Civil Society Alliances for Digital Empowerment

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Mapping Civil Society Organisation Engagement in Multilateral and Multistakeholder Internet Governance Processes

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Acronyms

ACs	Advisory Committees
AFRALO	African Regional At-Large Organisation
AFRINIC	African Network Information Centre
AIGF	Africa Internet Governance Forum
ALAC	At-Large Advisory Committee
ALSs	At-Large Structures
APAC	Asia–Pacific
APC	Association for Progressive Communications
APNIC	Asia Pacific Network Information Centre
APrIGF	Asia-Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum
APT	Asia-Pacific Telecommunity
ArabIGF	Arab Internet Governance Forum
ARIN	American Registry for Internet Numbers
ASMG	Arab Spectrum Management Group
ASO	Address Supporting Organisation
ASO AC	ASO Address Council
ATU	Africa Telecommunications Union
BPFs	Best Practice Forums
CADE	Civil Society Alliances for Digital Empowerment
ccNSO	Country Code Names Supporting Organisation
ccTLD	Country Code Top-Level Domain
CCWG-ACCT	Cross Community Working Group on Enhancing ICANN Accountability
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEPT	European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations
CIPESA	Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa
CITEL	Inter-American Telecommunication Committee
CoAP	Constrained Application Protocol
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTU	Caribbean Telecommunications Union
DDoS	Distributed Denial-of-Service
DNS	Domain Name System
DNSOP	Domain Name System Operations
EAIGF	East Africa Internet Governance Forum
EC	Empowered Community
ECNL	European Center for Non-for-profit Law
EFF	Electronic Frontier Foundation
EMODIR	Education, Mentoring, and Outreach Directorate
EN	English
ES	Expectation State

FIFA	Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa
FGI-CA	Forum sur Gouvernance de l'Internet pour l'Afrique Centrale (FGI-AC ou IGF-CA)
FR	French
GAIA	Global Access to the Internet for All (GAIA)
GAC	Governmental Advisory Committee
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GNSO	Generic Names Supporting Organisation
gTLDs	generic Top-level Domains
HRIA	Human Rights Impact Assessments
IAB	Internet Architecture Board
IANA	Internet Assigned Numbers Authority
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IESG	Internet Engineering Steering Group
IETF	Internet Engineering Task Force
IGF	Internet Governance Forum
IoR	Internet of Rights
IoT	Internet of Things
IP	Internet Protocol
IRTF	Internet Research Task Force
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
ITU-D	ITU Telecommunication Development Sector
ITU-R	ITU Radiocommunication Sector
ITU-T	ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector
KEIs	Key Expert Interviews
LACNIC	Latin America and Caribbean Network Information Centre
LATAM	Latin America
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
LIGF	Lebanese Internet Governance Forum
MAG	Multistakeholder Advisory Group
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MERLA	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Learning, and Adaptation
MLS	Messaging Layer Security
NAIGF	North Africa IGF
NCSG	Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group
NIGF	National IGF initiatives
NomCom	Nominating Committee
NPOC	Not-for-profit Operational Concerns Constituency
NRIs	National and Regional Initiatives
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSET	Office of the Special Envoy of Technology

PDP	Policy Development Process
PEARG	Privacy Enhancements and Assessments Research Group
PITG	Public Interest Technology Group
RCC	Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications
RIPE NCC	Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre
RIR	Regional Internet Registry
RFC	Request for Comments
RSSAC	Root Server System Advisory Committee
SAIGF	Southern Africa Internet Governance Forum
SDO	Standard Development Organisation
SO	Supporting Organisation
SP	Spanish
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SSAC	Security and Stability Advisory Committee
TLD	Top Level Domain
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
WAIGF	West Africa Internet Governance Forum
WCIT	World Conference on International Telecommunications
WGs	Working Groups
WRC	World Radiocommunications Conference
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society
WTDC	World Telecommunication Development Conference
WTSA	World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly

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Executive Summary

This study examines the engagement of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in multilateral and multistakeholder internet governance processes, emphasising their critical role in advocating for a just and inclusive digital future. CSOs are instrumental in addressing key issues such as internet accessibility, affordability, human rights, and the protection of marginalised communities. CSOs actively participate in prominent internet governance forums, including the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)-related forums. Despite their contributions, CSOs, particularly those from the Global South, face significant challenges that hinder their full participation.

This research examines barriers to CSO engagement in internet governance, identifies gaps and offers recommendations for more inclusive and equitable processes. The study employed a multi-faceted methodology, combining a comprehensive literature review of documents related to various internet governance forums, a baseline survey, and key expert interviews. The survey and interviews gathered responses from 91 CSOs and key experts across different regions, with a focus on the Global South, to assess participation levels, challenges, and opportunities.

The study revealed that while CSOs are increasingly engaging in internet governance forums, participation from the Global South remains disproportionately low due to **systemic**, **financial, procedural,** and **language-related barriers**, making it difficult for CSOs to navigate and contribute meaningfully to discussions.

Furthermore, this study shows a **lack of diversity and inclusivity** in internet governance forums which results in the underrepresentation of marginalised groups, particularly from the Global South, resulting in policies that fail to address the needs of all stakeholders. This weakens the legitimacy and effectiveness of decision-making process. **Gender and inclusivity gaps** persist, particularly in conservative societies, where women and marginalised groups are often excluded from decision-making.

Power imbalances favour large tech companies and government, limiting CSO influence in public interest issues such as human and digital rights, while silos within organisations like ICANN hinder collaboration. At the national level, restrictive political and legal environments further constrain CSO engagement, leaving their perspectives underrepresented in national policy discussions.

The **increasing number of internet governance forums and processes** has created a fragmented and overwhelming landscape for CSOs, particularly those with limited resources. Navigating multiple forums and keeping up with diverse agendas can strain the capacity of CSOs, reducing their ability to engage meaningfully in any single process.

The results align with the trends identified in the literature review, in addition to a shift of key digital policy discussions from traditional internet governance forums to other spaces, like trade forums, which often lack the inclusivity and accessibility needed for effective CSO participation.

Additionally, the growing trend of regional and context-specific internet governance initiatives led by CSOs reflects a positive move toward localised approaches. It highlights the need for more significant support and collaboration.

These findings confirm the underrepresentation of marginalised voices in internet governance processes, particularly from the Global South, and emphasise the need for a more inclusive and equitable internet governance process that ensures diverse perspectives are adequately represented. Underscoring persistent disparities in CSO engagement, the study calls for targeted interventions to address these issues.

The study recommends increasing funding opportunities, capacity building and technical support for CSOs in the Global South, promoting inclusivity and diversity in internet governance forums and fostering collaboration among CSOs, governments, technical experts and the private sector to strengthen policy influence. It also recommends developing localised approaches to address region-specific challenges and opportunities, and exploring innovative approaches and methods to enhance CSO participation in internet governance.

Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Internet Governance Processes and CSO Engagement Issues

Multilateral and multistakeholder internet governance processes are collaborative frameworks that unite diverse actors to shape the policies and regulations governing the internet. These processes involve cooperation among governments and international organisations, while expanding participation to include civil society, the private sector, technical experts, and academia. As defined by the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) in 2005, internet governance is *'the development and application by governments, the private sector, and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet' (*De Bossey, 2005, p 4) This inclusive approach ensures that internet governance is transparent, accountable, and reflective of the interests of all stakeholders, ultimately fostering a stable, secure, and open online environment that benefits society as a whole.

CSOs have been instrumental in the internet's evolution by contributing to its technological advancement and advocating for principles like net neutrality and freedom of expression, ensuring a secure and accessible online environment for all. Internet governance forums offer CSOs a vital platform to champion human rights, accessibility, inclusion, and gender equality. They represent diverse stakeholders, including marginalised groups. They advocate for transparency, accountability, and informed policy-making by contributing specialised knowledge on digital rights and cybersecurity. Additionally, CSOs work actively to bridge the digital divide, focusing on affordability, infrastructure, and digital literacy, aiming to ensure equal opportunities for historically marginalised communities to benefit from technological progress. Despite their crucial role, research indicates that CSOs, particularly from the Global South, must be better represented in regional and global internet governance forums. CSOs also encounter challenges in participating meaningfully in internet governance spaces such as ITU, ICANN, the IGF, and the IETF.

Engagement by CSOs from the Global South in internet governance forums is characterised by a dynamic interplay of progress and persistent challenges. While more CSOs are actively participating in key forums, raising their voices on critical issues, and fostering stronger networks, significant barriers persist. Limited resources, unequal power dynamics, and limited representation in formal structures hinder their full participation. Despite these challenges, CSOs are making strides, influencing policy discussions and pushing for a more inclusive and equitable internet governance landscape.

Internet governance operates at multiple levels – global, regional, and national – through various forums, each serving distinct purposes and offering opportunities for CSOs to engage and influence policy. The global IGF is the most inclusive platform for multistakeholder dialogue, enabling CSOs to exchange knowledge and shape global internet policy agendas. Multilateral forums like ITU focus on technical standards and development policies, where CSO participation ensures these reflect societal needs. Multistakeholder forums such as the IETF and ICANN address technical protocols and internet infrastructure, providing CSOs with opportunities to advocate for accountability and transparency.

At the regional level, forums like Regional Internet Governance Forums and entities like Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) bridge global discussions with local realities, empowering CSOs to address region-specific challenges and influence policy. National forums, including National IGFs (NIGFs), allow CSOs to shape domestic policies and ensure local voices are heard. Additionally, thematic forums focus on issues like digital rights, cybersecurity, or net neutrality offering spaces for in-depth discussions and collective action. Navigating this complex landscape requires strategic engagement, strong networks, and an understanding of the interplay between global, regional, and national dynamics.

1.2 Objectives and Scope of the Study

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of CSO engagement across critical internet governance processes. It highlights key actors, forums, emerging issues, and strategic opportunities and challenges faced by CSOs. It provides an understanding of the multifaceted landscape of CSO participation in internet governance at both the global and regional levels. The study was guided by the following objectives:

- **Identify and map key stakeholders:** Identify and analyse the diverse range of actors involved in internet governance multilateral and multistakeholder processes.
- **Assess thematic areas of CSO engagement:** Examine the key thematic areas in which CSOs are actively engaged in these internet governance processes, including cross-cutting themes.
- **Evaluate CSO strategies and impact:** Analyse the diverse strategies and approaches employed by CSOs to influence multilateral and multistakeholder internet governance processes, assessing their effectiveness and impact.
- **Identify gaps and opportunities:** Identify existing gaps in CSO engagement, barriers to participation, and potential opportunities for enhancing CSO involvement in shaping internet governance frameworks.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method research design to address the study's objectives and scope and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the engagement of CSOs in multilateral and multistakeholder internet governance processes. The research used a scoping review of the relevant literature to establish a strong contextual foundation, a baseline survey, and key expert interviews (KEIs) to gather diverse perspectives and qualitative insights.

1.3.2 Data Collection Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of CSO engagement in internet governance forums. The foundation of this research was a thorough scoping review of relevant literature, encompassing official documents, academic literature, policy briefs, and project reports. This review allowed for the identification of existing research, key themes, and critical knowledge gaps in the field.

Building on these insights, a baseline survey questionnaire was developed in consultation with members of the Civil Society Alliances for Digital Empowerment (CADE). The survey employed a mix of semi-structured and structured questions, allowing for both detailed narratives and quantifiable data. Examples of semi-structured questions include those prompting respondents to elaborate on the impact of challenges or describe successful engagement strategies. In contrast, structured questions, such as those inquiring about past participation or capacity building needs, offered predefined response options for easier analysis (refer to Annex 6 for the questionnaire). Furthermore, some questions utilised a Likert scale, such as *'On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your organisation's level of engagement in these forums?'*, enabling respondents to express their opinions or perceptions along a defined spectrum. In order to be accessible to a broad audience, the questionnaire was produced in three language versions: English (EN), French (FR), and Spanish (SP). The questionnaire, which comprised 19 questions structured across seven distinct sections, was designed to be completed in approximately 15-20 minutes. The sections included:

- **Demographics and Organisation Information:** Gathering basic information about participating organisations.
- **CSO Engagement in IG Forums:** Focusing on the organisation's level of participation in various IG forums.
- **Challenges to CSO Participation:** Identifying the primary barriers hindering effective participation in IG forums.
- **Opportunities for Enhanced Engagement:** Exploring potential opportunities for increasing CSO engagement.
- **Capacity Building Needs:** Investigating the specific areas where organisations require capacity building.
- **Inclusivity Factors:** Delving into organisations' efforts to address inclusivity within their IG-related activities.
- **Final Thoughts:** Providing space for organisations to share additional comments and recommendations.

The survey was deployed online at https://iyvkyxaur7h.typeform.com/to/vqoaVR5N. The Typeform platform was chosen for its robust data protection measures, including General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance (Typeform, 2021).

The survey questionnaire was launched in September 2024. The questionnaire was first piloted among CADE members, who helped refine the survey questions. It was then disseminated through CADE member organisations' networks, and on social media, with weekly reminders over a five-week period to encourage participation. In order to increase response rates, the deadline to complete the survey was extended until December 2024.

Complementing the survey data, online consultations with key experts were conducted to gather in-depth qualitative insights. The interviews, ranging from 45 minutes to a full hour, took place between September and December 2024. An interview guide, covering key topics such as engagement, challenges, and inclusivity, was used by researchers during the interviews to gather qualitative data from experts about their experiences with internet governance (see Annex 6). A pilot round of interviews was carried out with a small group of CADE members who had provided input in the development phase of the survey questionnaire. Subsequently, additional experts actively engaged in key internet governance bodies, including the ITU, IETF, IGF, and ICANN, were identified through a snowball sampling method. These consultations were recorded with the experts' consent, and transcripts were stored securely, adhering to GDPR standards. To

accommodate individual preferences, consultations were held using platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams.

Throughout the data collection process, ethical and data privacy considerations remained paramount, adhering strictly to GDPR principles. For quantitative data, personal identifiers were removed from survey data, and participants were informed of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study. Data access was restricted to authorised researchers, and all gathered data was stored securely, ensuring data integrity and confidentiality. For qualitative data, explicit consent was obtained, outlining the specific purposes for which the data would be used. Participants were informed about the potential for indirect identification through contextual details and were given control over the level of detail shared. The researchers implemented strict access protocols, limiting access to only those directly involved in analysis, and ensured that qualitative data was stored in protected environments. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw their qualitative contributions at any time, aligning with GDPR's right to be forgotten and data portability principles.

1.3.3 Sampling Strategy

This study employed a multi-method approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of CSO engagement in internet governance processes. Each of the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including a scoping review of existing literature, a baseline survey, and key expert interviews, employed distinct sampling strategies tailored to its specific objectives, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding CSO participation.

Scoping review

The scoping review employed a multi-faceted sampling strategy. Documents from core internet governance bodies, including a review of official websites, such as IGF, IETF, and ITU, were prioritised. Complementing this, strategic CSO websites, such as those of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), the Internet Society, and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), among others, were incorporated to capture diverse civil society perspectives. The search strategy utilised expanded keywords (such as CSOs active in ITU or CSOs active in IETF or IRTF), including organisation-specific terminology, and prioritised screening of documents from these core sources. Data extraction was refined to capture stakeholder participation, policy development, and CSO engagement strategies, among others.

Quantitative data sampling

The quantitative data for this study was gathered through a baseline survey questionnaire distributed among CADE member organisations' networks and disseminated on social media. The survey questionnaire, comprising 19 structured questions across seven sections, targeted CSOs engaged in internet governance. The selection process was inclusive, aiming to capture responses from any CSO actively involved in this field, with the survey available in English, French, and Spanish to enhance accessibility. While the survey had 647 views in English (22.8% completion rate), 63 in French (56%), and 29 in Spanish (41.7%), completion rates varied significantly. This resulted in 75 completed surveys (Figure 1), yielding an overall response rate of approximately 27%. Detailed profiles of the participating CSOs are available in Annex 2.

