

IGF 2021 DC main session: DC briefing paper template

DC on Core Internet Values

1. About the DC

What is the Internet? What makes it what it is? What are its architectural principles? What are the core values? And what is happening to the core values in the process of its evolution? What is it that needs to be preserved and what changes are inevitable? What does the Internet Community say about what can't be changed? How could changes and improvements be brought about without compromising the core values? How would the different positions between stakeholders be reconciled to commit to core Internet values?

These are just some of the topics we address in the DC on Core Internet Values.

2. Relevant issue area(s) and policy (questions)

The Dynamic Coalition on Core Internet Values has provided responses addressing several issues put forth in this year's IGF Issue areas. Of particular note, the following questions were addressed in preparation of the DC main session:

Social inequality and the pandemic

1. What can be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic context about the relationship between digital inequality and social and economic inequality?
2. Similarly, what lessons can be drawn with respect to the pandemic and Internet-related human rights? What does this suggest about policy approaches for digitalisation and digital inclusion?

Inclusion, rights and stakeholder roles and responsibilities

1. What are/should be the responsibilities of governments, businesses, the technical community, civil society, the academic and research sector and community-based actors with regard to digital inclusion and respect for human rights, and what is needed for them to fulfil these in an efficient and effective manner?

Promoting equitable development and preventing harm

3- What values and norms should guide the development and use of technologies to enable this?

Defining universal and meaningful access

- What are the key elements that constitute universal and meaningful Internet access? How can it be measured?

- How is the concept evolving in time and what does this evolution mean for policy?

Digital sovereignty

1. What is meant by digital sovereignty? What implications does it have for the global nature of the Internet, for Internet governance itself, and the effectiveness of the multistakeholder approach?
2. From an opposite angle, what are the implications of the Internet and digitalisation for national sovereignty?

Assessing Internet governance approaches and mechanisms and fostering inclusiveness

1. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of existing Internet governance approaches and mechanisms?
2. What can be done, and by whom, to foster more inclusive Internet governance at the national, regional and international levels?

Technical Internet governance

1. How can the technical governance of the Internet (e.g. the development of standards and protocols, and the management of critical resources) take into account the needs and views of all stakeholders?

3. DC contribution

The DC on Core Internet Values has been monitoring and mapping Internet evolution in light of its main mandate: What are the Core Values? And what is happening to the Core Values in the process of its evolution? What is it that needs to be preserved and what changes are inevitable?

This year, the mismatches between Internet scale and efforts to bridge the Digital Divide have become more evident and painful. Some governments and other stakeholders have done a true Internet-scale matching effort to bridge, others not. This is also true for the effects of misinformation and lack of access to knowledge. This is unfortunate when the World has been increasingly reliant on the Internet as a consequence to the Global Pandemic.

DC-CIV The 6F framework and ISOC's IWN and Toolkit help understand the ways in which some proposals for legislation and regulation (including platforms' internals) work or fail.

In bridging the gap, all actors have the responsibility to keep the Internet as open as it has been so far in order to include everyone and to foster innovation. This is really based on the values and Norms of Openness, Interoperability, Robustness and reliability, User-centricity, free, end to end connectivity etc. Openness and interoperability are key to a universal and meaningful access.

However, the DC-CIV has noticed some significant erosion of the values it has been tracking.

Some governments and organisations have used the term "Digital Sovereignty" as a term to improve a country's commercial success and independence according to its own laws. However,

in practice, Digital Sovereignty has also been used by some to push an agenda that erodes some Core Internet Values, for example Openness and interoperability and the Global nature of the Internet. The Multistakeholder model has been accused of fostering the globalisation agenda, as a contrast to a purported safer “national agenda” which is advertised as defending citizen rights better. The Coalition’s view is that any erosion of Core Internet Values does not serve the Internet well, and neither does it serve the Public Interest and end user rights.

The original approach developed within DC-CIV helps assess the match or mismatch between governance mechanisms and the Internet’s properties, thus improving design. Similarly, the discussions in the DC-CIV involve a measurement of the evolution of the Internet’s technical operations, thus our work helps calibrate and design instruments and mechanisms.

The view in our community is that any work relating to Technical Internet Governance needs to recognise the Internet’s Core Values as these take into account the needs and views of all stakeholders. Unfortunately we are seeing an increasing number of instances where Technical Internet Governance is used to serve vested interests - and therefore actively benchmarking Technical Internet Governance developments against Core Internet Values can serve as an early notification that a degradation is likely.