Youth IGF initiatives and other youth-focused formations

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AT THE IGF

LOOKING AT EXISTING EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

IGF Secretariat in collaboration with the NRI communities

First Edition, 2017
This publication is a result of several rounds of public consultations that the IGF Secretariat\(^1\) conducted in 2017. The consultations were initiated through the NRIs mailing list, with many of the NRIs having disseminated this call to other communities of interest. Members of many initiatives\(^2\) reflected by this publication actively liaised with the IGF Secretariat, participated in gathering practices, and helped develop this publication.

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Youth IGF initiatives and other youth-focused formations:
Looking at existing examples of practices

While the impact of the Internet on youth has been discussed for quite some time at the annual meetings of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), where young people have attended as well, it is only relatively recently in the history of the IGF that young people have become engaged in actual working processes. There is an increasing recognition by the IGF community of the importance of engaging young people in its working processes – from understanding key issues, to planning events and actively participating. Moreover, a variety of approaches have been undertaken to include the views and voices of youth in Internet policy discussions at the IGF annual meeting and during the preparatory process.

The most visible and ongoing engagement of youth has taken place at the national, subregional, and regional levels, where Youth IGF initiatives focus on bringing together young people to discuss Internet governance and policy issues. Besides these types of practices, many efforts have been invested by the wider IGF community in supporting youth to attend the IGF’s annual meetings, as well as in creating various programmes at the national, regional, or international level in order to train, educate, and inform young people about Internet governance processes and substantive topics.

This document provides a high level perspective on some of these youth-focused initiatives, and describes some of the existing practices for incorporating youth into Internet-focused discussions that have developed within the broader IGF community.
This document is a product of collaboration between the organisers and community members of various IGF National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs), supported by the IGF Secretariat’s Focal Point to the NRIs. Additionally, it is a work in progress or a “living document.”

Inputs from others engaged with youth initiatives are invited to extend and augment the examples provided by contacting the IGF Secretariat.³

Who are “youth?”

The term “youth” is defined and described differently across countries and regions, taking into account cultural, social, demographic, and other aspects.⁴ Thus, the questions of definition and description of the term “youth” should remain with the communities.

Different models of organization

As outlined in the introduction, within the IGF there are various practices on how to engage youth and integrate them into IGF processes. These are mainly recognized⁵ as IGF youth initiatives and other formations. Their essence will be reflected by this document.

*Youth IGF initiatives* led by youth or for youth, are expected to follow the core IGF principles – or in other words, the principles and practices of being open, transparent, inclusive, and non-commercial. They work in accordance with the bottom-up consensus process of the IGF. These criteria are closely reflected by the IGF NRIs Toolkit.⁶

³ Contact email address: igf@unog.ch
⁴ For example, the Youth Coalition on Internet Governance (YCIG) define the age range of youth to fall between the 13 and 35. The rationale is based on consideration of the fluidity of youth as it relates to various regional, developmental, and cultural contexts.
⁵ The IGF stakeholder group classification: government, civil society, private sector, and the technical community.
⁶ The Toolkit is available in all six official UN languages on the IGF website.
In principle, youth IGF initiatives are organised by organizing committees composed of at least three members coming from different stakeholder groups, or from young people with different professional backgrounds and/or interests, depending on the model implemented (see Practice I and Practice II below). The committees are either of mixed composition, consisting of members belonging to youth as per their internal youth definition and members coming from outside of that scope, or they are completely composed of young people. It is important to note that the diversified composition of the organizing committees does not necessarily follow the standard IGF classification of the stakeholder groups. In some cases, it brings together youth with different professional interests or backgrounds, which will be illustrated in the examples below.

**Other types of the youth engagement in the IGF** includes many substantive tracks the NRIs are organizing within their annual IGF meetings and intersessional work, as well as the Internet governance-related capacity building projects many stakeholders are conducting for youth participants (see Practice III and Practice IV).
Some of the key points regarding the existing practices on youth engagement are presented below in four separate sections, as per the outcomes of the several rounds of consultations with the communities.

The first round of consultations identified four existing practices:

- **Practice I**
  Youth initiatives organised by the national, subregional, and regional IGF initiatives

- **Practice II**
  Independently organised youth initiatives

- **Practice III**
  Integration of youth into the NRIs' preparatory processes or programmes

- **Practice IV**
  Additional projects to build youth participation in Internet governance

The community also highlighted *other supporting programmes* regarding youth engagement in the Internet governance sphere, to be recognized as valuable to many. These are reflected under the section that follows Practice IV.
Some of the national, subregional, and regional IGF initiatives are organizing programmes within their annual IGF meetings, specifically focused on youth. The organisers are in these cases, the NRIs’ multistakeholder organizing teams. They develop specific tracks for young people, asking them to provide their reflections on the bottom-up agenda built by the wider community. For example, the Netherlands Youth IGF is organised by the national IGF of Netherlands. Young people are given dedicated slots to discuss the major areas of interests that the wider Netherlands IGF community has chosen, taking into account the annual meeting programme. One important element of this organizational structure is that all other stakeholders that do not necessarily fall under the definition of youth are welcome to attend these discussions and actively participate. This is how knowledge and different perspectives are shared and capacities built in the long-term.

