IGF 2023
Background paper for Open Forum proposal:' How to enhance participation and cooperation of CSOs in/with multilateral and multistakeholder organisations and fora in the digital domain'
May 22, 2023

Civil society is an important part of the European Union (EU) digital policy. The EU promotes human centric approach and brings the people are at the centre of digital transformation, by protecting people's rights, supporting the democracy and fair, responsible and secure use of digital technologies.

The EU has been actively promoting these values across the globe; yet, more active involvement of civil society is clearly needed. The are obvious differences in terms of civil society organisations' (CSOs) readiness to take part at international digital fora. While we get used to active involvement of so called 'Global North' CSOs in actively shaping digital policy, the 'Global South' CSOs still struggle to be more visible and have their voice heard louder.

The European Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe – (NDICI-Global Europe) focuses on closer engagement with civil society. The Global Gateway - a European strategy to boost smart, clean and secure links – delivered and developed through Team Europe initiatives (incl. digital sector) also foresees a dialogue with civil society to ensure a fully inclusive approach is taken.

European Commission (DG INTPA) announced a call for proposals in December 2022 aimed at strengthening the capacities of CSOs (digital advocacy groups, grassroots, think tanks, digital associations and NGOs) dealing with open internet and digital rights to increase their capabilities and capacities to become more influential on global arena.

These organisations are expected to be capable to strengthen their participation at International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and other organisations' working formats (groups, open cooperation platforms, events, etc.). The action is aimed at CSOs which are dealing in the field of Open Internet Governance, and digital rights.

There is a limited CSOs (global) capacity in this field to draft proposals, formulate position papers, provide non-papers, reports, reviews, organise events, maintain qualitative dialogue and report back on the outcomes of the main digital questions. The EU is promoting the development of Open Internet Governance at the global level and this action is a part of the global strategy. This action is foreseen in the Action Document for Multilateralism and Digitalisation, Financed under the NDICI-Global Europe (7,5 M EUR value of two grants).

DG INTPA is planning to support the CSOs to reach these goals:
a) Long term structural engagement of CSOs – specifically including CSOs from the 'Global South' - in relevant working groups of entities including ICANN, IETF, ITU, IGF- to contribute to policy and to further and maintain a human centric and public interest-based approach. Other entities may be considered depending on due justification.
b) Increase of CSOs engagement at national, regional and international IGF multistakeholder's fora, including EuroDig (European Dialogue on Internet Governance) and possibly others, to promote national and multistakeholder engagement when formulating positions and assuring subsequent outreach and follow up.

c) Partnerships building between 'Global North' CSOs and 'Global South' CSOs concerning the priority activities/objectives of this lot.

d)Capacity building of and by CSOs on Digital Economy, Digital Diplomacy, Internet Governance, Open Internet, Strengthen CSOs knowledge and capacities to engage on topics and principles covered by EU policy. Such as those mentioned in the EU Digital Compass / Digital Decade communication, relevant legislative work such as the GDPR, the AI act, the Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act, Data Governance, Act, the EU's declaration on digital rights and principles, declaration on the future of the internet and in general, the EU's human centric approach with attention to inclusive participation and gender equality.

 e) Enhancing 'Global South' stakeholders' participation in the open internet and digital rights debates to raise awareness on governmental level and society at large; Promoting the EU declaration of Digital Rights and Principles.

f) Increase of CSOs engagement at national, regional and international IGF multistakeholder's fora, including EuroDig (European Dialogue on Internet Governance) and possibly others, to promote national and multistakeholder engagement when formulating positions and assuring subsequent outreach and follow up.

g) Partnerships building between 'Global North' CSOs and 'Global South' CSOs concerning the priority activities/objectives of this lot. For Lot 2, Activities might also (in addition to the obligatory activities) include:

h) Within relevant fora of multilateral and multistakeholder organisations (study groups, etc), scrutinise policy of artificial intelligence (incl.EU AI Act28) and capacity building to ensure its responsible and ethical use globally;

i) Design and implement innovative approaches towards dealing with disinformation. This should focus on pre-bunking (rather than debunking) and involve methods which can be scaled up to very large volumes at low cost, and for which the impact can be measured/estimated in a robust manner.

The awarded consortium will be invited to co-organise this Open Forum with DG INTPA.