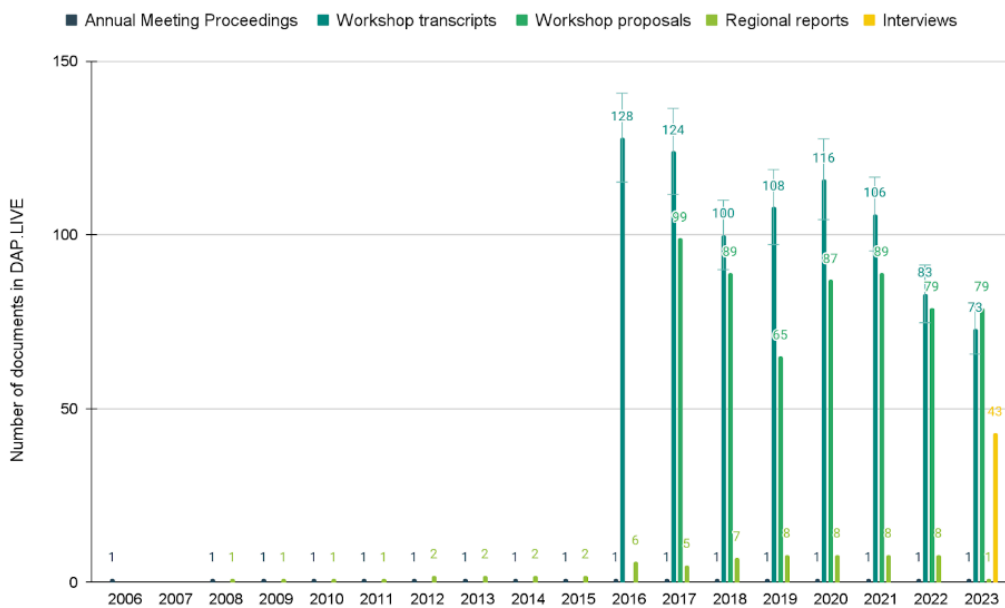
In parallel with the interviews, the research team undertook desk research enhanced with automated text analysis using both AI/ML and standard large-scale document analysis techniques on the DAP.LIVE platform (see below). A total of 1,548 documents were ingested into the DAP.LIVE system from publicly available resources, primarily the IGF's website and – where applicable – the websites of Regional IGFs.

As shown in Figure 29 below, the documents were comprised of global and Regional IGF reports and primary data collection:

- For the Global IGF, 1,486 documents, including 587 workshop proposals, 838 workshop transcripts, 44 interviews, 17 Annual Meeting Proceedings reports.
- For National and Regional Initiatives, 63 documents, which included NRI Annual Reports, when available, and statistics on growth of NRIs.

7- METHODOLOGY

► **Figure 32: Data incorporated into DAP.LIVE for large-scale document analysis**



In all cases, the analysis considered documentation from 2016–2023, except for NRI reports which were collected, as available, beginning in 2006. The availability of IGF publications varies year by year and region by region, which means some years and/or geographical areas are better documented than others. Analysis relies on available data; thematic analysis considers relative phrase frequency.

The text analysis was intended to capture (a) thematic evolution and (b) participation data.

7. b. i. Analysis of the IGF's thematic evolution

The report tracks the evolution of themes discussed at the IGF. Thematic evolution analysis was conducted using text analysis to understand whether the IGF has been reflective of contemporary issues, trailing behind or leading in the discussion of policy challenges.

To analyse thematic evolution at the Global IGF event, the analysis considered what constitutes the core of the IGF's agenda: Opening Sessions, Main Sessions, workshop proposals, workshop transcripts, and High-Level Session Transcripts. The table below juxtaposes the quantity of sessions analysed in DAP.LIVE with the overall number of sessions held from 2016–2023 (represented as the ratio of documents in DAP.LIVE to the total sessions).

Types of session	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
High-Level Leaders' Track	1/*	2/-	3/-	9/-	4/8	6/9	3/5	5/5
Workshop	96/96	94/99	68/71	64/64	83/84	73/83	53/79	48/78
Main Session	7/-	7/8	8/8	10/10	7/7	8/8	5/5	1/6

The data collected was contrasted with the number of sessions reported by the IGF Secretariat. As shown in the table above, data is generally complete for most years, with the exception:

- High-Level Leaders Track in 2016–2019 and Main Session in 2016, where data is not available on the IGF's Attendance and Programme Statistics Annual Reports or the sessions did not exist in their current form.
- Workshop sessions in 2022–2023 where the capture rates dropped to approximately 60%, primarily due to the unavailability of complete transcripts from sessions.