Youth discussions are sometimes summarised in written outcomes (youth messages), which became contributions to the NRI meeting itself.
In other instances, youth simply contribute their views to the sessions of the national/regional IGF meetings, directly as active participants and speakers.

Another example of these practices is the Asia Pacific regional IGF (APrIGF). The youth group from NetMission.Asia, with support from APrIGF’s Multistakeholder Steering Group (MSG), organises the Asia Pacific Youth IGF Initiative in parallel with the APrIGF annual meeting. With an aim of providing a unique discussion platform for youth with different backgrounds in terms of their professional interest, the organisers set up a three-to-four-day-long Internet Governance Camp. The camp’s programme structure is close to the simulation of the IGF’s multistakeholder approach. Participants are assigned a role of one of the four traditionally recognised groups within the Internet governance community.

During the camp, they are encouraged to approach specific topics, as per the bottom-up-built agenda, and provide perspectives from the positions of their assigned stakeholder groups. Participants work with experts from various Internet governance fields, and the major objectives of this camp are to have youth understand the essence of the specific, substantive issues, as well as to understand the overall IGF process – especially in regards to the implementation of the core
IGF principles in practice at the local/national, regional, and global levels. The outcomes of the Asia Pacific Youth IGF also feed into the APrIGF, while also extending the participation of youth participants in this regional meeting.
Some communities have established a practice of independently organizing youth IGF initiatives. The essence of these types of practices is that young people from a certain country or region engage themselves into a structure that facilitates the organisation of a multistakeholder platform for discussing Internet governance issues of relevance for them while respecting the core IGF principles.

For example, the German Youth IGF Initiative is organised by a committee composed of five young people of different ages and genders with different educational backgrounds and from different parts of the country.

They build their programme in a bottom-up manner, asking the community for input, for both topics and speakers suggestions, through a public poll. This initiative organises a one-day meeting,
prior to the national German IGF. The Youth German IGF raises funds on its own and offers grants to youth across the country to attend the meeting. The grant selection criteria are based on gender and geographical balance, educational diversity (e.g., high school, university, etc.),\(^7\) and organisational background\(^8\) as well as ethnical/diversity balance. For the event, the youth IGF invites speakers from different stakeholder groups to discuss the topics of that year’s agenda. In addition, they prepare positions and set agenda goals, which are summarized as “Youth Messages.” The messages are submitted to the German national IGF as well as to the global IGF. Moreover, the Youth German IGF has four youth representatives seated on the steering committee of the German IGF, representing the positions and interests of youth as one stakeholder group within the national process.

The **Youth Latin American and Caribbean IGF (Youth LACIGF)** has been implementing this practice since 2016. Their initiative is independently organised by an organising committee composed of members that fit their definition of youth in addition to other stakeholders, while maintaining stakeholder, regional, and gender balance.

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\(^7\) This criterion aims to create a balance between youth pursuing an academic education and youths undergoing other types of educational paths.

\(^8\) Youth engaged in any type of organization, be it a youth political party, an NGO, a youth association, etc., vis-à-vis non-organised youth.
They gather input through a public poll about the topics of relevance from the wider community, and based on the input received, the organising committee builds the agenda and organises sessions around it.

These sessions are mainly discussion and educational sessions, where youth are informed, trained, and involved in the substantive discussion of the regional LACIGF.

The Youth LACIGF it feeds into the LACIGF by communicating the key outcomes of the meeting, as well as by participating onsite and being directly part of the discussion.

The **Youth IGF of Hong Kong** has a similar organisational structure. Its organising committee is composed of members coming from three different stakeholder groups. Consultations were organised to collect the views from the community to identify relevant issues to discuss during the forum. The initiative gathers high school students with the aim to involve them in the global discussion as digital citizens, empower them to develop a sense of belonging within digital society, and understand their rights and responsibilities with mutual respect to other Internet users. Experts on Internet governance issues provide substantive training to the participants, and assign them a
role of each of stakeholder group in order to understand the role of individual stakeholder groups within the IGF’s multistakeholder model.