Figure 1: Regional breakdown of CSO survey respondents and KEIs

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">91 Respondents</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">75 CSOs</th><th colspan="2">16 Key Experts (and their focus area)</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">44</td><td rowspan="2"> 
Africa</td><td>3</td><td>IGF</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>ICANN, IGF</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">9</td><td rowspan="2"> 
Latin America</td><td>1</td><td>ICANN, ITU</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>ICANN, IETF</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">13</td><td rowspan="2"> 
Asia</td><td>1</td><td>Regional IGF</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>IETF</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td> 
Europe</td><td>2</td><td>ICANN</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td> 
United States</td><td>1</td><td>ITU</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td> 
Central America</td><td rowspan="2">4</td><td rowspan="2">Undisclosed</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td> 
Global</td></tr>
</table>

Qualitative data sampling

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with experts. Initial participants were purposely selected based on their recognised expertise and experience in the field of internet governance. These participants were asked to recommend other potential respondents, creating a snowball effect that expanded the sample size and diversity. This approach emphasised the inclusion of diverse perspectives, taking into account factors such as regional representation, organisational diversity, and gender balance. Interviews were conducted virtually for 13 weeks, between September and November 2024.

A total of 16 key experts (Figure 1) participated in the interviews, with females representing 56% (n=9). The majority (9) of experts focus on the IGF, while others prioritise ICANN (6), the IETF (3), or a Regional IGF (5). A few had a strong focus on ICANN, ITU and IETF combined. Four of the experts highlighted diverse priorities across internet governance processes and organisations. Details of experts who participated in the study are provided in Annex 1.

1.3.4 Data Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and patterns across the literature and to map existing CSO engagement in internet governance. This informed the subsequent data analysis: building upon the findings of this review, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to analyse the collected data.

For the quantitative analysis, the study used the statistical software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse the collated baseline survey dataset. This analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarise key aspects of the data, such as the regional representation of participating organisations (Figure 1). These quantitative findings were interpreted in light of the qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of CSO engagement in internet governance processes.

For the qualitative analysis, the study conducted a thematic analysis of expert interview responses. This analysis employed a hybrid approach, drawing upon themes identified during the scoping review and integrated into semi-structured interview guides, therefore combining content analysis with elements of thematic analysis. The AI software Perplexity AI, selected due to its commitment to the security of data (Perplexity, n.d.), was used to identify recurring patterns and cross-cutting issues through anonymised data. The study also cross-tabulated data to identify common trends and patterns across different CSO groups, focusing on barriers to participation and areas where engagement can be strengthened.

1.3.5 Limitations

A proper evaluation and understanding involves acknowledging the study's limitations. There are three main limitations that may have affected data collection and the interpretation of the findings. The first is related to the sampling representation. The purposive sampling approach, while effective in gathering high-quality data from knowledgeable respondents, may introduce bias by focusing on specific individuals and organisations that might not fully represent the broader population of CSOs engaged in internet governance processes. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data from the survey and interviews, possibly resulting in biased subjective interpretations. Lastly, survey response rates were influenced by time constraints, survey fatigue, and concerns over phishing scams. To address this, the survey period was extended, and targeted outreach intensified. However, as with any survey-based research, capturing a fully comprehensive dataset is inherently challenging.

1.4 Research Gaps in the Role of CSOs in Internet Governance

CSOs play a critical role in the multistakeholder approach adopted in internet governance (Haristya, 2020, pp 252-270). They serve as the vital link between the internet's technical infrastructure and its impact on people's lives. The success of CSOs' role lies in its ability to:

- **Amplify marginalised voices:** CSOs empower communities and individuals who are often excluded from traditional decision-making processes, ensuring that their perspectives and concerns are heard.
- **Champion human rights:** CSOs advocate for an internet that respects and upholds fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, privacy, and access to information.

- **Promote digital inclusion:** CSOs strive to bridge the digital divide, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background or location, can benefit from the internet's opportunities.
- **Foster transparency and accountability:** CSOs hold powerful actors to account, demanding transparency in decision-making and advocating for policies that protect the public interest.
- **Drive innovation and creativity:** CSOs explore new and innovative ways to use the internet for social good, fostering a vibrant and dynamic online ecosystem.

The scoping review revealed several critical research gaps in understanding the full scope of CSO engagement within internet governance, a domain where their role is pivotal. While the scoping review showed that CSO presence across key governance bodies is documented, it highlighted the difficulty in gauging the depth and impact of this engagement (Carr, M., 2015), a critical aspect of their function. Further, a significant gap emerged concerning the representation of geographically and linguistically diverse CSOs, potentially overlooking crucial perspectives from the Global South and hindering their ability to promote digital inclusion effectively. The review also underscored the challenge of capturing informal engagement, such as online activism and ad-hoc coalition work, which often plays a vital role in shaping internet governance and driving innovation and creativity. In addition, the rapid evolution of the internet governance landscape presents ongoing limitations in comprehensively mapping and evaluating CSO contributions, particularly in their efforts to foster transparency and accountability. These identified gaps emphasise the need for future research to develop more inclusive methodologies to fully understand the complexities of CSO involvement in internet governance and fully realise their potential to empower communities.

1.5 Conclusion

This section has established the foundational framework for a comprehensive analysis of CSO engagement within the complex landscape of internet governance, highlighting CSOs' critical role in shaping inclusive and multistakeholder processes. Using a mixed-methods approach, including a scoping review, a baseline survey, and key expert interviews, this study examines CSOs' diverse strategies, impacts, and thematic engagements in advocating for human rights, digital inclusion, and transparency. The findings presented herein are intended to facilitate a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play within multistakeholder forums, promote evidence-based policy formulation, and enhance the effectiveness of these processes. The study seeks to contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable digital future, where the rights and interests of all stakeholders, particularly marginalised and underrepresented groups, are effectively represented and protected.

Section 2. Mapping Internet Governance Actors and Mechanisms for CSO Engagement

This section delves into the existing mechanisms and modalities for CSOs' active participation, focusing on the following processes and bodies: ICANN, ITU, the IETF and the IGF. The different modalities of engagement present significant opportunities for active CSO participation in these spaces.

2.1 ICANN

ICANN is responsible for the management and coordination of the internet domain name and address space, which are critical resources necessary for internet connectivity (Weitzenboeck, 2014, pp 49–73). Essentially, it manages the internet's address book by overseeing the assignment of unique identifiers like domain names (e.g. .com, .org) and internet protocol addresses. ICANN develops policy through a consensus-based multistakeholder process. ICANN's commitments and core values prescribe that these processes 'employ open, transparent and bottom-up, multistakeholder policy development processes that are led by the private sector (including business stakeholders, civil society, the technical community, academia, and end users), while duly taking into account the public policy advice of governments and public authorities' (ICANN, 2025a).

2.1.1 ICANN's Structure

ICANN operates through a multistakeholder governance model, which brings together a diverse global community, including governments, civil society, and businesses, to contribute to the development of internet policies (Lee, 2013, pp 21-34). The model relies on Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (AC) to provide expertise and recommendations on issues like domain name policy, internet security, and governmental relations. The ICANN Board of Directors considers recommendations from these groups and the broader community to make informed decisions, while ICANN staff implement these policies to ensure the smooth daily operation of the Domain Name System (DNS) (ICANN n.d.a). This collaborative approach helps promote inclusivity, consensus-building, and accountability.

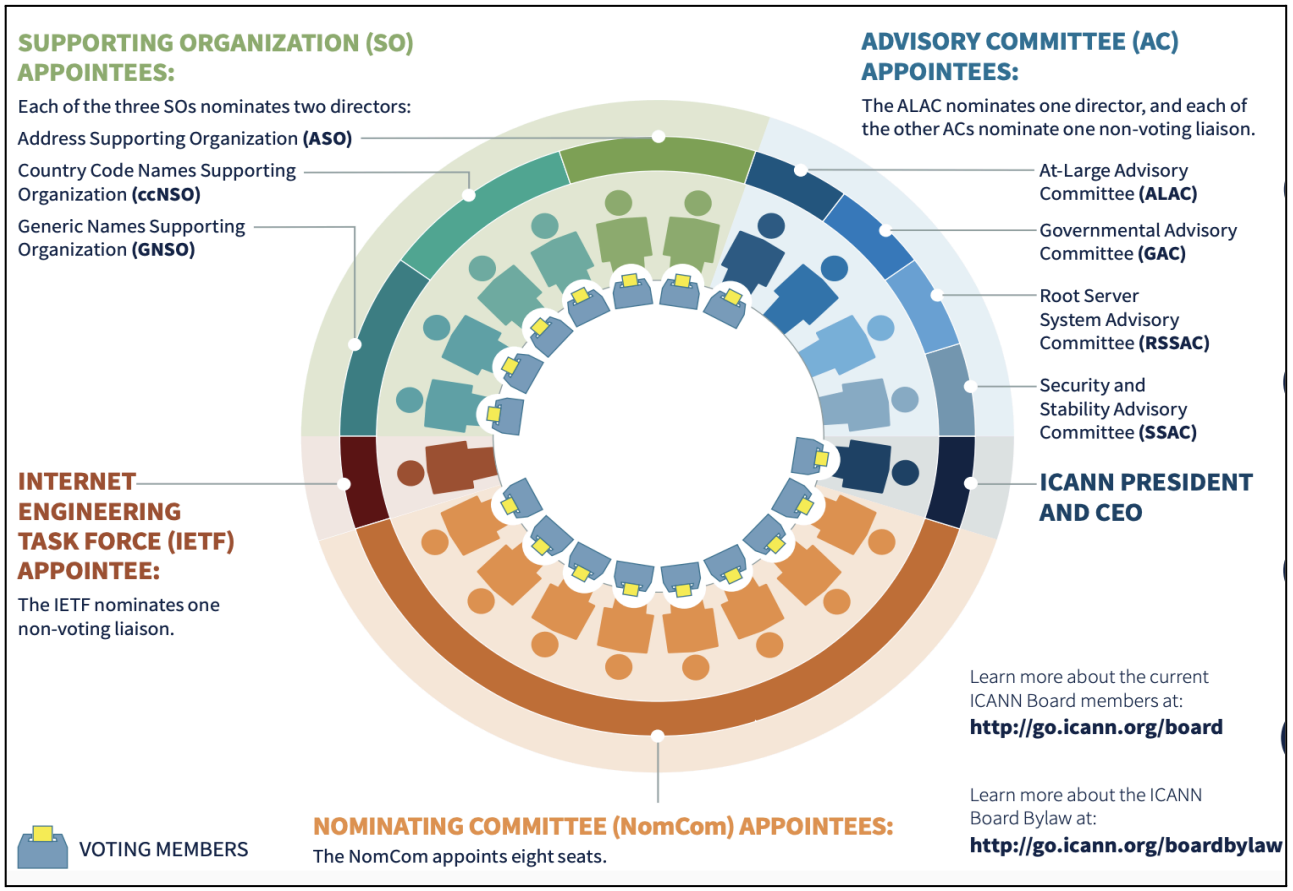
ICANN has complex voting procedures and intricate governance mechanisms to facilitate a representative balance of power among stakeholders and competing interests (Chatham House, 2020). Its multi-layered structure involves a board of diverse stakeholders as well as community councils, committees and SOs (Mueller, 1999, p 498). The evolution of ICANN's organisational structure has not been without its challenges – representation is still a contentious issue (Gomes Sequeiros, 2021, pp 42-44).

2.1.2 The ICANN Board

The ICANN board structure (Figure 2) includes two directors nominated by each of the three SOs, which focus on different aspects of internet policy. Advisory committees provide diverse perspectives on issues like user interests, government policy, and internet security, and each nominates a director or liaison. The IETF also appoints a non-voting liaison. The Nominating Committee (NomCom) appoints eight directors, while the president and chief executive officer

(CEO) lead the organisation in implementing policies. ICANN's three SOs and four ACs are listed in Table 1.

Figure 2: ICANN board structure



Source: ICANN, 2020a

Table 1: ICANN organisations

The three Supporting Organizations (SOs)	The four Advisory Committees (ACs)
• Address Supporting Organization (ASO) • Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) • Country Code Names Supporting Organization (ccNSO)	• At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) • Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) • Root Server System Advisory Committee (RSSAC) • Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC)

Source: ICANN, n.d.a

2.1.2.1 The Address Supporting Organization (ASO)

The ASO brings together representatives from the five RIRs, namely Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. Most members represent internet service providers (ISPs) and other internet engineering concerns. The purpose of the ASO is to review recommendations on global internet protocol (IP) address policy and to advise the ICANN Board. The ASO ensures that the policy development process is correctly followed in each RIR community:

- African Network Information Centre (AFRINIC)
- Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC)
- American Registry for Internet Numbers (ARIN)
- Latin America and Caribbean Network Information Centre (LACNIC)
- Réseaux IP Européens Network Coordination Centre (RIPE NCC)

The ASO conducts policy development work during RIR meetings and on mailing lists. The ASO Address Council (ASO AC) coordinates the global policy development work of the internet number community and appoints members to the ICANN Board, the ICANN Nominating Committee, and other ICANN groups. The ASO AC consists of 15 members, three from each RIR. ASO AC monthly teleconferences are open to observers, including CSOs (ICANN, 2024).

2.1.2.2 The Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO)

The GNSO is the policy development body responsible for gTLDs. Its members include representatives from gTLD registries, ICANN-accredited registrars, intellectual property interests, internet service and connectivity providers, businesses, and non-commercial interests. The GNSO brings these different stakeholders and other parts of the ICANN community together to develop gTLD policy recommendations through a multistakeholder process driven by working groups and teams (ICANN, 2018a).

The Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG)

NCSG is a home for CSOs and individuals within ICANN's GNSO, where policy for generic Top-level Domains (gTLDs) is developed. The NCSG provides a voice and representation in the GNSO and other ICANN policy processes to non-profit organisations and individuals who are primarily concerned with the non-commercial, public interest aspects of domain name policy (NCUC, 2025a). The NCSG has two differently focused constituencies, the NCUC and the NPOC.

The Not-for-profit Operational Concerns Constituency (NPOC)

The NPOC is a constituency within the NCSG, representing operational concerns related to the service delivery of not-for-profit and NGOs that are domain registrants in the DNS. The NPOC focuses on the impact of DNS policies and their effects on the operational readiness and implementation of non-commercial missions and objectives (ICANN, 2018b). The NPOC engages the ICANN community on how proposed and existing policies and initiatives may uniquely impact the operations of not-for-profit and non-governmental organisations and the delivery of their mission-related services (NPOC, 2019). Such not-for-profit and NGO perspectives on operational concerns include domain name registration, expansion of the DNS, fraud and abuse, and using the DNS to provide and gather information and serve their members and communities.

The Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC)

The NCUC is the home for CSOs and individuals in the GNSO who have voting power in ICANN's policy-making and board selection. The NCUC develops and supports positions that favour non-commercial communication and activity on the internet. The NCUC also serves CSOs devoted to internet freedoms and human rights, academic institutions involved in internet governance policy research, developing country NGOs, religious organisations, and cultural organisations. NCUC opens its doors to individual membership, provided that the individuals take a non-commercial outlook on policy matters (NCUC, 2025b).

2.1.2.3 The Country Code Names Supporting Organization (ccNSO)

The ccNSO provides a forum for country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD) managers to meet and discuss topical issues of concern to ccTLDs from a global perspective. The ccNSO provides a platform for technical cooperation and skills-building among ccTLDs, and facilitates the development of voluntary best practices for ccTLD managers. It is also responsible for developing and recommending global policies to the ICANN Board for a limited set of issues relating to ccTLDs (ICANN, 2020b).