Other types of sessions, such as Dynamic Coalitions, were purposely excluded to avoid topic-specific sessions from skewing the data. Individual segments of the report, such as case studies, do at times look at the entire dataset of documents uploaded. The authors have indicated so, whenever applicable.

Data analysis has also been employed to analyse NRI Annual Reports, such as the African IGF, the Asia Pacific IGF (APrIGF), EuroDIG and LACIGF. Analysis also considered the growth of NRIs over the years and thematic trends in Regional Reports.

The analysis identified a total of 29 themes, outlined in Annex 3. Themes were developed through an iterative process, using a combination of automated and human analysis. Automated analysis pulled out the top 5,000 four-word phrases from the workshop transcripts for each Global IGF.⁷⁷ Automated methods were used to eliminate stock phrases and duplicates. The research team then used the dataset to create the final set of word dictionaries for the analysis, and clustered the phrases into themes.

⁷⁷ Workshop transcripts were rich in length and considered an adequate sample to illustrate thematic issues in each Global IGF event.

7- METHODOLOGY

The thematic dictionaries were used to track specific phrases or words in the documents. The graphs included in the report considered relative frequency, which refers to the number of times a given word or phrase appears in proportion to the total number of words considered.

The thematic dictionaries were also used to power AI-based analysis. The themes and terms identified were used as prompts in the system, allowing the research team to identify phrases of similar semantic meaning. This facilitated the identification of quotes and documents to review and reference throughout the report across the large dataset that was being considered, without having to review documents manually.

7. b. ii. Participation data

Participation data was intended to characterise attendance per region, especially the three Global South regions (GRULAC, APAC and AFRC), and per stakeholder group. Data on participation in the IGF was studied to determine the distribution among regional and stakeholder groups annually. Trends were discerned in relation to the gender and diversity of attendees, with a particular focus on the primary participant groups and newcomers to the annual Global IGF meetings, as well as the composition of Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) members. Additionally, both onsite and remote participation were assessed independently. Participation data has been collected from the statistics provided at the IGF Annual Meeting Proceedings reports. Moreover, the team took a proactive approach and has been in contact with the IGF Secretariat to fill in the gaps of missing data. The data was manually input into the DAP.LIVE system for analysis.

7. c. Desk-based research

Lastly, the report was supported by desk-based research, including a literature review of academic articles, policy reports and UN and IGF publications that touch upon the impact of the IGF. When applicable, these documents are cited throughout the report to support research findings.

7. d. DAP and Artificial Intelligence-powered text analysis

DAP.LIVE is an analysis and visualisation platform developed by the DNS Research Federation, with advanced data and text analysis capabilities. The DAP.LIVE platform supported the research team in trend and large-scale document analysis by carrying out a bottom-up inquiry, searching for most frequently occurring key terms at the IGF. This contributed to building evidence-based narratives for the IGF's impact and value generation. With the help of AI, the team was able to run searches by semantic meaning. DAP.LIVE was also used to create the visualisations included in this report.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to measure the impact of the IGF. While this proved to be a complex task – with many of the experts consulted for the project warning concrete impact would be hard to demonstrate – **the report found strong evidence of the IGF's value.**

The IGF has indeed delivered. The IANA case study included in the report is a vivid reminder of what the world was like before the IGF. **Internet governance was contentious**, there was a marked distrust between multilateral spheres and the Internet organisations, and dialogue proved especially complex and challenging.

The IGF has succeeded in **enabling inclusive and constructive dialogue**. This dialogue allowed **difficult issues to be digested**, such as the IANA Transition itself. It has enabled the Global South to have a voice in global decision-making, as illustrated by ongoing conversations on AI governance. The IGF acknowledges that no stakeholder can do it alone, and the report overwhelmingly demonstrates there is **general agreement that everyone's views have been enriched by diverse stakeholder and regional perspectives** brought forth by the IGF. Particularly through the NRIs, the forum has enabled for some underrepresented, and often heavily controlled, communities to engage in discussions that would otherwise have been considered impossible.