The **Youth IGF Turkey** follows a similar organisational structure. Its organising committee is multistakeholder in nature, composed of members from three different stakeholder groups. Through an open call to gather topics of interest, invites youth to build the agenda, develop the substantive programme, and organise discussions.
While organizing their annual meetings, many of the NRIs specifically focus on ensuring youth are engaged and integrated into the preparatory process as well as into the annual meeting itself. To achieve this, the NRIs are developing tracks within their annual meetings, specifically focused on preparing youth to understand the IGF process and the relevant substantive issues. Usually, the NRIs aim to have these adjusted programmes organised as pre-events, or online before the meeting, in order to allow for youth to participate more effectively at the annual meeting.

One example is the South Eastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance (SEEDIG) – the subregional IGF for Southeastern Europe. In 2017, this IGF initiative organised its first Youth School, which had both online and in-situ components. Before the annual SEEDIG meeting, the Youth School participants were involved in webinars aimed at preparing them for participation in the SEEDIG meeting. During the SEEDIG event, a half-day-long session was held only for youth as a pre-event. This session was planned as a debate on a specific Internet governance-related case, in an attempt to prepare and encourage the youth members to actively participate in the subsequent
SEEDIG discussion. An open-ended organizing team composed of members of the core SEEDIG team and other SEEDIG community members prepared the content of the school. The youth participants were selected through a public call, while bearing in mind the need to achieve diversity in terms of region, gender, and educational background, and were supported financially by SEEDIG sponsors.

The national IGF of Nigeria implemented the practice of organizing a set of dedicated workshops for youth as a pre-event to their annual meeting and under a unique overarching title (the latest being “Empowering the Connected Youths”). Relevant experts produce specific case studies on a topic of interest, and commit to working with the young participants throughout the day in a format that emphasizes interactive discussion. The final outcomes are summarized in the written report, developed directly by youth participants. This report is integral part of the full report for the national IGF of Nigeria as well.
The national IGF of Paraguay regularly organises educational webinars for university students of all backgrounds, in order to build capacity and strengthen this national IGF’s future by fostering new expertise and human capacity.

The European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG), the regional IGF for Europe, has involved young people since its early days. Starting with a youth roundtable in 2010, the youth pre-event “New Media Summer School” was organised from 2011 to 2016 by various youth organisations (a collaboration between the European Students Forum (AEGEE), Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU), Young European Federalists (JEF), European Youth Press (EYP), and the Young European Greens (YEG)). In 2012 when EuroDIG took place in Stockholm, Sweden, a Nordic Youth IGF conference (NYIGF) was organised as a pre-event to EuroDIG. Thirty youth between the ages of 14 and 17 from Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, and Sweden formed the Nordic Youth Delegation. Starting from the 2017 annual meeting, EuroDIG’s youth events is now called “YOUthDIG”. The objective of this two-day-long track is to foster peer learning and networking among youth residing in Europe, discuss and exchange views with experienced Internet policy practitioners, and create youth messages, which are presented at EuroDIG and the IGF.
The agenda is structured along the thematic categories of the EuroDIG programme, taking into account the preferences expressed by the participants who are asked to choose the top three substantive topics among the ones included in the programme of the EuroDIG meeting – as built in a bottom-up manner by the wider community). Youth participants work closely with Internet governance experts from the field, learning and discussing potential ways to engage in Internet governance processes. Apart from this separate track, EuroDIG is undertaking great efforts to include the voice of young people in the programme as such. Young people are encouraged to join organising teams and raise their voice in each session. After earlier experiences, EuroDIG/YouthDIG determined that assigning separate youth-only sessions during the main programme ended up sidelining youth; thus, in their view, such practice was not the model to follow.

Another practical example is the work conducted by the national [IGF of Sri Lanka](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IGF_of_Sri_Lanka). The Sri Lanka IGF conducted a Youth IGF initiative alongside its 2017 annual meeting, where a set of focused thematic training sessions for youth took place. It was seen as a very good opportunity for youth to discuss Internet governance-related topics among themselves. This was an experimental setup for the preparations of the Youth IGF initiative, which will be organised independently by youth in 2018.
Infrastructure, language issues, quality of connection, affordability, literacy, Internet safety, and entrepreneurship over the Internet were the key topics discussed in an open forum. As a result, youth participation in IGF Sri Lanka has increased through this initial engagement with youth prior to the meeting.

In 2016, the national IGF of Brazil created its youth programme, which engaged 50 young people from the Brazilian IGF community, in the IGF annual meeting hosted by the Government of Brazil in 2015. Prior to the IGF meeting, these participants completed a capacity building programme regarding the substantive processes of the Internet governance.