Membership in the ccNSO is open to all ccTLD managers. The ccNSO is administered by the ccNSO Council, which consists of 18 councillors (15 elected by ccNSO members and three appointed by the ICANN NomCom). The ccNSO councillors are actively involved in determining the work and direction of the ccNSO. ccNSO Councillors manage the policy development process, lead and participate in various ccNSO working groups, engage with the ICANN community on topical issues, and develop positions based on ICANN community feedback (ICANN, 2025b).

2.1.2.4 The At-Large Community

ICANN's At-Large community acts in the interests of internet users. There are 267 At-Large Structures (ALSes) and over 200 Individual Members, organised into 5 Regional At-Large Organizations (RALOs) that represent the views of individual internet users around the world. These members include internet-related consumer rights groups, academic organisations, and public-minded individuals wishing to contribute to policies that influence the technical coordination of the DNS (ICANN, 2019a).

Within the At-Large community's bottom-up, tiered structure, the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) is the primary organisational home for the voice and concerns of the individual internet user. Representing the At-Large community, the 15-member ALAC consists of two members selected by each of the five RALOs and five members appointed by ICANN's NomCom. The role of the ALAC is to consider and provide advice on the activities of ICANN as they relate to the interests of individual internet users. The work of the At-Large community takes place primarily in working groups divided into three tracks: policy advice, operations, and community engagement. At-Large structures conduct their work through regular teleconferences and active participation during ICANN public meetings (ICANN, 2019b)

2.1.2.5 The Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC)

The GAC is the main body for government involvement at ICANN. Started in 1999 with the participation of 17 states and 6 intergovernmental organisations, GAC membership has risen over the years. Today, the GAC consists of 183 members – national governments and distinct economies recognised in international forums – and 39 observers – Including multinational governmental and treaty organisations as well as public authorities, participating in the GAC in an observer capacity (ICANN, 2021a). The GAC's key role is to advise the ICANN Board on public policy issues, especially where there may be an interaction between ICANN's activities or policies and national laws or international agreements (ICANN, 2021b).

GAC consensus advice has a particular status under the ICANN Bylaws. Such advice must be duly taken into account by the ICANN Board. If the ICANN Board proposes actions that would be inconsistent with GAC consensus advice, it must provide reasons for doing so and attempt to reach a mutually acceptable solution with the GAC (ICANN, 2021c).

2.1.2.6 The Root Server System Advisory Committee (RSSAC)

The RSSAC advises the ICANN community and the ICANN Board on matters relating to the operation, administration, security, and integrity of the root server system (RSS). The RSSAC consists of representatives from the root server operator organisations and liaisons from the partner organisations involved in the technical and operational management of the root zone (ICANN, 2024b). The RSSAC Caucus is composed of Domain Name System experts interested in the RSS, broadening the base of diverse technical expertise available for RSSAC work. The primary role of the RSSAC Caucus is to perform research and produce publications on topics relevant to the mission of the RSSAC (ICANN, 2024b).

2.1.2.7 The Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC)

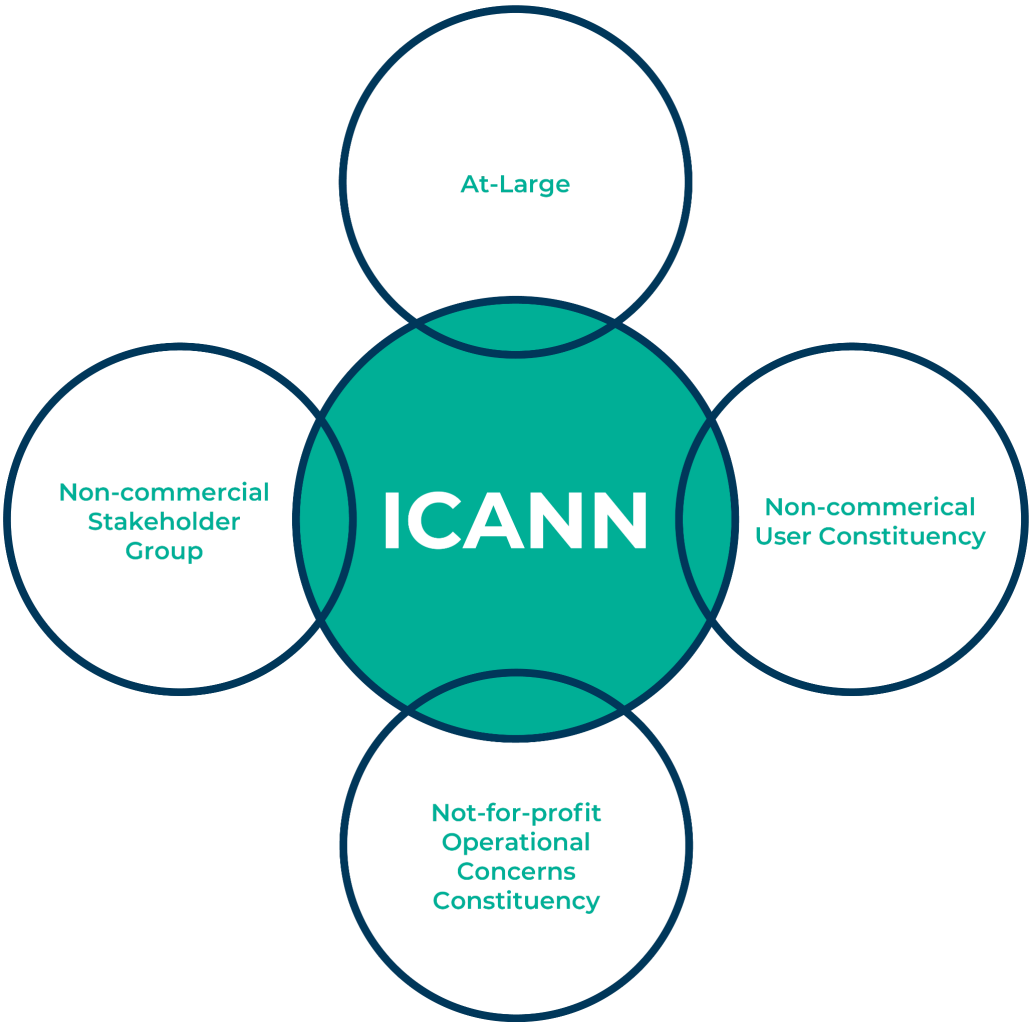
The SSAC advises the ICANN community and the ICANN Board on matters relating to the security and integrity of the naming and address allocation systems of the internet. This includes operational issues, such as those pertaining to address allocation and internet number assignment, and registration matters, such as those pertaining to registry and registrar services like WHOIS[1] (ICANN, 2024c).

2.1.3 CSO Engagement Mechanisms in ICANN

A variety of mechanisms and modalities exist for CSOs to actively engage in ICANN processes (Figure 3). These include participation through established structures representing non-commercial entities, such as the NCSG, the NCUC, and the NPOC. CSOs can also engage with ICANN through the At-Large community, representing individual internet users. These opportunities allow CSOs to contribute to policy development, advocate for user rights, and help ensure the internet remains an open and accessible resource for all.

[1] WHOIS is an Internet protocol that is used to query databases to obtain information about the registration of a domain name (or IP address). WHOIS data is a collection of data about the registered domain name, its name servers and registrar, the domain name creation date, the domain name expiration date, the contact information for the registered name holder, the technical contact, and the administrative contact.

Figure 3: Mechanisms and modalities of CSO engagement in ICANN



2.1.4 Requirements for CSOs to Participate in ICANN Processes

Engaging with ICANN is open to anyone willing to contribute their time. Navigating ICANN's complexities can be a steep initial climb, yet the learning process is rapid, and the benefits are substantial (Cath et al, 2017). For CSOs seeking to effectively engage with ICANN, a few key requirements need to be met. These include establishing legal non-profit status with transparent governance and dedicated resources for ICANN participation. ICANN accreditation and membership in relevant stakeholder groups may be necessary depending on the specific process. CSOs should demonstrate relevant expertise, maintain independence from commercial and governmental influence, and align with ICANN's mission. Table 2 summarises these requirements.

Table 2: Requirements for CSOs to participate in ICANN processes

Category	Requirement	Description
Administrative	Legal Status	Formally registered as non-profit organisations or have a similar legal status.
	Transparency	Maintain clear governance structures, financial transparency, and publicly available information.
	Internal Capacity	Have dedicated staff or volunteers with expertise and time commitment for ICANN engagement.
Registration	ICANN Accreditation	Obtain accreditation from ICANN for certain processes, particularly policy development or advisory committees.
	Membership in Stakeholder Groups	Join relevant stakeholder groups like NCSG or ALAC to enhance influence and access.
Accreditation	Demonstrated Expertise	Showcase expertise in areas relevant to ICANN's work, like internet governance or human rights.
	Independence	Maintain independence from commercial or governmental influence and be transparent about funding.
	Commitment to ICANN's Mission	Align with ICANN's mission and demonstrate willingness to engage constructively.
Logistical	Access to the Internet and Technology	Have reliable internet connection and access to communication channels and online resources.
	In-person Participation Support	Budget for travel, accommodation, and related expenses for in-person meetings.
	Language Skills	Proficiency in English is crucial for effective participation.

2.2 The IETF

The IETF is the internet's premier standards development organisation (SDO) (IETF n.d.a). It focuses on the technical development and evolution of internet protocols and standards, which serve as the underlying technologies that make the internet work. These standards, published as Requests for Comments (RFCs), cover many topics, including network protocols, security, routing, and applications. The IETF's work ensures that the internet remains interoperable, scalable, and secure, allowing continuous innovation and growth (Internet Society, 2025). The IETF operates through a decentralised, open, and collaborative process, where engineers and technical experts participate in working groups to propose, discuss, and refine internet standards.

There is no membership in the IETF. Anyone can participate by signing up to a working group mailing list or registering for an IETF meeting. All IETF participants are considered volunteers and expected to participate as individuals (IETF, n.d.a).

The IETF is governed by a hierarchy of leadership, including the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG) and the Internet Architecture Board (IAB). The IESG is responsible for overseeing the technical management of the IETF activities and ensuring that the proposed standards meet the

necessary criteria for approval. The IAB, on the other hand, provides strategic guidance and oversight, helping to shape the long-term direction of the IETF.

In addition to the working groups, the IETF also has various advisory and administrative bodies, such as the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF) and the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA). These entities work in tandem with the IETF to support its mission and ensure the effective implementation of its standards.

2.2.1 The IETF Decision-making Process

The IETF operates on a rough consensus model (IETF, 2014). This means that decisions are made based on general agreement within the working group responsible for a particular topic, rather than formal voting. The process highlights are:

- **Working Groups:** Experts interested in a specific topic form a working group.
- **Discussion:** Proposals are submitted as Internet-Drafts and discussed extensively on mailing lists and at the IETF meetings. There are no time specifications for proposal discussions.
- **Revision:** Drafts are revised based on feedback and further discussion.
- **Consensus:** When a rough consensus is reached, the working group forwards the document to the IESG.
- **IESG Review:** The IESG reviews the document for technical quality and consistency with other standards.
- **Publication:** If approved by the IESG, the document is published as an RFC (Request for Comments), becoming an official internet standard.

2.2.2 Working Groups and their Roles

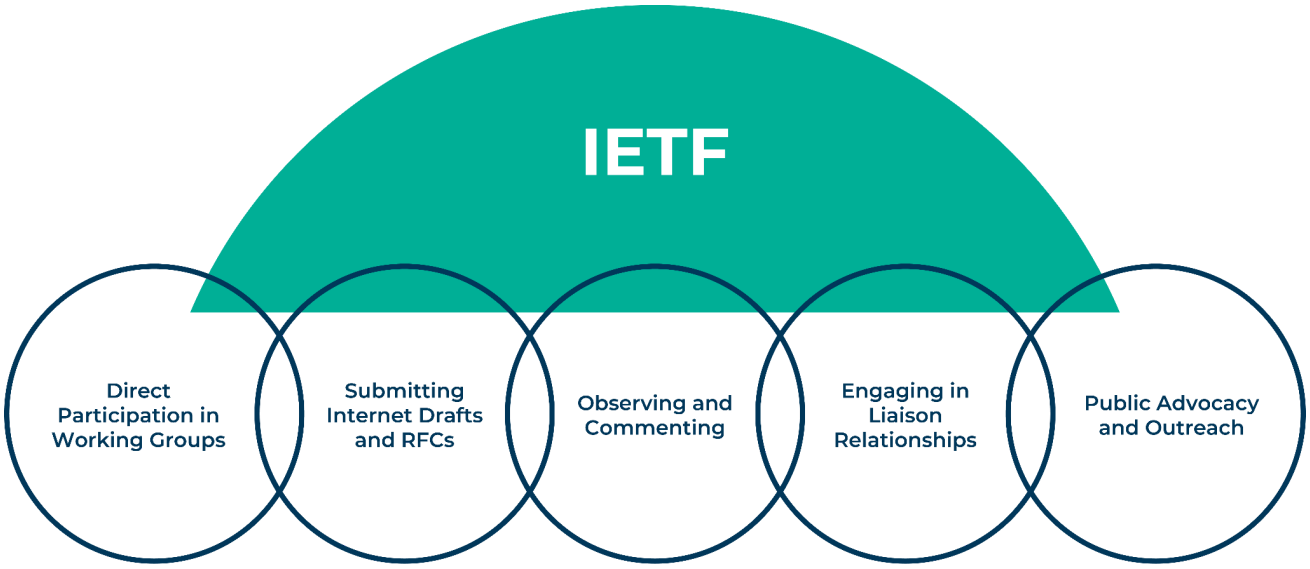
Working groups (WGs) are the backbone of the IETF, driving the development of new protocols and standards (IETF, n.d.b). WGs are formed based on community interest and demand, allowing the IETF to be responsive to the needs of the internet community. Discussions and decision-making within WGs are conducted through mailing lists and meetings, facilitating the exchange of ideas and collaboration among members. This approach is aimed at ensuring that IETF standards are reflective of the collective knowledge and experience of its community (IETF, n.d.b).

Each WG is led by one or more chairs, who are responsible for guiding the group's activities and ensuring that its objectives are met. The chairs facilitate discussions, manage the development of drafts, and coordinate with other WGs and IETF leadership (IETF, n.d.b). The success of IETF standards is, therefore, primarily attributed to the sustained contribution and expertise of its WGs. While the IETF operates mainly in the technical realm, CSO participation is vital for ensuring that technical standards reflect broader societal concerns and human rights considerations. CSOs can contribute perspectives on issues like privacy, accessibility, and the impact of new technologies on society, especially marginalised communities.

2.2.3 CSO Engagement Mechanisms in the IETF

CSOs can engage with the IETF through various avenues, ranging from direct technical contributions to broader advocacy efforts in WGs (Figure 4). These methods offer different levels of influence and require varying degrees of technical expertise, allowing CSOs to strategically participate in the development of internet standards.

Figure 4: Mechanisms and modalities of CSO engagement In the IETF



- **Direct Participation in WGs:** CSOs can participate in the IETF working groups, contribute to discussions, and provide feedback on draft standards. While this requires technical expertise, it offers a direct avenue for influencing technical decisions.
- **Submitting Internet-Drafts and RFCs:** CSOs can propose new standards or modifications to existing ones by submitting Internet-Drafts and RFCs. This requires in-depth technical knowledge and collaboration with experts, but it can lead to significant policy impact.
- **Observing and commenting:** Even without direct participation, CSOs can observe IETF meetings and working group discussions, submit comments on draft documents, and raise concerns about potential human rights implications.
- **Engaging in liaison relationships:** The IETF maintains liaison relationships with other organisations[2], frequently other SDOs or other internet governance organisations, including civil society groups, (IETF, n.d.d). CSOs can leverage these relationships to provide input on policy issues and collaborate on shared goals. New liaison appointments are rare, since the best way for organisations to work with the IETF is by participating in the relevant working groups or by having IETF WG members participate directly in the other organisation's structures.
- **Public Advocacy and Outreach:** Raising awareness about the IETF's work and mobilising public support for specific policy positions can indirectly influence the development of technical standards.