The space carved out for the Global South in what were previously Global North-dominated conversations is palpable. From the onset, the IGF made concerted efforts to raise Global South participation. This structural measure has not only worked, but **Global South participation has greatly enriched global debates at the IGF** and many other fora. The Internet is a global network that needs to consider global demands. As the world becomes increasingly polarised, spaces that guarantee expert-driven, global dialogue will become invaluable.

But most importantly, the **IGF has a tangible impact**. Unleashing **connectivity solutions** through its support for Internet Exchange Points and community networks; organically **fostering national and regional Internet governance debates**; and **creating the next generation of Global South leaders** are three concrete examples covered in this report. The IGF also shows concrete evidence of contributing to shaping Internet governance policy decisions, whether across government, private sector or Internet organisations. Or better – sometimes in cooperation with these sectors, as seen with the Christchurch Call.

8- CONCLUSION

The IGF emerges as a particularly **dynamic space**, which sets it apart from other UN-led and Internet community fora. The thematic dynamism demonstrated by the large-scale text analysis produced for this report indicates that the IGF has been **highly adaptable and sensitive to emerging issues** calling for global discussion. This dynamism is also observed in perennial concerns of the IGF, such as Internet Access, which also show evolution overtime. This adaptability was on full display during the global pandemic, where the IGF capitalised on its remote participation experience to continue offering much needed global dialogue.

So much is expected of the space that it is sometimes possible to lose sight of all it has delivered.

There are more **opportunities for the IGF to develop** and for further strengthening the IGF so that it remains a global forum that is fit for purpose, particularly as the world enters a complex international landscape, with the resurgence of geopolitical tensions and ever-faster technological advancement. This report expects to serve as the basis for stocktaking, and to open a door for conversation about how to evolve the IGF going forward.

9. Report annexes

Annex 1. Impact Framework by item in the Tunis Agenda (Paragraph 72)

I. ISSUE-DRIVEN:

1. Discuss existing and emerging issues

Tunis Agenda 72. (a) Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet; (b) Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body; (g) Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations; and (j) Discuss, inter alia, issues relating to critical Internet resources.

2. Advise on access and affordability

Tunis Agenda 72. (e) Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.

3. Help find solutions to misuse

Tunis Agenda 72. (k). Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users.

9- REPORT ANNEXES

II. EXCHANGE-DRIVEN

4. Facilitate engagement and interfacing

Tunis Agenda 72. (b) Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body; (c) Interface with appropriate intergovernmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview; and (f) strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries.

5. Exchange information, best practice and capacity building

Tunis Agenda 72. (d) Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities; and (h) Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.

III. VALUE-DRIVEN

6. Uphold WSIS values and transparency

Tunis Agenda 72. (i) Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes; and (l) Publish its proceedings.

Annex 2. Interview questions

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

1. a. Policy impact on region/stakeholder group: *'I can think of at least one example of a useful/relevant policy impact that the IGF has had in my region or for the stakeholder group I represent.'*

Examples of policy impact:

- ** The IGF facilitating cooperation between governments and big tech/Internet companies;*
- ** The IGF leading to new regulatory solutions;*
- ** The IGF facilitating access to knowledge, technical resources or capacity building in ways that impact regional or national communities.*

1. b. Support for mandate renewal. *'I support the extension of the IGF's mandate.'*

Follow-up question: Why do you [support/not support/ feel neutral about] the extension of the IGF's mandate?

Options: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

2. Context. How would you describe your role at the IGF? How, and in what capacity, have you contributed to the space?

3. Perceptions of what IGF is here to do. What do you understand to be the role of the IGF? What do we engage in this forum for?

4. Extent to which the IGF has met its mandate. According to the Tunis Agenda, the IGF is meant to: (a) facilitate discussions on existing and emerging Internet policy issues; (b) advise on access and affordability; (c) help find solutions to various forms of Internet abuse and misuse; and (d) facilitate exchange and capacity building. To what extent do you find the IGF has had an impact in these areas?

9- REPORT ANNEXES

5. Success Stories. Can you point us to any success stories that illustrate the impact the IGF has had over the years? Do you have any concrete examples of the IGF having an impact on local or regional Internet policies or on the stakeholder group or region you represent?

6. Areas for improvement. What is one thing that the IGF could do better?

7. A world without the IGF. If the IGF ended, what would you miss? What would be lost from a policy perspective? What would be lost for the region or stakeholder group you represent?