The IGF-USA has traditionally cooperated with a few universities in order to engage with youth and integrate them into this national IGF community. To achieve this, different approaches have been taken over several years, with inclusion of youth as speakers in sessions, or workshops, as well as youth workshops organised by youth on a topic of interest for their community. These sessions were all organised by youth and for youth, with an open invitation to everyone to attend and engage in the discussion at the IGF-USA annual session. They were usually supported by
university professors from primarily three different universities. In addition, IGF-USA has a unique relationship with Elon University, which brings 15-20 young participants each year to the IGF-USA – as well as to the annual IGF – who engage both in sessions, but also in a unique role of reviewing and reporting on the various sessions, supported by three professors from Elon University. Youth from both the workshops and from Elon’s engagement have typically been given opportunities to speak during the closing “read out” of key messages, thus highlighting the inclusion of youth.

The national IGF of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (IGF DRC)\(^9\) collaborates with the Congolese Association of Free Software Users (ACOUL) and the Centre Africain d’Echange Culturel (CAFEC), in order to establish Youth IGF DRC – an initiative focused on youth. After the restitution session was organised,\(^10\) this national IGF supported the organisation of an awareness session led by youth in many universities located in the city of Kinshasa. At that time, the organising committee of this national IGF recognised strong support from other young people to matters pertaining to Internet governance. This prompted this initiative to start organising training sessions dedicated to Internet governance using a mailing list and the mobile application,

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\(^9\) Initiative in formation.  
\(^10\) During ICANN59, by Mr. Gabriel Bombambo of ACOUL and Ms. Baudouin SCHOMBE of CAFEC.
WhatsApp. Young participants actively brainstorm on substantive materials sent by this national IGF related to various topics such as Internet and critical Internet resources, who runs the Internet, who controls the Internet, who are the actors within Internet governance processes, etc. This initiative feeds into the national IGF DRC, with topics of interest that are included in the final programme agenda. In the long-term, this methodology aims to identify relevant issues through research projects.

The national IGF of Colombia as well invests in youth engagement. Since 2013, the core multistakeholder organising team has organised a bi-monthly participation scheme through which all stakeholders are brought together to discuss the issues of local relevance, that are addressed during the annual IGF of Colombia. Since 2016, this initiative has successfully engaged and incorporated university students into the discussion, by empowering and encouraging them to express their views on different topics. Youth have created their own discussion structures through university research groups or by being professionally involved in nonprofit organizations whose work is related to the Internet.
Particular efforts have been directed toward involving youth from remote places, based outside of Bogota as the capital city, in the IGF processes. This reciprocal support among young people has enabled more Colombians to apply for scholarships to participate in regional Internet governance fora as well. Through their participation in the Colombia IGF, youth introduced issues of their interest and have been the driving force behind initiatives in their local communities. The cooperation of these set of efforts materialized in the Colombia IGF, where youth contributions have been integrated into the workshops and sessions. Youth participants also create session reports during the event. Starting this year, the Mesa Colombiana de Gobernanza de Internet will hold a course prior to the national forum to guide new actors as well.

**Youth IGF Africa** is an open platform for youth facilitated by the African IGF, that supports international cooperation between established and upcoming youth IGF initiatives in Africa. It supports the creation of local empowerment and participation in IGF meetings at the national, subregional, and regional levels. The platform has merged the themes of good practice exchange between institutional supporting partners with young people, individually. Youth from many African countries – including but not limited to Chad, Sudan, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, the DRC, Kenya, Uganda, Liberia, Mali, Tunisia, Cameroon, and Gambia – have been involved in the project so far, whose aim is to organise their first face-to-face meeting.
There are practices where some stakeholders provide, together with the participation in Internet Governance events, a number of training events for youth, where the community expresses interest to get involved.

For example, the **Youth IGF Movement** is an incentive that allows youth to discuss Internet governance topics of interest. This global movement of young people enables youth – described to be between 15 and 35 years old – to discuss and take a lead on issues related to Internet governance in the format of local, national, or regional debates. These debates are organised by youth on a volunteer basis based on the methodology provided by the Youth IGF Movement team, which respects the IGF’s core principles. It enables the voice of young people to be heard by the Internet governance community, and to help youth take an active part in related decision-making processes.
The platform also serves as a hub to deliver capacity-building sessions to youth via train-the-trainer workshops, and to raise their awareness on a number of Information Society-related issues. It also allows for young people to meet young entrepreneurs and members of start-ups to exchange ideas about entrepreneurial challenges, and different stakeholders provide the training, nationally and internationally. The concept of the Youth IGF gatherings is based on the idea of providing an inclusive opportunity for young people from both developed countries and developing nations, particularly those facing social problems, to be able to express themselves and convey their thoughts and concerns about the Internet to the broader Internet governance community. The final messages from all meetings are communicated to decision-makers and discussion fora at different levels.\textsuperscript{11} It brings youth to the annual IGF meeting, conducts on-site focus sessions, and encourages broader engagement and participation in all other IGF sessions.