2.3 ITU

ITU is a specialised agency of the United Nations (UN) responsible for coordinating global telecommunications networks and services. It plays a significant role in internet governance by setting international standards for telecommunications technologies, allocating radio frequency spectrum, and develops the technical standards that ensure networks and technologies connect seamlessly, and works to improve access to digital technologies in underserved communities worldwide (ITU, 2025a).

[2] https://datatracker.ietf.org/liaison/

ITU comprises three sectors: Radiocommunication (ITU-R), Telecommunication Standardization (ITU-T), and Telecommunication Development (ITU-D). Each sector has its own unique characteristics and activities.

The membership of ITU is composed of Member States, Sector Members (private industry and other approved organisations), Associates, and Academia. It brings together 194 national governments and over 1,000 companies and organisations to develop international telecommunication standards and coordinate global spectrum and infrastructure policy (ITU, n.d.a). Only member states have voting rights. However, Sector Members can participate in discussions and contribute to consensus building. Other organisations and individuals, as described in Article 25 of the ITU Convention, can attend as observers.

According to Global Digital Partners (2024), many governments have used ITU processes, such as the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA), to attempt to expand the mandate of ITU into critical emerging areas of digital technology governance (like AI and the metaverse) or into operational aspects of the internet and its critical resources. This can potentially duplicate the work done in other open, expert-driven standard-making forums such as the IETF and poses a threat to the multistakeholder process of internet governance.

2.3.1 Structure of ITU

The structure of ITU involves the **Plenipotentiary Conference:** This is the supreme decision-making body of ITU. It meets every four years to set the general policies, adopt four-year strategic and financial plans, and elect the organisation's leadership and council members.

The **Council:** The council acts as the governing body between plenipotentiary conferences. It comprises 48 member states elected by the Plenipotentiary Conference, ensuring equitable regional representation. The Council prepares the agenda for the Plenipotentiary Conference, manages the Union's work program, and approves budgets (ITU, n.d.b).

ITU-R: The ITU-R sector focuses on the efficient management and use of the radio-frequency spectrum and satellite orbits. It develops international standards for radiocommunication systems to ensure their seamless interoperability.

ITU-T: The sector develops global standards for telecommunications networks and services, including those related to the internet. These standards ensure interoperability and facilitate the interconnection of networks across borders.

ITU-D: This sector promotes and supports the development of telecommunications and ICT infrastructure and services in developing countries. It focuses on bridging the digital divide and promoting access to affordable communication technologies.

General Secretariat: This body provides administrative and logistical support to ITU's activities. It is headed by the secretary-general, who is elected by the Plenipotentiary Conference.

Table 3 offers an overview of the three key sectors within ITU, i.e., ITU-R, ITU-T, and ITU-D. It also identifies the primary conference or assembly associated with each sector and the purpose and activities of these conferences/assemblies. Lastly, it notes the year of the next scheduled conference for each sector, offering a snapshot of the ITU's upcoming activities.

Table 3: ITU sectors

Item	ITU-R	ITU-T	ITU-D
Sector	Radiocommunication	Telecommunication Standardisation	Telecommunication Development
Mandate	Coordinates the allocation of Radio Frequency Spectrum and adopts radiocommunication recommendations (Art 13 ITU Constitution)	Studies technical, operational and tariff questions and adopts recommendations to standardise telecommunications (Art 17 ITU Constitution)	Facilitates and improves telecommunications development (Art 21 ITU Constitution)
Conference /Assembly	World Radiocommunications Conference (WRC)	World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA)	World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC)
Description	Considers revisions to the ITU Radio Regulations	Defines the work programme, working methods, and the structure of study groups for the following four years in ITU-T	Defines the work programme, working methods and the structure of study groups for the following four years in ITU-D
Occurrence	Every 3–4 years	Every 4 years	Every 4 years
Next Conference	2027	2028	2025

2.3.2 Decision-making Processes and Procedures

ITU generally strives for consensus in its decision-making processes. Decisions within ITU are made with the agreement of all member states. This means that at times, decisions may favour a geo-political orientation (Global Digital Partners, 2024). Within the ITU-R and ITU-T sectors, technical issues and standards are developed through study groups and working parties. These groups are composed of experts from member states, industry, and other stakeholders. ITU also organises world conferences on specific themes, such as the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT). These conferences bring together member states and other stakeholders to discuss and negotiate international agreements and regulations related to ICTs.

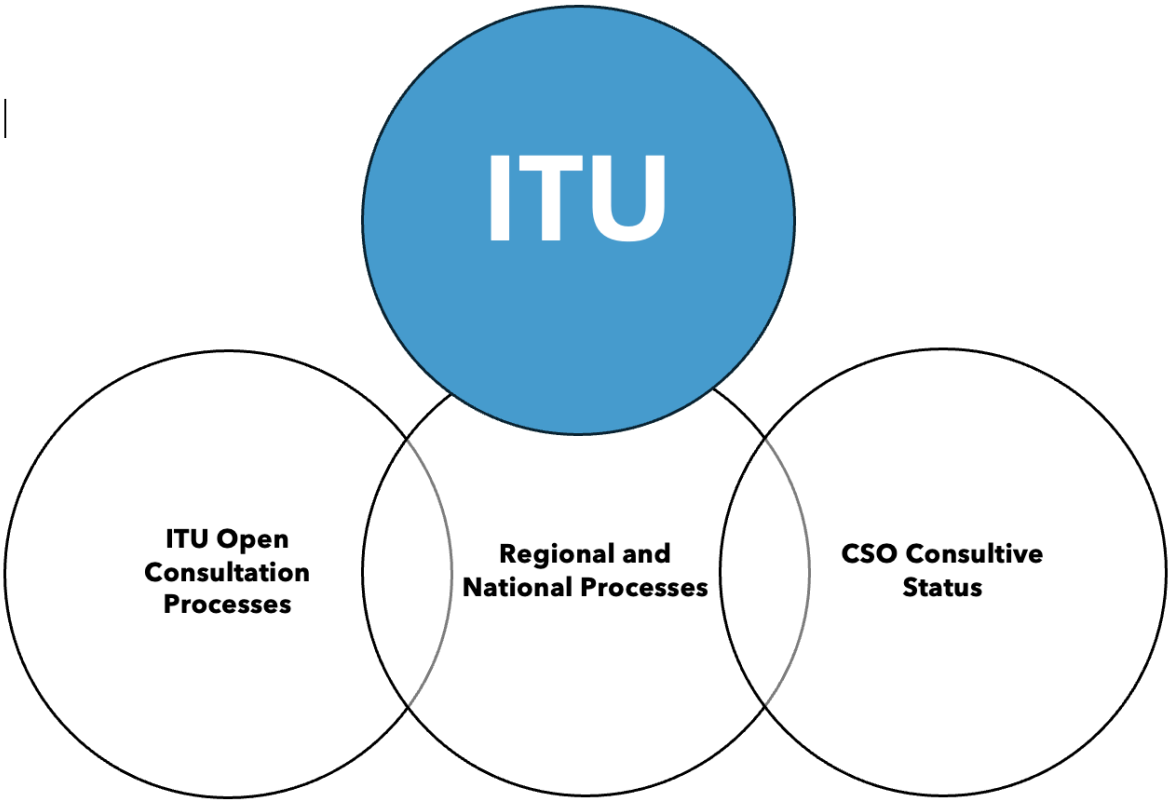
2.3.3 ITU Study Groups

ITU study groups are venues for ITU members to work collaboratively in responding to the priorities of the ITU membership. Each ITU study group is responsible for progressing ITU's work in a specific field of the ITU's mandate. These groups develop the technical basis for ITU agreements and associated activities. Study groups serve as the primary mechanism for developing international standards and recommendations for the ICT sector. They bring together experts representing governments, industry, academia, CSOs and other stakeholders. This facilitates the development of globally harmonised standards and recommendations.

2.3.4 CSO Engagement Mechanisms with ITU Processes

There are a number of avenues for CSOs to engage with ITU (Figure 5). These include having a consultative status with ITU, engaging through regional and national processes, and contributing to other processes which do not require formal membership.

Figure 5: Mechanisms of CSO engagement in ITU



To engage directly in ITU activities, including Study Groups, CSOs need to obtain an Associate or Sector Membership. The annual fees vary depending on the type of membership. However, these membership fees – ranging from CHF 3,975 (USD 4,500) to over CHF 60,000 (USD 68,000) annually – are often prohibitively expensive for many CSOs, particularly those based in low- and middle-income countries. Unlike other multilateral spaces, the ITU does not offer systematic fee waivers, sponsorships, or differentiated pricing for civil society actors. This financial barrier significantly limits formal CSO participation, particularly in technical standardisation and policy development processes where access to working documents and meetings requires membership.

CSO engagement at the national and regional levels offers an indirect way of engaging in ITU processes. Key experts interviewed for this study noted that CSOs with capabilities to establish strong relationships with individual member states and/or regional bodies have reported rewarding experiences. They said that at the national or regional levels, CSOs usually have a better chance of identifying potentially problematic proposals and initiating advocacy or offering advice to their government before decisions reach the level of intergovernmental negotiations.

Since ITU is multilateral in nature and negotiations are led by country delegations, being part of a national delegation offers CSOs an effective way of influencing decisions, as it helps them overcome barriers to access, such as restricted access to working documents and in-person meetings.

Modalities for stakeholder participation in member delegations vary from country to country, and as such, it is essential that CSOs have an accurate understanding of the delegation's structure and the rules of engagement. Global Digital Partners (2024) notes that CSOs should also be mindful of the considerations involved in engaging as part of a national delegation. While this modality helps CSOs overcome barriers to ITU participation, it may also involve aligning with the delegation's positions. As a result, CSOs may face limitations on the degree of independence with which they can contribute to discussions.

An increasing number of member states are choosing to include diverse voices from the private sector, academia, and civil society as part of their delegations (CEPT, 2019). Interviewed experts noted that 'some member states are supportive of more inclusive and multistakeholder engagement,' citing Brazil and Mexico as examples of governments that have successfully integrated CSOs as expert members of their delegations. Yet, in general, governments from the Global South and developing countries are more reluctant to include CSOs in their delegations than their counterparts in the North.

Several organisations with ties to ITU can also facilitate civil society engagement with the organisation. These include the Internet Society's national chapters and RIRs, which can provide guidance on navigating ITU and connect individuals with relevant networks. The main regional organisations that feed into the consolidated regional position include:

- Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT)
- Arab Spectrum Management Group (ASMG)
- African Telecommunications Union (ATU)
- Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU)
- European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT)
- Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL)
- Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications (RCC) –representing former Soviet republics

CSOs can also engage with ITU through public consultations, such as those held in open consultation processes, or through initiatives like Partner2Connect and Giga. Participation in side events, capacity-building workshops, or collaborations with ITU members (such as academia or industry) offers additional entry points. While these avenues do not grant access to formal decision-making or documents, they allow CSOs to contribute to broader discussions.

2.3.4.1 Requirements for CSOs to participate in ITU processes

Table 4 details the requirements that CSOs must meet to engage with ITU. These include demonstrating relevant technical expertise and being formally registered and potentially accredited.

Table 4: Requirements for CSOs to participate in ITU

Category	Requirement	Description
Technical	Relevant Expertise	CSOs should possess expertise and knowledge in the specific areas of ITU's work they wish to engage in. This may include technical, legal, policy, or other relevant fields.
Administrative	Formal Registration	CSOs typically need to be formally registered as an organisation in their home country.
	Accreditation	CSOs need to obtain accreditation from ITU to participate in certain processes, such as Study Groups.
	Designated Representative	CSOs may need to designate an official representative to act on their behalf in ITU proceedings.
Logistical	In-person Participation Support	CSO representatives may need to arrange and cover the costs of travel, accommodation, and other expenses associated with attending ITU meetings or events.
	Language Skills	ITU uses UN-approved languages. CSOs should be prepared to communicate and submit documents in one of these languages.
Accreditation	Associate or Sector status	CSOs need an associate or sector membership status with ITU to participate directly.
	Fees	Membership fees vary depending on the type of accreditation and the CSOs' country of origin.

Data source: ITU, n.d.a

2.3.5 Review of CSO Participation in Main ITU Meetings

WTDC

The WTDC typically attracts the highest number of CSO participants at ITU meetings (ITU, 2022), possibly due to its strong focus on development issues which resonate strongly with CSOs. In addition, participation at the WTDC has increased over the years. Whereas WTDC-17 convened approximately 1,500 participants, WTDC-22 saw over 2,100 participants.

The Internet Society's WTDC-22 Issues Matrix (2022) documents the conference's development-oriented priorities. WTDC-17, with its focus on broadband access and affordability, resulted in resolutions aimed at promoting infrastructure development, reducing costs, and encouraging investment in underserved areas. This reflects the primary concern of connecting the unconnected. WTDC-17 saw the adoption of Resolution 52, which urged member states to develop national broadband plans and policies to facilitate affordable internet access. WTDC-22 saw a broader range of issues come to the forefront. Resolutions addressed not only connectivity, but also digital skills development, cybersecurity, online safety, and the ethical use of AI (ITU, 2022). The focus expanded to include digital literacy, safety, and the responsible use of technology for societal good. This is exemplified by the WTDC-22 Kigali Action Plan (ITU, 2022), which outlines five key pillars for digital development, including affordable connectivity and digital transformation.

WTSA

The WTSA sets the direction for standardisation activities in telecommunications and ICTs. A comparison of the two most recent assemblies, WTSA-20 and WTSA-24, reveals some interesting trends and highlights.

WTSA-24 saw significantly higher participation than WTSA-20. WTSA-20 convened 1,281 delegates: 870 physically and 411 remotely. In total, 138 Member States attended, as well as 85 other entities. In situ participants represented 125 Member States, 49 Sector Members, 6 Academia Members, and 2 UN specialised agencies (CEPT, 2022). WTSA-24 brought together over 3,700 participants representing 160 Member States, including WTSA participants, with badges for associated ITU conferences and India Mobile Congress (ITU, n.d.d). While both assemblies addressed a wide range of topics, WTSA-24 placed a stronger emphasis on emerging technologies like AI, the internet of things (IoT), and cybersecurity.

In terms of resolutions, both WTSA-20 and WTSA-24 produced a number of outcomes aimed at guiding future standardisation work. However, WTSA-24 saw a greater focus on collaborative initiatives and partnerships, with top priorities issues including AI, the metaverse, emergency communications, and sustainable digital transformation (ITU, n.d.e). The ITU also reported an increasing engagement of developing countries in the standardisation process (ITU, n.d.c).

While there is a high bar for CSO engagement with WTSA, Article 19 works on priority issues in standardisation (ITU, 2024)

WRC

WRC meetings are held every three to four years to review, and, if necessary, revise the Radio Regulations, the international treaty governing the use of the radio-frequency spectrum and the geostationary-satellite and non-geostationary-satellite orbits (ITU, 2023). Notably, these decisions are executed at national and international levels.

The last conference was held in 2023, and its Final Acts are readily available (ITU, 2023).In theory, CSOs can advocate for policies that prioritise public interest, such as access to communication technologies, spectrum allocation for community radio, and the protection of the rights of marginalised groups. Research, participation in side events and collaboration with national delegations also offer some opportunities for input. CSOs might have a particular interest in related emerging issues.

While the involvement of CSOs could help promote a more inclusive and equitable approach to the use of radio frequencies and communication technologies, in practice the mapping research did not find evidence of this type of engagement.