Annex 3. Text analysis – 30 themes

A total of 30 themes are outlined in Section 6 (Methodology). Themes were developed through an iterative process, using a combination of automated and human analysis.

1. Access/Connecting the Unconnected/Digital Divide
2. Accessibility
3. Health
4. Data Governance
5. Freedom of Expression
6. Net Neutrality
7. Gender/Race
8. Open Code/Open Source
9. Artificial Intelligence
10. Human Rights
11. Children Safety
12. Climate Change
13. Internet Fragmentation
14. Internet Infrastructure
15. Privacy, Surveillance, Data Protection
16. Content Moderation, Disinformation, Online Harms
17. Internet Shutdowns
18. Regions/Countries
19. Cyber Capacities
20. Internet Use and Impact
21. Stakeholders
22. Structure
23. Cybercrime
24. Internet Values/Nature
25. Trust/Safety
26. Law Enforcement
27. Pandemic
28. Procedural
29. United Nations

9- REPORT ANNEXES

Annex 4. Interviewees

Organisation/Affiliation	Stakeholder group	Geographic region	Gender	Interviewee number
Caribbean CTO	Technical Community	GRULAC	M	16
Universidad de San Andres (Academia)	Civil Society/Academia	GRULAC	F	35
Digital Action	Civil Society/Academia	GRULAC	F	8
ALAI, represents private sector well	Private Sector	GRULAC	M	11
Government of Argentina	Government	GRULAC	F	12
Foreign Service Brazil	Government	GRULAC	M	10
Former MAG, Civil Society	Civil Society/Academia	AFRC	F	15
ISOC Uganda, African IGF MAG, CIPESA	Civil Society/Academia	AFRC	F	18
APC to speak of Community Networks SIG	Civil Society/Academia	AFRC	M	3
Mozilla	Private Sector	AFRC	F	28
Government of Egypt	Government	AFRC	F	1
Kontemporary TM in Nigeria	Private Sector	AFRC	M	36
APNIC Foundation	Technical Community	APAC	F	7
Internet Society	Civil Society/Academia	APAC	F	17
Google/Father of Internet	Private Sector	WEOG	M	29
The Atlantic Council, DFRLab/The Lisbon Council	Civil Society/Academia	WEOG	M	44
ETNO	Private Sector	WEOG	F	31
Diplo/GFCE	Civil Society/Academia	ESTEUE	F	32
IGF Secretariat	IGO	IGO	F	45
IGF Secretariat	IGO	IGO	M	6
UNESCO	IGO	IGO	M	37
OECD	IGO	IGO	F	30
APNIC	Technical Community	APAC	F	20
Microsoft	Private Sector	WEOG	M	9

Organisation/Affiliation	Stakeholder group	Geographic region	Gender	Interviewee number
Microsoft	Private Sector	WEOG	F	9
Government of Switzerland	Government	WEOG	M	19
Government of Switzerland	Government	WEOG	M	19
Roadblox	Private Sector	WEOG	M	27
ITU	IGO	IGO	M	38
Internet Society	Technical Community	AFRC	M	2
.ASIA	Technical Community	APAC	F	5
Access Now	Civil Society/Academia	APAC	M	26
Access Now	Civil Society/Academia	APAC	M	26
CENTR	Technical Community	ESTEUE	F	39
CoE	IGO	IGO	M	33
UN	Government	WEOG	M	40
AU	Government	WEOG	F	25
ISOC Global (from Latam)	Technical Community	GRULAC	M	4
CGI.br	Technical Community	GRULAC	M	41
IGF/UN Consultant	Civil Society/Academia	WEOG	M	42
DR Congo Youth, IGF 2023	Youth	AFRC	M	22
Togo Youth IGF, IGF 2023	Youth	AFRC	F	23
Youth LAC IGF, former president of Youth SIG, organised 2 editions of Youth LACIGF, attended several Internet governance events	Youth	GRULAC	M	13
Liberia IGF, IGF 2023	Youth	AFRC	M	14
Youth LACIGF, IGF 2023	Youth	GRULAC	M	34
Asia Pacific Youth, IGF 2023	Youth	APAC	F	24
Youth IGF Ethiopia	Youth	AFRC	F	21
ICANN	IGO	IGO	M	43



**DNS
RESEARCH
FEDERATION**