The \textbf{Youth Observatory} is a youth-led organisation that has been created as a result of Latin American youth engagement at the first edition of the Youth@IGF programme, organised by the Internet Society (ISOC) and the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.br) during the 10\textsuperscript{th} edition of the annual IGF. It aims to connect youth from various countries and regions, and by doing so, share knowledge about Internet governance-related subjects, as well as enhance youth engagement in Internet governance-related processes.

\textsuperscript{11} In 2016, 1 400 participants from 15 countries gathered around the movement.
The organisation is part of one of ISOC’s Special Interest Groups (SIGs) – Youth SIG – and works on several fronts, among which are: (a) Hosting the two editions of the Youth LACIGF; (b) Editing and launching a book written by young authors from several countries in the LAC region in August 2017; (c) Promoting periodic campaigns on social networks; (d) Promoting digital education training initiatives in schools in some countries; and (e) Participating actively in local, regional, and international Internet governance fora by proposing, organizing, and participating in workshops and sessions. The **Youth Observatory website** is open to everyone that wants to contribute to its work.

The **Youth Coalition on Internet Governance (YCIG)** is one of the official Dynamic Coalitions (DCs) of the IGF. As per its own description, it is an open group for organizations and individuals, representing all stakeholder groups, willing to collaborate together in order to encourage and enrich youth participation in local, regional, and international Internet governance discussions and processes. Its main objective is to advocate for the voice of children, young people, and young professionals in Internet governance fora and processes. They hold regular online meetings, in-situ meetings (such as during the annual IGF), and communicate with their network through a dedicated [mailing list](#). Their engagement has resulted in many of the members of their network being appointed to leadership positions in many other Internet organisations.
The **European Youth IGF Project** is a European Union-funded project (2015-2017) to support international cooperation between established and upcoming youth IGF initiatives in Europe. It supported the creation of local empowerment workshops and participation in national, regional, and international IGF meetings. It merged the themes of best practice exchanges between institutional partners and individual youth empowerment, and is expected to publish its final results at the end of 2017. The participating countries were Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

The wider IGF community also runs many **schools dedicated to Internet governance**, as well as other educational and training activities, where inter alia many youth (in addition to others) are trained about Internet governance processes and structures. For example, the **African School on IG (AfriSIG)** is held prior to the African IGF annual meeting as a partnership between the African Union Commission (through the NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency) and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). AfriSIG is not organised exclusively for young people, but the majority of participants are young. It facilitates a leadership development process, as well as a capacity building opportunity. After the five-day-long AfriSIG training is completed, participants are integrated into the programme of the African IGF annual meeting as speakers, rapporteurs, and moderators.
These participants play an important role in being active on social media during the African IGF. Additionally, there is always a session at AfriSIG where members of the African IGF secretariat brief participants on the event about what should they expect from the meeting. Being able to participate actively and with influence in an NRI is a core part of the AfriSIG methodology. As a result of their participation in the school, fellows become actively involved into their national initiatives, are selected for other opportunities, such as ICANN meetings or fellowships to attend IGF annual meetings.
Aside from the practices and opportunities mapped above, the wider IGF community, through public consultations for developing this publication, noted other programmes that are very important for Internet governance-related capacity building programmes, including:

**ICANN: NextGen and Fellowships**

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) initiated a NextGen programme, that funds the attendance of number of student participants in each ICANN meeting, drawn from the region that ICANN’s meeting is held in. It includes a focused mentoring and coaching approach, describing the fuller Internet Governance ecosystem, as well as ICANN’s core mission.

The Fellowships Programme, on the other hand, aims to support the development of the new generation of the community members. It prioritizes the fellows that are currently living in underserved and underrepresented communities around the world, with respect to diversity of gender, sector, region, experience, and expertise. Selected fellows attend the ICANN meeting, where they have an opportunity to learn about the ICANN’s structure and engage with the community.
IGF Ambassadors Programme is for young ISOC members who have a strong interest in the issues and themes of the IGF. Ambassadorship awards are available for first-time and returning ambassadors.

Additionally, as per the ISOC website, the Youth@IGF Programme aims to bring youth between the ages of 18 and 25 to the annual IGF meeting in order to build capacity and empower youth voices.

For all the above mentioned programmes, more information is available at their dedicated websites.
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