2.4 The IGF

The IGF is an annual forum that fosters multistakeholder dialogue on internet governance issues. Its mandate was established by the Tunis Agenda during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005 and was extended for another 10 years by the UN General Assembly in 2015 (ITU, 2005a). As the WSIS+20 review approaches 2025, there is renewed attention on the future of the IGF and its role within the broader digital cooperation landscape.

The IGF is not a decision-making body, but rather a multistakeholder forum that brings together representatives of governments, industry, civil society, academia and the technical community to

discuss on an equal footing various issues related to internet governance (Canales Paz, 2024). This is a safe space for CSOs, and over the years, CSO participation has rapidly increased. The IGF's mandate is to offer a multistakeholder platform for discussing policy issues related to internet governance: exchanging best practices, enhancing capacity building efforts, and improving internet access in developing countries (Estier, 2024).

The IGF is founded on a set of core principles (ITU, 2005b):

- **Openness:** The IGF maintains an open forum where all stakeholders, regardless of background, can engage in discussions and contribute their perspectives. This inclusivity encourages diverse viewpoints in internet governance debates.
- **Inclusiveness:** The IGF strives to include all stakeholders, encompassing governments, civil society, the private sector, the technical community, international organisations, and academia. This multistakeholder approach ensures the representation and consideration of all perspectives.
- **Bottom-up approach:** The IGF operates on a bottom-up approach, where the agenda and discussions are driven by the interests and concerns of the stakeholders themselves. This ensures that the IGF remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the internet community.
- **Non-output oriented:** The IGF is not a decision-making body. Its primary function is to facilitate dialogue and the exchange of information. This allows for open and frank discussions without the pressure of reaching a consensus or producing negotiated outcomes.
- **Multistakeholderism:** The IGF is built on the principle of multistakeholderism, recognising that effective internet governance requires the collaboration of all stakeholders. This approach guarantees that all voices are heard and that decisions are made through a collaborative process.

2.4.1 The Structure of the IGF

The IGF operates through several key components (IGF, n.d.a):

- **Annual IGF meeting:** This yearly global event is the centrepiece of the IGF, taking place in a different host country each year. It features a diverse range of formats, including workshops, panel discussions, open forums, and networking opportunities, facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practices on internet governance.
- **NRIs (National and Regional Initiatives):** These independent meetings are organised at national and regional levels, mirroring the multistakeholder model of the global IGF. They provide a platform for addressing internet governance issues specific to local and regional contexts.
- **Best Practice Forums (BPFs):** These forums delve into specific internet governance themes, such as cybersecurity, access, and child online protection. They generate policy recommendations and reports that contribute to the development of best practices in these areas.
- **Dynamic Coalitions:** These issue-specific groups are formed by stakeholders who share a common interest in addressing particular internet governance challenges.
- **Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG):** This committee plays a crucial role in advising on the programme and themes for the annual IGF meeting. Its members represent a diverse range of stakeholders, including governments, civil society, the private sector, the technical community, and international organisations, ensuring a multistakeholder perspective in shaping the IGF's agenda.

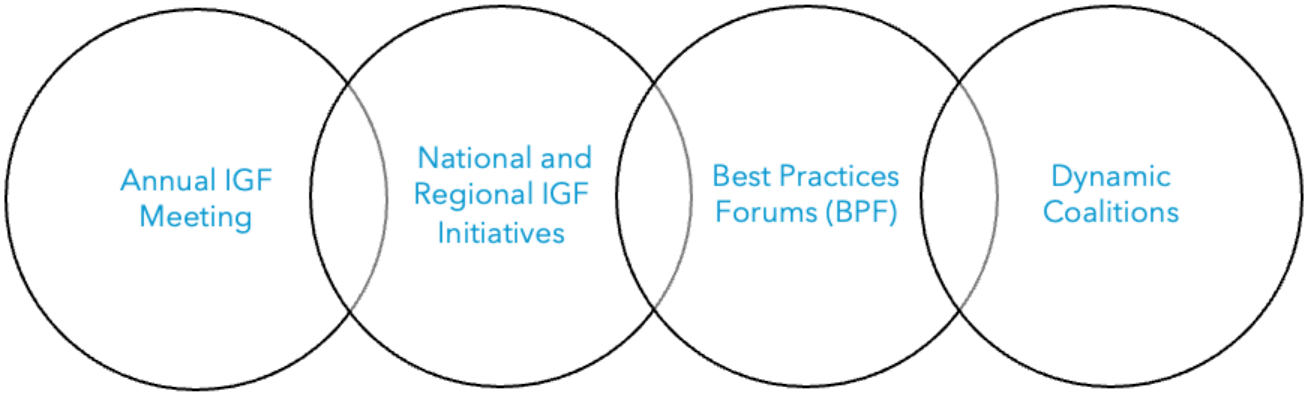
2.4.2 CSO Engagement Mechanisms in the IGF

The IGF has offered CSOs a safe space to engage and contribute to internet governance issues. According to Komaitis (2024), 'the IGF is one of those Internet-related events the internet community highly anticipates; it is an opportunity for people to congregate and discuss key policy and technology issues that shape our digital future. For the past 18 years, the IGF has been one of the most constant and predictable events in the internet governance calendar'.

The annual IGF meeting serves as a central platform for dialogue and collaboration, bringing together diverse stakeholders to discuss. NRIs allow CSOs to participate in discussions that have a local bearing. Since NRIs are typically viewed as a preparatory process that builds up to the global IGF, experts active in the IGF interviewed for this study, believe the approach of focusing on NRIs as foundation building is strategic for synthesising and harmonising the issues from localised levels.

The global IGF offers avenues such as the BPFs, which provide a structured environment for in-depth discussions on specific topics, enabling CSOs to share expertise and contribute to the development of best practices. Additionally, Dynamic Coalitions offer a flexible mechanism for CSOs to collaborate on issue-based groups throughout the year, ensuring sustained engagement and action on specific internet governance challenges (IGF, n.d.a). Figure 6 shows mechanisms and modalities for CSO engagement in IGF.

Figure 6: Mechanisms and modalities of CSO engagement in the IGF



Both the key experts and the results of the baseline survey reveal that for many CSOs, the costs associated with attending the IGF, including travel expenses and accommodation, are often prohibitive, especially when an IGF is organised in a Global North country. Visa restrictions present another major challenge for CSOs from the Global South. The process of obtaining a visa to travel to the IGF host country can be complex, time-consuming, and costly, often requiring extensive documentation and bureaucratic procedures. In some cases, despite their best efforts, CSO representatives may be denied visas altogether, preventing them from attending the IGF and contributing to the discussions. One key expert noted that 'the cost of a flight and other related expenses and time such as visa processes to attend an IGF meeting in Europe or somewhere in the Global North is unaffordable for the average Global South CSO.

These constraints can prevent CSOs, especially from the Global South, from participating in the IGF, hindering their ability to actively engage in the discussions. While it may not fully replicate the in-person experience, online participation options do lower the barriers and should, therefore, be further supported.

2.4.3 The WSIS+20 process

The WSIS+20 process marks the second review of the outcomes of WSIS, which took place in two phases – Geneva in 2003 (the Geneva phase) and Tunis in 2005 (the Tunis phase). The latter phase resulted in the establishment of the IGF. For CSOs, WSIS+20 presents both critical challenges and emerging opportunities.

WSIS+20 is unfolding in an increasingly complex and contested landscape. Governments are showing greater interest in controlling the technical, administration, and usage aspects of the internet (Haggart et al, 2021). Canales (2024) highlights attempts by some states to use forums such as ITU-T to promote nationally developed standards, potentially undermining the current multistakeholder model and the international interoperability of standards.

According to McDonald and Kaspar (2025), there are several issues surrounding the modalities for WSIS+20, which pose significant challenges for CSO. Firstly, delays in the process, 'resulting from the need to align the process with other UN processes, namely the GDC and its implementation', risk limiting the ability of CSOs to effectively plan their engagement and allocate resources. Secondly, the increasingly fragmented UN institutional landscape has led to overlapping mandates on technical issues among UN bodies and agencies. While ITU is the key agency set to co-host the WSIS+20 High-Level event, more clarity on how other agencies will coordinate their roles is needed.

Overall, the WSIS+20 represents a pivotal moment and triggers an urgent need for transparent modalities and inclusive mechanisms.

2.5 Conclusion

This section has mapped key internet governance forums, and explored mechanisms for CSO participation within ICANN, the IETF, ITU, and the IGF. Each body offers distinct engagement opportunities but also presents challenges, particularly for CSOs from the Global South.

In managing the internet's naming and addressing system, ICANN uses a multistakeholder model with entry points like the NCSG and ALAC. However, its complexity demands significant resources and expertise, posing challenges for CSOs in meeting administrative and technical requirements. This complexity can be interpreted as a form of 'technical gatekeeping' where the

very structure of participation favours those with existing resources and expertise, effectively marginalising less privileged voices.

On the other hand, the IETF, developing internet standards, operates through open working groups and rough consensus (Russell, 2006). CSOs can contribute with technical expertise and submit RFCs or provide input on human rights and societal impacts. Technical expertise is key, but CSOs add valuable non-technical perspectives as well. The IETF's emphasis on technical expertise reveals a potential for 'expertise bias', where non-technical but equally crucial perspectives on social and human rights implications may be undervalued. The fact that discussions are primarily held in English and in-person meetings often take place in the Global North, poses an even greater challenge for CSO participation from the Global South.

ITU, a UN agency coordinating global telecommunications, is member-state-driven, requiring CSOs to engage through national delegations. Associate or sector member status can enhance access, but CSOs face hurdles like registration fees and logistical barriers. The ITU's state-centric approach underscores the persistent dominance of national governments in global governance.

The IGF, as a multistakeholder forum, offers open participation through annual meetings, NRIs, BPFs, and DCs. Yet, financial and logistical constraints for in-person meetings hinder CSO participation, especially from the Global South. The WSIS+20 review process, a pivotal moment for internet governance, requires strategic navigation of UN structures. This highlights the challenge of integrating internet governance into broader UN frameworks, where bureaucratic complexities can further impede effective CSO engagement.

Effective CSO engagement requires understanding each body’s structures and addressing barriers like resource gaps and capacity limitations. This understanding must go beyond mere procedural knowledge and include a critical analysis of the power dynamics at play. Strategic collaboration and capacity building are essential to ensure inclusive, representative internet governance that serves the public interest. However, capacity building efforts must be grounded in principles of equity and empowerment, rather than simply replicating existing power structures. True inclusivity requires a shift towards recognising and valuing diverse forms of knowledge and expertise, and ensuring that the voices of marginalised communities are not only heard, but also meaningfully integrated into decision-making processes.

Section 3. Gaps and Barriers to Engagement within Internet Governance Processes

This section discusses the challenges faced by CSOs in engaging with internet governance processes. The section consolidates findings from the key expert interviews and baseline survey as well as the literature review conducted for this study, highlighting the recurring barriers faced by CSOs in various internet governance processes.

The most significant pattern identified is the limited or absent CSO participation in key internet governance discussions and processes across different forums. The study attributes this lack of engagement to several factors, including financial constraints, technical jargon and communication challenges, complex procedures, and bureaucracy. The study also documents aspects of insufficient diversity and inclusivity and the existence of silos. Disparities in influence in key internet governance processes is another recurring issue emanating from policy and regulatory hurdles, the digital divide, and the misalignment of organisational priorities, as evidenced in interviews and survey responses.

3.1 Limited Participation or Absence from Internet Governance Discussions

Interviewed key experts reveal a recurring pattern of limited or no CSO participation in important internet governance discussions and processes across all relevant forums. This lack of engagement stems from various factors, including resource constraints, the nature of the spaces where these discussions occur, and the diversity of the CSO landscape. The consequences of this underrepresentation are significant. According to respondents, without meaningful CSO participation, resulting policies may fail to serve the needs of all stakeholders, exacerbating the digital divide and hindering the internet's potential to drive social and economic progress in the Global South. This section delves into the multifaceted reasons behind this persistent challenge, exploring the specific barriers that limit CSO engagement in internet governance processes.

3.1.1 Financial Constraints

CSOs face significant barriers to effective engagement in internet governance forums, with financial constraints emerging as the most prevalent challenge cited by key experts. Many organisations, especially smaller ones, struggle to cover travel costs and participation fees for international events. This financial hurdle disproportionately affects CSOs from the Global South, limiting their representation and voice in global internet governance discussions. Although some processes involve a large chunk of the work being carried out online – such as mailing lists – one key expert noted that when it comes to in-person participation, 'the cost of a flight to an ICANN meeting in North America or Europe is unaffordable for the average Global South CSO.'

The baseline survey records financial limitations as the most pervasive obstacle to CSO engagement in internet governance forums, which goes beyond issues of in-person participation. A key expert explained, for instance, how the lack of funding limits CSOs' ability to develop the technical expertise to contribute meaningfully to complex internet governance discussions.

While financial resources are often cited as a primary barrier to CSO participation in internet governance forums, the reality is more complex.

3.1.2 Technical Jargon and Communication

Another significant barrier for CSOs engaging in internet governance is the lack of technical expertise on intricate and evolving issues. Internet governance issues can be complex and rapidly evolving, and this often requires specialised knowledge that many organisations, particularly grassroots groups, may not possess. Interviewed key experts reveal that spaces like the IETF, for example, are highly technical in nature, and difficult to engage with and understand without some level of technical expertise. Its procedures and rules are also unique, stemming from early tech communities. To get involved, one needs to learn these rules and customs, and the learning curve is usually steep for non-technical participants. The baseline survey revealed that many CSOs demonstrate limited capacity to comprehend emerging technical issues that are topical in some internet governance processes.

One key expert pointed out that *'participation is difficult for civil society for numerous reasons, starting from knowledge, capacity, understanding, resources, time, connections and so on. If we start from the basics, understanding the modalities of the rules of participation is even the first hurdle for some organisations.'* This highlights the need for targeted capacity building and support to enable CSOs, especially those from the Global South, to navigate complex internet governance processes and contribute meaningfully.

This limited awareness extends to specific internet governance forums and processes, with many organisations reporting very limited participation in key venues like the ICANN, the IETF or ITU. The technical complexity of emerging technologies like AI poses a significant challenge for CSOs. Survey respondents frequently cite *'lack of technical expertise'* as a significant barrier to engagement. This knowledge gap hinders CSOs' ability to effectively advocate technical policy issues and contribute meaningfully to discussions on emerging technologies.

This gap can be further worsened by communication challenges, with the language barrier being the main obstacle. Respondents noted that IETF work is done almost exclusively in English, and rapid conversations with technical jargon are common in meetings. Participation by non-English speakers or speakers for whom English is a second language is challenging. Although simultaneous interpretation would certainly help during meetings, survey responses reveal that this barrier extends beyond mere translation; it encompasses the ability to understand and engage with the complex technical and policy jargon – often involving the significant use of acronyms and abbreviations – in internet governance discussions.

The dominance of English in many international internet governance processes excludes valuable perspectives from linguistically diverse regions. This language gap often leads to the underrepresentation of diverse perspectives in global internet governance discussions. It can also reinforce the perception – particularly in regions like Africa – that these conversations are irrelevant or inaccessible. As one key expert with experience in ICANN spaces notes:

'*There's still capacity building that needs to happen for total participation. Most of the CSOs are within the region (Africa). And partly, it comes from the perspective that the conversations happening within ICANN do not affect Africa, especially if one does not have a background of what ICANN does. It then becomes difficult to navigate and understand those conversations and make sense out of them.'*

3.1.3 Procedures and Bureaucracy

Expert interviews confirmed how multilateral processes have complex procedures and bureaucracy, posing a significant hurdle for CSOs. ITU's procedures and processes make it difficult for CSOs to navigate and participate effectively. This can be particularly challenging for smaller CSOs with limited staff and capacity. One key expert explained that, for instance, the process for submitting contributions or interventions to ITU study groups can be complex and time-consuming, requiring adherence to specific formats. This can be a barrier for smaller CSOs with limited administrative capacity. In addition, CSOs without ITU tier accounts, for instance, cannot access essential ITU documents. These documents, often critical for informed policy advocacy and effective project implementation, are locked behind a system based on membership tiers. This creates an uneven playing field, limiting the ability of smaller organisations with constrained resources to contribute meaningfully to the global ICT discourse and effectively serve their communities. Complex procedures and bureaucracy add significantly to the financial burden as well.

