

## Access

Despite the rapid growth of the Internet, with an estimated one billion users today worldwide, there are still some five billion people who remain without access to this important tool for economic growth and social development. Increasing access to the Internet remains one of the biggest challenges for the Internet community and, as assessed by participants in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the single most important Internet-related issue for most people, in particular in developing countries.

Participants in the IGF process have explored the various barriers to access that people face in terms of availability and affordability, including connection costs, national policies that influences the spread of the Internet, and the role of open standards in facilitating access. These issues, among others, are expected to be spotlighted in Rio de Janeiro. While many have agreed that building up infrastructure is indispensable for bridging the “digital divide”, especially in rural areas, they have also emphasized that those efforts must be accompanied by education on ways to use the Internet. In other words, without capacity building in the fundamental skills necessary to use the technology the Internet brings, considerable portions of the population will never have access.

Participants in the IGF have identified the following topics for possible discussion during the “access” session in Rio de Janeiro: special connectivity problems faced by Africa, landlocked, island and least developed countries; access challenges in rural areas; skills development, training and capacity building in the use of technology; low-cost access solutions; mobile and wireless access; international infrastructure reliability, connectivity policy and costs; local and regional interconnection and cross-border regulation; the economic impact of access; and issues related to Internet neutrality.

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