3.2 Insufficient Diversity and Inclusivity

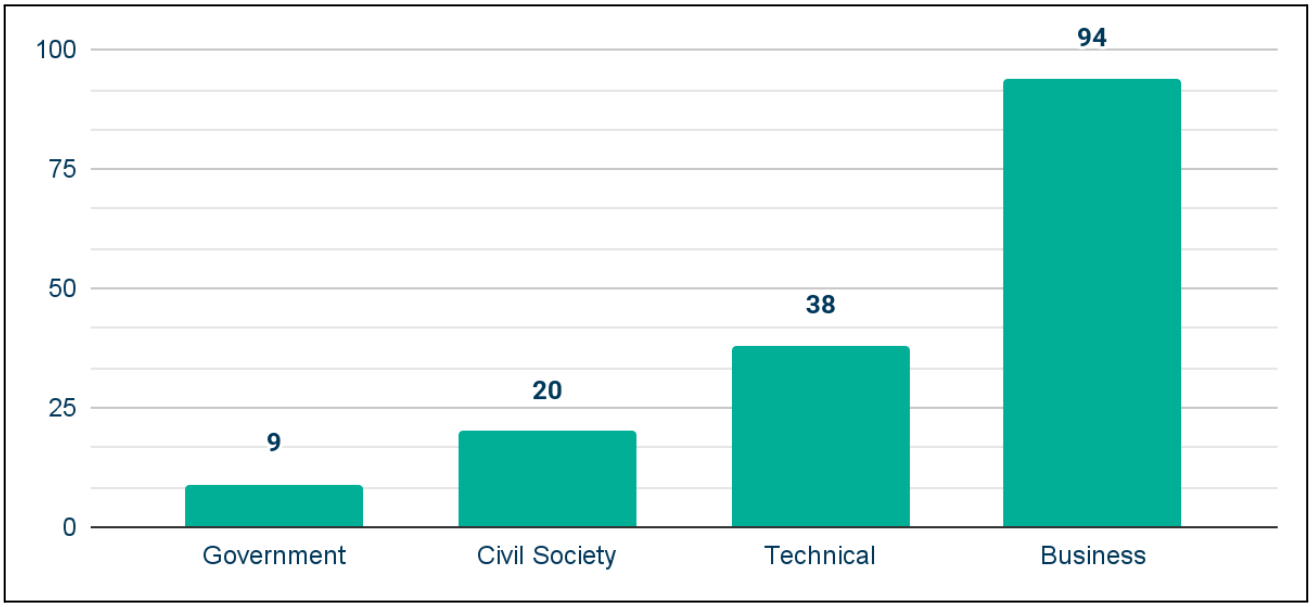
The increasing importance of digital diversity has become a critical concern in recent years, particularly with the realisation that inclusivity has received insufficient attention in recent global developments. Diversity, in its broadest sense, spans cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences. The internet's strength lies in its role as a platform for a multitude of voices and viewpoints, each essential to its vitality (Ayub, 2024). Insufficient inclusivity in stakeholder representation is one of the recurring issues regarding engagement in internet governance processes. The study reveals limited diversity among participants in terms of gender, ethnicity, and background, especially in standard-making bodies.

According to Knodel and Salazar (2023), in spaces such as ICANN and the IETF, a large percentage of participants are from Western Europe or North America and mainly work for big tech companies. Systemic representational bias is embedded in forums like the IETF, which can alienate participants that identify outside its white, male, Global North monoculture.

This lack of inclusivity is also reflected in IETF's operational decisions, such as organising meetings in countries with poor records on LGBTIQ rights. According to Cath (2021), the IETF is 'procedurally open but in practice quite thorny' and 'an organisation that prides itself in abrasiveness'. Cath also argues that 'the informal practices within the IETF are exclusionary because they are masculine practices', making the IETF 'unattractive for participants who don't identify as male'.

This issue of insufficient inclusivity is also present at ICANN, as evidenced through the composition of ICANN's leadership structure, for instance. Figure 7 compares CSO representation with other stakeholder groups throughout ICANN's different leadership constituencies. In 2022, civil society participants occupied only 12% of leadership roles in the ICANN community. It is also important to note that not all leadership roles hold the same authority; some of the positions only allow for observer status and do not grant voting rights.

Figure 7: Stakeholder group of individuals in ICANN leadership roles in 2022



Data source: Férdeline, 2022

According to Férdeline (2022), the scenario presents a historical issue within ICANN structures favouring mostly business influence. In this case, commercial interests constitute 58% of leadership roles across the board. While this situation may take time to address, it underscores the need for ICANN to prioritise diverse representation.

The lack of diversity in ICANN's structures presents a significant challenge to sustained membership growth and can result in a gradual decline in community participation over time. ICANN, as a community, is predominantly composed of long-standing members, which points to a general lack of diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Another perspective gathered from a key expert participating at the ICANN 81 meeting indicates that many newcomers are discouraged by the technical nature of the discussions and do not remain involved in ICANN in the long term. This partly explains why only long-standing members remain engaged, resulting in newer perspectives being further underrepresented.

When a community is dominated by individuals with similar backgrounds, shared biases and blind spots can emerge, making it difficult to identify potential problems or consider alternative solutions. Long-standing members may be resistant to change and new ideas, hindering innovation and adaptability. This lack of diverse perspectives leads to a limited range of approaches to problem-solving, potentially overlooking critical aspects or innovative solutions. Since ICANN is dominated by business interests, for instance, decisions may favour business interests at the expense of the less represented communities.

As highlighted by Férdeline (2022), geographic diversity has also become a concern. There is generally over-representation from the Global North, potentially affecting many policy decisions on issues like internationalised domain names.

Lack of inclusivity is also a major concern in the IETF, which is dominated by the developer community (Cath, 2021). CSOs, particularly from the Global South, are heavily underrepresented in IETF processes. CSO participation in the IETF remains relatively limited compared to technical

experts and industry representatives, based on data from IETF reports in 2021, 2022, and 2023 (Table 5).

Table 5: IETF participation among respondents by sector in 2021–2023

IETF Participant Category	Estimated Representation
Technical experts (network engineers, software developers, researchers, etc.)	~60-70%
Industry representatives (from technology companies, internet service providers, equipment vendors, etc.)	~20-30%
Government representatives:(from national governments, regulatory agencies, etc.)	~5-10%
CSOs (NGOs, advocacy groups, etc.)	**~5-10%**
Academics (researchers, professors, students, etc.)	~5-10%

Geographical diversity is another factor impacting inclusivity at IETF on a practical level. Although many discussions take place online (especially through mailing lists), in-person IETF meetings have rarely taken place in the Global South; rather, they have been predominantly hosted in North America, Europe, and parts of Asia, on a rotating basis. This places a significant burden on participants from the Global South, having to contend with longer travel distances, navigate complex border controls, and incur higher travel and accommodation costs (Knodel and Salazar, 2023). As a result, the unique needs and perspectives of these regions are underrepresented, leading to potential biases and overlooking critical issues.

3.3 Existence of Silos Undermining Collective Efficacy

Another issue which continues to undermine the collective efficacy of multistakeholder collaboration efforts is the existence of silos. These silos are due to a lack of cross-community engagement. These often lead to fragmented initiatives and decrease the achievement of sustainable results. The impact of these silos is evident in several areas. Firstly, policy development processes, especially those that take place through working groups, often become bogged down by entrenched positions among different stakeholder groups, leading to policies not reflecting the interests of the majority of stakeholders.

In fact, key experts revealed that while community working groups are intended to foster collaboration, they inadvertently become silos themselves due to the dominance of, very often, business stakeholders, and a lack of cross-community engagement. This results in duplicated efforts and a lack of coherence.

One instance highlighting these challenges is the topic of Internationalized Domain Names for Country Code Top-Level Domains (IDN ccTLDs).[3] This area has been plagued by fragmentation and lack of coordination among different stakeholder groups. Within ICANN, the IDN Working Group and the IDN ccTLD Fast Track Working Group both have mandates related to IDN ccTLDs.

[3] For illustration purposes; IDN ccTLDs allow countries and territories to use their native languages and scripts in their internet addresses. This promotes linguistic diversity and inclusivity online by enabling users to register and access domain names in their local languages. For instance, Egypt can utilise '.مصر' instead of '.eg', improving accessibility for Arabic speakers. IDN ccTLDs create a more user-friendly internet environment and empower individuals to engage with online resources in their preferred languages.

However, their approaches and timelines often diverge, leading to confusion and inefficiencies. Discussions within these groups are often dominated by technical experts, neglecting the broader policy implications and community perspectives. This has slowed down the implementation of IDN ccTLDs in many countries and delayed the availability of domain names in local languages, hindering online accessibility and digital inclusion.

According to a recent IDN World Report (2023), a significant number of ccTLD registries offer IDN registrations, but the actual number of IDN registrations remains relatively low compared to the overall domain market. IDN domains currently represent less than 1% of the estimated 360 million domains worldwide. This disparity can most likely be attributed to the internet's historical development, which is predominantly in Latin script.

Geographic or regional silos are also a concern. For instance, CSOs from developing regions such as Africa face barriers to participation due to financial constraints and a general lack of awareness. Regions have distinct priorities and concerns regarding internet governance, and yet, not enough attention is given to distinct priorities at sub-regional or even local levels. A key recommendation is that priorities should not be generalised but tackled on a more granular level. A failure to effectively bridge these perspectives impedes progress on global issues.

3.4 Disparity in Influence

The study identified concerns about the influence of large tech companies in internet standard-making bodies such as the IETF and ICANN. Large tech companies, with their significant financial resources and vested interests in the internet landscape, have the potential to exert significant influence over decisions.

There are also concerns that large tech companies have a disproportionate representation in key committees or advisory groups, giving them more influence over policy-making. Some decisions have been perceived to create an unfair playing field for smaller businesses, and more importantly for this study, an uneven playing field where the voices and interests of CSOs are overshadowed by those of large tech companies. This can lead to policies and standards that prioritise commercial interests over the public good.

3.4.2 Government Perception of CSOs as Competitors

ITU's state-centric structure carries barriers to direct CSO involvement. Governments often dominate these spaces, viewing them as their exclusive domain and sometimes perceiving CSOs as competitors rather than partners. CSO participation is often limited, even within national delegations. This imbalance in representation makes it challenging for CSOs to have their voices heard. Even when CSOs can participate, they face significant hurdles in accessing key discussions and influencing outcomes. As one key expert pointed out, ‘The US delegation for ITU-T is something like 250 people. It's humongous, and two-thirds of them are big tech companies. Or maybe not big, but tech companies. And then there's two or three civil society people that are in that group.’ The influence of CSOs is, therefore, limited, which calls for a robust CSO-coordinated effort and action.

3.4.3 Policy and Regulatory Hurdles

Interviewed key experts revealed that restrictive laws and limited access to decision-makers in some countries create substantial obstacles to CSO engagement. Experience shows that in some regions and countries, CSO voices are often suppressed, and restrictive regulatory environments

pose challenges. These challenges are particularly acute in regions where civil society spaces are shrinking, making it difficult for organisations to advocate effectively on internet governance issues without risking government backlash. One interviewee from an African country noted that CSOs face obstacles in data protection and freedom of expression, both online and offline. These constraints can significantly limit their ability to engage fully in internet governance processes.

3.4.4 Digital Divide

The survey results reveal the reality of the digital divide, particularly in developing regions. This gap manifests in various forms, creating significant barriers to equitable participation in the digital world. The persistent digital divide continues to be a substantial impediment, particularly for organisations in Africa and parts of Asia. The digital gap is further exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure. Many countries in the Global South lack the necessary technological backbone to support robust digital engagement. This includes stable internet connectivity, access to devices, and continuous power supply. In some areas, frequent power outages compound the challenge of maintaining a consistent online presence. This infrastructure gap limits CSOs' ability to participate in online forums and hampers their capacity to conduct research, collaborate with peers, and stay informed about rapidly evolving internet governance issues.

3.4.5 Misalignment between Internet Governance and Organisational Priorities

Key experts revealed that another obstacle limiting engagement in internet governance spaces is that many CSOs face challenges in aligning internet governance discussions with their primary mission areas, which often limits their motivation to actively participate in such forums. This misalignment typically arises from a perceived lack of relevance or immediate impact on the core issues they address, particularly those affecting their primary constituencies.

For instance, organisations working on urgent local or community-specific challenges of election violence might view internet governance as a distant concern. As a result, they may deprioritise engagement in these discussions, opting instead to allocate their limited resources and attention to more pressing, mission-critical activities. This disconnect not only hinders the ability of CSOs to contribute meaningfully to internet governance debates but also exacerbates the lack of diverse representation in these forums.

3.5 Conclusion

This section has highlighted the key challenges CSOs face in engaging with internet governance processes. A recurring issue is the limited or absent participation of CSOs in critical internet governance discussions, driven by financial constraints, technical complexity, bureaucratic hurdles, and overused specialised jargon. These barriers disproportionately affect CSOs from the Global South, with language barriers and the dominance of English further excluding diverse perspectives.

Diversity and inclusivity remain significant concerns, as internet governance forums often lack representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, and geographic background. This underrepresentation, particularly in organisations like ICANN and the IETF, can lead to biased decision-making and the marginalisation of voices from underrepresented groups and the Global South. The dominance of technical experts and corporate interests further skew agendas, undermining equitable representation. Fragmentation and siloed approaches hinder

collaboration, as seen in challenges related to IDN ccTLDs, where disjointed efforts have slowed progress.

Power imbalances also persist, with large tech companies and governments wielding strong influence, often sidelining CSOs and smaller stakeholders. Policy barriers and the digital divide further limit CSO engagement, particularly in developing regions. Additionally, some CSOs deprioritise internet governance engagement due to urgent organisational priorities, reducing diverse representation. Addressing these challenges requires collective action to enhance transparency, improve access to resources, promote capacity building, and ensure diverse voices are included in shaping the future of the internet.

Section 4. Opportunities for CSO Participation in Internet Governance Processes

This section explores opportunities for CSOs to engage with key internet governance processes, focusing on the IGF, ICANN, the IETF, and ITU. Drawing on insights from key experts and the baseline survey findings, it provides practical entry points for CSOs new to these spaces, and ways in which CSOs can strengthen their participation. The findings highlight innovative strategies to gain relevance, build momentum, and secure and retain a place in decision-making processes, as shared by respondents. The ultimate goal is to empower CSOs to make impactful contributions to the growth and sustainability of a globally connected, open internet accessible to all, based on the experiences and recommendations of those actively involved in these efforts.

4.1 Opportunities for CSO Engagement in IETF and IRTF Processes

The IETF plays a crucial role in shaping the internet. For CSOs, understanding and engaging with the IETF is vital. The IETF operates through various WGs, each focused on a specific area of internet technology. In addition, the IRTF delves into the internet's longer-term challenges. This includes exploring emerging technologies and their potential impact on society. As one key expert noted, the IRTF's research groups, like the Crypto Forum Research Group (CFRG) and the Human Rights Protocol Considerations Research Group (HRPC), are particularly relevant to CSO. These groups tackle issues like the development of strong encryption tools and the integration of human rights considerations into internet protocols.

Knodel and Salazar (2023) argue that people contributing to the IETF and IRTF are primarily driven by specific goals or desired outcomes; they have an agenda particular to them. This means their participation may not simply be about contributing to the common good of the internet but is often influenced by a specific target they want to achieve. Active IRTF research groups[4] provide a good entry point for CSOs interested in understanding and actively getting involved in IETF processes. While CSOs are often associated with human rights issues, their scope of work extends far beyond this domain. Many CSOs actively address technology, economic development, and regulatory frameworks, among other critical areas related to internet governance. Data collected through key interviews underscores that CSOs play a vital role in identifying and prioritising issues that are most relevant to their constituencies, regions, and spheres of influence. This localised expertise allows them to provide unique, grassroots perspectives that are essential for addressing complex challenges.

However, the inclusion of CSOs in working groups or research initiatives should not be driven solely by a desire to increase participation numbers. Tokenistic inclusion can undermine the credibility of both CSOs and the groups they are part of, particularly when their expertise is not aligned with the group's objectives. Instead, CSOs should be included purposefully, based on the relevance of their expertise, the specific needs of the group, and their ability to contribute meaningfully to the discussion or decision-making process. In addition, as a key expert noted, the IRTF has a long list of research groups that did not survive long due to limited interest and active

[4] https://datatracker.ietf.org/rg/

participants, making it important for CSOs to join research groups that resonate with their interests and where they can actively contribute.

CSOs are particularly valuable in contexts where grassroots perspectives, community engagement, or specialised knowledge are needed. Additionally, care must be taken to ensure that the CSOs included are truly representative of the constituencies they claim to speak for, and that power dynamics do not marginalise their voices in practice.

The following non-exhaustive list of research groups and working groups (Table 6) provides some important spaces relevant to CSOs that could serve as entry points for CSOs due to cross-cutting issues.

Table 6: IETF and IRTF working groups and research groups relevant for CSOs

IETF/IRTF	Name of Group	Description
IRTF	Human Rights and Policy Considerations (HRPC)	The HRPC, headed by Article 19, focuses on whether standards and protocols can enable, strengthen, or threaten human rights, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), specifically, but not limited to the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of assembly. The group objectives include: • Exposing the relations between protocols and human rights values, focusing on the human rights framework, such as the policy implications of technology choices and the technical implications of policy choices. • Suggesting guidelines to protect the internet as a human-rights-enabling environment and a global public good in future protocol development. • Increasing awareness in both the human rights community and the technical community of the importance of the internet's technical workings, and their impact on human rights and the public interest. • Creating a place for discussions and analysis of the relationship between protocol development and their human rights and policy implications by, among other mechanisms, serving as a bridge between the human rights and the protocol's development communities.
IRTF	The Privacy Enhancements and Assessments Research Group (PEARG)	PEARG is a general forum for discussing and reviewing privacy-enhancing technologies for network protocols and distributed systems in general, and for the IETF in particular. It follows IETF work on violations of societal, community, and individual privacy, as well as protocol-specific documents such as DNS privacy in RFC 7626 and pervasive monitoring (RFC 7258). Similar to HRPC, PEARG's chartering is evidence that privacy issues are central to internet participation in the IETF 13 protocol design and should be studied long-term to influence protocol development.
IETF	The Domain Name System Operations (DNSOP)	DNSOP develops technical information and guidance for the operation of DNS software and services, and for the administration of DNS zones. DNS privacy is a significant area of focus for the technical community and has a direct impact on user privacy, free expression, and access to information. The standardisation of encrypted DNS protocols like DNS-over-HTTPs or DNS-over-TLS protects user privacy and anonymity and marks a welcome, broader shift toward a more rights-respecting internet infrastructure.

IETF	The Messaging Layer Security (MLS)	The MLS is researching a standard messaging security protocol for human-to-human(s) communication with security and deployment properties so that applications can share code and so that there can be shared validation of a single end-to-end encrypted communications protocol. This is quite relevant for CSO work in digital democracy.
IRTF	The Global Access to the Internet for All (GAIA)	GAIA tackles the long-term internet problem of the digital divide as access to the internet becomes ubiquitous. Through community network implementers, GAIA creates visibility for and tracks some of the most innovative and challenging aspects of the environmental, political, and socioeconomic barriers to the implementation of internet protocols.
IRTF	Thing-to-Thing research group	The Thing-to-Thing research group is focused on protecting internet of things (IoT) devices against attacks. This group researches IoT deployments and must ensure they are not used for Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks. DDoS attacks are typically done using compromised devices or through amplification attacks using a spoofed source address. The group presents examples of different theoretical amplification attacks using the Constrained Application Protocol (CoAP). The goal is to raise awareness and motivate generic and protocol-specific recommendations on the usage of CoAP.

Data sources: IETF, n.d.a / IRTF, n.d

4.1.1 Initiatives Addressing Engagement Challenges in the IETF

The IETF has a number of onboarding programmes. As noted by Knodel and Salazar (2023), the Education, Mentoring, and Outreach Directorate (EMODIR) plays a key role in this effort. EMODIR provides coordinated resources and educational opportunities tailored for various audiences, from newcomers and general participants to specific communities and IETF leadership, including working group chairs (IETF 2024). Mentoring programmes are also managed by EMODIR to accelerate the integration of new participants into productive roles within the IETF.

In addition to this internal initiative, there are IETF external programmes designed to help participants overcome barriers to participation. These programmes could potentially help bridge certain gaps and assist CSOs to participate in person in IETF meetings to build and grow their networks with like-minded stakeholders across civil society, academia, and even industry:

1. IRTF Diversity Travel Grants[5], available per IETF meeting
2. The Public Interest Technology Group (PITG) travel assistance fund[6]
3. The IETF Policy Program[7], supported by the Internet Society
4. The Internet of Rights (IoR) Fellowship[8], supported by ARTICLE 19

4.2 Opportunities for CSO Engagement in ICANN

This section draws upon insights gathered from key experts conducted for this study. The perspectives provide context and inform the analysis presented.

[5] https://www.irtf.org/travelgrants/
[6] https://pitg.gitlab.io/fund/
[7] https://www.internetsociety.org/policy-programs/policymakers-program-to-ietf/
[8] https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Call-for-Applications-2024-IoR-Fellowship-2.pdf

4.2.1 Policy Development

Interviewed key experts familiar with ICANN processes noted that CSOs can deepen their engagement in ICANN's policy development processes by actively participating in the SOs/ACs. This includes joining the ALAC to represent individual internet users and the GNSO and ccNSO to engage with country code top-level domains. One interviewee emphasised that CSOs can proactively build coalitions with other stakeholders and monitor policy implementation to track their impact and identify any unintended consequences.

4.2.2 Capacity Building

The interviewee highlighted the need to support CSOs in key areas, including understanding ICANN's complex structure and processes and developing expertise in policy analysis, development, and communication. The expert suggests that this capacity gap can be addressed through targeted capacity building initiatives such as training programmes, mentorship, and peer learning, noting the ICANN e-learning platform as a valuable resource. The expert also emphasised the importance of knowledge sharing between experienced and newer CSOs, and the role of regional and national initiatives in empowering local communities to participate in internet governance discussions and contribute to global policy development.

ICANN also provides opportunities for new CSOs to engage. New CSOs could utilise the diverse resources offered by ICANN's beginner resources (ICANN, n.d.b). Specifically, CSOs could leverage the ICANN Learn platform, as it provides interactive courses on fundamental ICANN concepts, policy development, and essential DNS knowledge. In addition, participation in the 'ICANN for Beginners Virtual Program' webinar series offers a structured introduction to ICANN's role and ecosystem. Further, new CSOs can proactively identify relevant ICANN communities aligned with their policy interests. It is important for CSOs to consider applying for programs like the 'Fellowship Program' or 'NextGen@ICANN' which provide valuable mentorship and networking opportunities.

4.2.3 Focus on Human Rights

Interviewed key experts highlighted that CSOs could ensure human rights are integrated into all ICANN processes and decision-making. For instance, one expert suggested that CSOs can develop human rights impact assessments to evaluate the potential effects of ICANN policies and propose safeguards to protect these rights. This could be complemented by monitoring and documenting online violations, which some CSOs are already doing.

4.2.4 ICANN Initiatives for Improved Collaborative Decision-making

The development of ICANN’s Empowered Community is one key outcome of the Cross Community Working Group on Enhancing ICANN Accountability (CCWG-ACCT), an effort meant to improve collaboration. The Empowered Community (EC) is the mechanism through which ICANN’s SOs and ACs can seek to enforce enumerated community powers legally. As a result of the IANA transition, community powers and the rules that govern the EC are now defined in the ICANN Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws and include five community groups sharing nine enumerated powers (Drazek et al, 2022).

The current members of the ICANN EC are:

- ASO
- ccNSO
- GNSO

- ALAC
- GAC

According to Drazek et al. (2022), the EC was designed to hold the ICANN board and management accountable, without contradicting the board's exercise of its fiduciary responsibilities, and to create a limited and proportional capability for ensuring the board meets its obligations, and does so in the public interest within its bylaws, and on behalf of its global multistakeholder community. As such, the role of the EC is limited to providing checks and balances as the representative of the broader ICANN community. The existence of the EC is believed to help foster constructive engagement among the ICANN board, organisation and community.

4.3 Opportunities for CSO Engagement in ITU

4.3.1 Study Groups and Focus Groups

Interviewed key experts with experience in ITU processes noted that – assuming CSOs are able to meet other criteria such as membership (refer to Section 2.3) – an opportunity for them to participate in ITU is through joining and contributing to ITU Study Groups. These study groups serve as the primary forums where technical standards and recommendations are formulated. CSOs can offer input on issues such as accessibility, affordability, and the broader societal impact of technology. At each WTDC, WRC, or WTSA, member states define key study questions that guide the groups' work for a four-year period. These questions cover a range of topics, from broadband deployment and cybersecurity to e-health and environmental impact. The study groups hold regular meetings where members contribute expertise, share case studies, and debate solutions. Based on their findings, they produce guidelines and recommendations that serve as valuable resources for countries and organisations implementing ICT projects and policies.

In addition to study groups, ITU's focus groups augment the study group work programme by providing an alternative working environment for the rapid development of specifications in their chosen areas. Focus groups are now widely used to address needs as they emerge and when they are not covered within an existing study group. The key difference between study groups and focus groups is that the latter enjoy greater autonomy in organising themselves. Focus groups can be created very quickly, are usually of limited duration, and can choose their own working methods, leadership structure, financing, and types of deliverables. This can provide an opportunity for CSOs seeking to raise awareness around specific issues.

While ITU does not formally track CSO participation, some study groups tend to attract more CSO involvement due to their work on social and human rights issues. These include ITU-T Study Group 9 (broadband cable and TV networks), ITU-T Study Group 20 (internet of things and smart cities), ITU-D Study Group 1 (enabling environment for ICT development), and ITU-D Study Groups 1 and 2 (ICT applications and cybersecurity). A non-exhaustive list of ITU-T study groups that are particularly relevant for CSOs is in Table 7.

Table 7: ITU-T study groups relevant for CSOs

Study Group	Issues Covered
ITU-T SG1	Telecommunication Standards for Cybersecurity, Privacy, and Trustworthiness: This group focuses on developing international standards, guidelines, and best practices to enhance cybersecurity, protect privacy, and ensure trustworthiness in telecommunications networks and services. This includes areas like network security, data protection, identity management, and security incident response.
ITU-T SG2	Operational Aspects of Service Provisioning, Numbering, Routing, and Networks: SG2 deals with the operational aspects of telecommunication networks and services, including numbering, routing, network management, service quality, and interoperability. They work on standards for efficient network operation, service provisioning, and interconnection between different networks.
ITU-T SG3	Tariff and Accounting Principles, including related Telecommunication Economic and Policy Issues: This group focuses on economic and policy aspects of telecommunications, including tariffs, accounting principles, cost modelling, and market analysis. They develop frameworks for fair pricing, interconnection agreements, and sustainable telecommunication development.
ITU-T SG5	Environment, Climate Change and Circular Economy: SG5 addresses the environmental impact of telecommunications and ICT, including climate change mitigation, energy efficiency, e-waste management, and the circular economy. They develop standards and recommendations for reducing the carbon footprint of the ICT sector and promoting sustainable practices.
ITU-T SG9	Broadband Cable and Television: This group focuses on standards for broadband cable networks, television broadcasting, and multimedia services. They cover areas like digital cable transmission, interactive television, video compression, and content delivery networks.
ITU-T SG12	Performance and Quality of Service: This group focuses on measuring and improving the performance and quality of service of telecommunication networks and services. They develop standards for quality of service metrics, performance testing, and network optimisation.
ITU-T SG13	Future Networks including 5G: SG13 is responsible for developing standards for next-generation networks, including 5G and beyond. They work on network architectures, technologies, and services that will enable future communication capabilities and applications.
ITU-T SG17	Security: SG17 is dedicated to developing security standards for telecommunication networks and services, covering areas like cryptography, authentication, access control, and security management. They work on protecting networks and data from unauthorised access and cyberattacks.
ITU-T SG20	IoT, Smart Cities and Communities: This group focuses on standards for the internet of things (IoT), smart cities, and smart communities. They cover areas like IoT architectures, communication protocols, data management, and security for IoT devices and applications.

Data source: ITU, 2025b.

4.3.2 Regional Engagement

Another opportunity for CSOs to engage with ITU is through its Regional Offices, which offer opportunities for localised engagement on telecommunications issues specific to different regions. New CSOs seeking to engage with ITU can increase their effectiveness by focusing on specific areas of interest within ITU's mandate. Building relationships with other CSOs, and relevant stakeholders is essential. Developing expertise in ITU processes and telecommunications issues, along with clearly communicating concerns and recommendations, contributes to successful engagement.

4.4 Opportunities for CSO Engagement with the IGF

4.4.1 Annual IGF Meetings and Intersessional Work

One of the primary ways CSOs can engage with the IGF is through participation in the annual global IGF meetings. These gatherings bring together stakeholders from governments, the private sector, the technical community, academia, and civil society to discuss pressing internet governance issues. CSOs can also offer input to the IGF agenda and planning meetings through the work of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG). At the IGF itself, CSOs attend and intervene in sessions, workshops, and main events, both online and in situ. Additionally, CSOs can organise side events or networking sessions to highlight their perspectives and priorities. The annual meetings also provide opportunities to engage in open forums and dynamic coalitions – whose work is ongoing throughout the year – fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among diverse stakeholders. (IGF, n.d.a). Dynamic coalitions, for instance, focus on topics such as accessibility, blockchain, and internet rights, providing opportunities for CSOs to join existing groups or propose new ones. By contributing to coalition outputs, such as reports or guidelines, CSOs can help shape the discourse on priority internet governance issues and drive meaningful change. CSOs can build partnerships with other stakeholders to co-organise events or initiatives, participate in other intersessional work such as policy networks or best practice forums, and share their perspectives in collaborative outputs like policy recommendations or joint statements.

The IGF's MAG, which advises the UN Secretary-General on the IGF's agenda and programme, is a strategic body that provides input on the IGF's strategic direction and annual themes. CSO representatives are included in the MAG, ensuring that diverse stakeholder perspectives are considered when planning and executing IGF activities. CSOs can apply for MAG membership when calls for nominations are announced, and can collaborate with MAG members to advocate for priorities throughout the year. This direct involvement in the MAG allows CSOs to influence the IGF's agenda and ensure that it addresses the most pressing issues facing the internet today. In addition, the IGF holds open consultations and MAG meetings open to all stakeholders, including CSOs. These meetings provide opportunities for CSOs to voice their concerns and priorities, offer feedback on the IGF's agenda and structure, and contribute to discussions on emerging internet governance trends.

The IGF offers online participation options, ensuring broader civil society and multistakeholder engagement. CSOs can engage in events via online participation tools and live streams, submit questions or comments remotely, and participate through online forums and social media discussions. This flexibility allows civil society to contribute to the IGF's work regardless of geographic or financial constraints.

4.4.2 National, Regional, and Youth IGF Initiatives

Raising regional and even country-specific internet governance issues would not only strengthen the relevance of CSOs in their jurisdictions but also position them to effectively advance regional priorities and contribute to solving critical national and regional challenges. CSOs can participate in or help organise NRIs in their regions, collaborating with other stakeholders to tackle region-specific challenges. A key expert explained how one CSO in Africa gained relevance and strategically positioned itself as a respected partner to other CSOs, governments, and the business sector through its active participation in the organisation of a local IGF. The outcomes and recommendations from these initiatives can then be shared at the global IGF, ensuring that local perspectives inform broader discussions. This decentralised approach allows civil society to address issues that are particularly relevant to their communities while contributing to the global dialogue on internet governance.

4.5 Conclusion

This section has examined the most important avenues through which CSOs can actively engage in critical internet governance processes, particularly within the IGF, the IETF, ICANN, and ITU. It has underscored the vital role of CSOs in fostering a globally connected, open, and inclusive internet. Within the IETF and IRTF, the analysis identified specific working and research groups, such as the HRPC and PEARG, where CSOs can apply their expertise to advance discussions on human rights, privacy, and internet protocol development. The section also addressed the barriers CSOs encounter when engaging with these technical communities and highlighted initiatives like EMODIR and travel grants to enhance participation.

Turning to ICANN, the discussion emphasised the significance of CSO involvement in policy development through SOs and ACs, capacity-building programmes, and advocacy for integrating human rights into ICANN's decision-making processes. Finally, the section explored opportunities for CSOs within ITU, particularly through participation in study groups and focus groups focused on cybersecurity, the IoT, and sustainable development. It also highlighted the importance of regional engagement with ITU to address localised telecommunications challenges.

By strategically identifying entry points, strengthening capacity, and promoting collaboration, CSOs can amplify their influence and make meaningful contributions to the evolution of internet governance. This ensures that the governance framework reflects the diverse needs and values of communities worldwide, fostering a more equitable and inclusive digital future.

Section 5. Broader Patterns and Trends in CSO Engagement in Internet Governance

While the previous sections dealt specifically with ICANN, the IETF, ITU, and the IGF, the baseline survey and key experts highlight a broader set of patterns and trends in CSO engagement across other internet governance discussions. Analysing these dynamics is essential in understanding how civil society participation is evolving. It also provides valuable insights into how CSOs can more effectively influence internet governance processes and advocate for a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable digital future.

5.1 Human Rights, Digital Rights, AI, and Emerging Technologies in Focus

Results from the baseline survey show a high number of CSOs, particularly in the Global South, focusing their internet governance engagement around human and digital rights issues, since this largely aligns with the expertise and priorities of many CSOs. This focus now also extends to AI ethics and governance, which shows agility in how CSOs are able to turn their focus to topical issues of the moment.

AI is an emerging priority area for CSO engagement. As one interviewee noted: *'AI is now becoming an integral part of daily life, making people's lives easier. However, we must also consider the risks, such as deepfakes and the unfiltered accumulation of information. Therefore, public empowerment is essential, along with a bottom-up approach to ensure that AI delivers better outcomes for the benefit of society.'* This highlights the need to ensure that CSOs understand the complex policy challenges posed by AI.

Interestingly, the online survey responses show a disconnect between CSO focus areas and other internet governance issues. There appears to be a misalignment between the primary focus areas of many CSOs – human rights and sustainable development – and their engagement with issues related to more technical aspects as well as other emerging technologies. This disconnect may result in missed opportunities for CSOs to shape the development of technologies that will increasingly impact their areas of concern. There is, therefore, a need to frame internet governance issues in ways that clearly demonstrate their intersection with CSOs' existing mandates. For example, illustrating how the development of emerging technologies can embed or undermine human rights, or how data governance and infrastructure decisions affect access to essential services, can make these topics more immediately relevant.

5.2 Challenges to National-level Engagement

The key experts revealed significant challenges for CSO engagement, including at the national level in some contexts. As one expert noted, *'We have a fragmented civil society in Rwanda due to historical and political reasons. The government has created all the spaces and most are filled by government officials. As such, the civil society's voice is not as strong as compared to neighbouring countries like Kenya or Burundi.'*

This highlights how political contexts can severely constrain civil society's ability to engage effectively on internet governance issues, even domestically. The baseline survey and interviews

with key experts revealed underlying tensions in how CSOs engage with governments and other stakeholders in internet governance processes. Another key expert aptly described this complex relationship: *'We try to work with the government, not for the government. And we are, in many cases, also critics of the government's policies. So, we maintain a diplomatic and cordial relation, but sometimes we are against some of their policies.'*

This underlines the delicate balance CSOs must strike: maintaining constructive, respectful relationships with state actors while firmly advocating for their principles and holding governments accountable. Rather than adopting a purely oppositional stance or symbolic gestures, effective engagement in internet governance increasingly requires a form of advocacy grounded in diplomacy, strategic communication, and coalition-building. In contexts where political space is limited, this approach can help CSOs remain credible interlocutors, broaden their influence, and contribute meaningfully to policy development – even when navigating disagreement.

5.3 Proliferation of Internet Governance Spaces

The study identified an increasing proliferation of internet governance spaces, with a number of forums discussing overlapping issues. While diverse perspectives can enrich discussions, the sheer number of forums and processes has overstretched CSOs' ability to keep up with developments. As one key expert noted: *'This year, we have Net Mundial, OECD, WSIS+20, IGF, LAC IGF, and GDC, and it's too much. So, it's a problem for us to think where to put the focus because our resources are limited.'* This oversaturation of forums makes it difficult for resource-constrained CSOs to engage across all relevant processes effectively. Hence, CSOs have been unable to sustain consistent engagement in these internet governance forums.

This fragmentation forces CSOs to prioritise among equally important spaces, often at the expense of strategic, long-term participation. The result is a patchy and uneven presence across internet governance forums. One key expert explained: *'As an organisation working in the digital empowerment landscape of the country, we have yet to engage in policy development activities with government institutes. However, we conduct many community-based activities that have the potential to influence the policy development processes.'* This reflects a broader trend: many CSOs, especially those in developing countries, primarily focus on national-level advocacy and engagement, rather than participating in international processes, resulting in the underrepresentation of grassroots perspectives at the global level.

5.4 Shift of Policy Discussions to Other Spaces

Another key expert explained how digital policy discussions are shifting away from traditional internet governance forums to other spaces: *'There was a forum shifting where digital policy issues are discussed and decided. So, in the beginning, the IGF was the only space where we had to talk. So, everybody flocked and convened there. That was a very vibrant space. But with time, it became clear to many actors, including governments, that talking is nice, but we need to do something about it.'* She noted that many key digital policy issues are now negotiated in trade forums like the WTO, where civil society has limited access and influence.

This shift from key digital policy discussions to trade forums like the WTO presents significant challenges for CSOs. These forums often prioritise business and government interests, potentially sidelining CSO concerns about public interest and human rights. This can lead to policies that

favour corporations at the expense of citizens, with limited consideration for issues like online privacy, freedom of expression, and data protection. Furthermore, the lack of transparency in trade negotiations restricts CSOs' access to information and their ability to influence policy-making. These closed-door discussions can undermine democratic processes by bypassing traditional legislative channels and reducing opportunities for public input. This shift effectively silences the voices of those most impacted by these policies.

CSOs need to adapt and employ new strategies. Building strong coalitions with other organisations can amplify the collective voice and lobbying power. Investing in research and analysis is crucial to understanding the complexities of digital trade and advocating effectively. CSOs must also engage in strategic advocacy, targeting key decision-makers in governments and trade organisations. Public education and mobilisation are essential to build broader support and pressure governments for more inclusive policies. Exploring legal challenges to harmful trade agreements and actively participating in alternative forums where digital policy is discussed can further strengthen their influence. Ultimately, CSOs must adapt to this changing landscape to ensure that digital policies serve the interests of all members of society

5.5 Emergence of Regional Priorities

Both the survey results and expert interviews highlighted key regional thematic priorities for CSO engagement. Local and regional political developments significantly influence the issues which CSOs choose to focus on. For instance, elections and other critical democratic processes often trigger shifts in priorities, prompting CSOs to launch initiatives to address misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation issues that may affect public opinion and electoral outcomes. This pattern underscores how regional political contexts are shaping CSO agendas – particularly around digital rights, information integrity, and online harms.

Findings from the baseline survey highlight how internet governance priorities vary significantly across regions. For example, in Latin America, issues like infrastructure access and gender-based violence online are key concerns. The need for more responsive internet governance processes that are aligned with regional priorities is evident in the perceived limited influence of CSOs on policy development. Survey responses indicate that CSOs consider their influence on internet governance policies as limited. When asked about the effectiveness of CSOs in influencing internet governance policies in their country/region, many respondents described it as *'not very effective'* or only *'somewhat effective'*. This perception of limited influence may, in turn, discourage CSOs from prioritising engagement in internet governance processes.

The findings also show that regions often discuss priority and topical issues based on experience on the ground, as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8: Internet governance priorities across regions

Region	Thematic priorities
MENA (NAIGF)	Internet shutdowns and throttling, content regulation and filtering, net neutrality, media and information literacy
Sub-Saharan Africa (AIGF, SAIGF, WAIGF, EAIGF, FGI-CA)	Digital literacy and skills, local content languages, disinformation, misinformation, surveillance, child online protection, online violence, connectivity
APAC (APrIGF)	Platform governance and content regulation, internet fragmentation

LATAM	Net neutrality and open internet, data protection and privacy, media and information literacy, community networks, digital security and local access.

Data source: IGF, n.d.b

5.6 A Gender and Inclusivity Gap

The online survey responses reveal a stark reality: Despite global efforts to bridge the digital divide, a significant gender and inclusivity gap persists, particularly in conservative societies and the Global South. This gap manifests in various forms, creating substantial barriers to equitable participation in the digital world and, by extension, in internet governance processes.

In many conservative societies, deeply ingrained cultural norms continue to limit women's access to and use of technology. These norms often stem from traditional gender roles that confine women to domestic spheres, limiting their opportunities for digital engagement. This control extends beyond mere access; it can also limit the type of content women are allowed to consume or the online activities they can engage in.

Survey respondents also highlighted the lack of gender-responsive policies, stressing the need for more gender-responsive digital policies. Current policies often fail to consider the unique challenges faced by women and marginalised groups, such as online harassment or the impact of data collection practices on vulnerable populations. Respondents emphasised the need for more inclusive policy development processes. This includes actively recruiting women and representatives from marginalised groups for decision-making roles in internet governance bodies and ensuring their perspectives are meaningfully incorporated into policy outcomes.

5.6.1 Online Harassment and Safety Concerns

One of the most concerning findings from the survey is the prevalence of online harassment and safety violations faced by women and marginalised groups. This problem is particularly acute in conservative societies where women's public participation, even in digital spaces, may be viewed negatively. Examining forms of online harassment, women who do manage to overcome access barriers and participate in online spaces often face various forms of harassment. These can range from unwanted messages and cyberstalking to more severe forms of abuse, such as doxing (revealing personal information online) and threats of violence. Such harassment is not limited to personal interactions but extends to professional spheres, including participation in internet governance forums. Creating and promoting safe online spaces for women and marginalised groups emerged as a key recommendation. These spaces can provide supportive environments for developing digital skills, sharing experiences, and engaging in internet governance discussions without fear of harassment.

5.6.2 Impact on CSO Participation

The fear of online harassment has an effect on women's digital participation. Many respondents reported self-censoring or limiting their online activities to avoid potential abuse. This reluctance to engage fully in digital spaces significantly hampers women's ability to contribute to meaningful internet governance and digital policy development discussions. The impact also extends to the intersectionality and compounded marginalisation of CSO participation in internet governance forums. The online survey responses underscore the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding the gender and inclusivity gap. Women from minority ethnic or religious groups, those with disabilities, or those from the LGBTIQ community often face compounded barriers to digital access and participation. The survey reveals a significant

underrepresentation of women and marginalised groups in internet governance processes and digital policy development.

Addressing the gender and inclusion gaps in digital access and internet governance requires a multifaceted approach. It demands technological solutions and social, economic, and policy interventions. By focusing on these areas, we can work towards a more equitable digital landscape that genuinely represents and serves all members of society, regardless of gender or social status.

5.7 Conclusion

This section examined the multifaceted dynamics of CSOs' wider participation in internet governance spaces, delineating critical patterns, trends, and thematic consistencies. CSO engagement predominantly centres on advancing human and digital rights, with growing attention to emerging domains like AI governance. However, a strategic misalignment persists between certain organisations' core mandates and their perceived relevance to internet governance mechanisms, signalling a need for mission-driven recalibration.

At the national level, CSOs confront operational hurdles such as restrictive political climates and the nuanced diplomacy required to balance advocacy with constructive government collaboration. While the proliferation of internet governance spaces offers expanded platforms for dialogue, it simultaneously stretches organisational capacities thin, risking stakeholder fatigue and diluted participation – particularly in resource-intensive global processes. Additionally, the migration of digital policy debates to other arenas, such as trade-related discussions shifting to the WTO, introduces new complexities, compelling CSOs to adapt their strategies and navigate spaces where access and influence are constrained.

Regional disparities further complicate the internet governance landscape, as localised political dynamics and socio-technical realities shape divergent priorities. This underscores the need for governance frameworks that are both adaptive and attuned to contextual specificities. Survey insights revealing CSOs' perceived marginalisation in policy outcomes highlight the urgency of addressing systemic barriers to equitable participation.

Section 6. Opportunities for CSO Engagement

This section presents the emerging opportunities for CSO engagement. It provides a forward-looking perspective into areas where CSOs could put more energy.

6.1 Focusing on Specific and Relevant Issues

CSOs can increase their impact by concentrating on issues directly relevant to their communities. One key expert highlighted infrastructure development, human rights, and internet shutdowns as key areas for African CSOs to address. For example, they noted cybersecurity and online safety work should address cybersecurity threats and online safety, particularly for vulnerable groups, and improve access and affordability. Another expert emphasised: *'Extending access, ensuring equitable access to digital technologies and the internet is critical. Second to that is affordability.'* Equitable access is essential for navigating complex processes within internet governance forums.

DNS Abuse and Privacy

A key area where CSOs are making strides is advocating for human rights considerations in technical policy-making.

The proposal for Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIA) around DNS abuse mitigation is a prime example of how civil society is working to bridge the gap between technical operations and human rights concerns.

There is recognition that AI and other emerging technologies are critical areas for CSO engagement. CSOs are increasingly focusing on AI-related issues, particularly the ethical implications and AI abuse.

6.2 Developing Localised Approaches

Developing localised approaches that consider regional and cultural contexts is crucial for effective internet governance engagement, especially in the Global South. Supporting the development and strengthening of regional and national internet governance forums is essential for promoting localisation. These regional forums are crucial in addressing region-specific challenges and priorities and building local capacity and expertise in internet governance processes.

For example, encouraging the use of local case studies and examples in internet governance discussions grounds policy debates in real-world contexts relevant to different regions. Local case studies can highlight specific challenges regions face. For instance, the frequent internet shutdowns during elections or civil unrest in some African countries provide concrete examples of digital rights issues.

6.3 Leveraging Multistakeholder Platforms

Forums like the IGF allow CSOs to network, share knowledge, and influence policy discussions. Engaging in national and regional IGFs can be an effective stepping stone to global participation. Ideally, this would offer a pathway to strengthening active collaboration with technical experts through partnerships between CSOs and the technical community to bridge knowledge gaps and enhance credibility in internet governance discussions.

In addition, regional forums play a crucial role in building capacity. There is a trend towards more regional and context-specific internet governance initiatives led by CSOs in response to challenges to regional and context-specific initiatives. The Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica), which CIPESA (a CADE partner) organises, is one successful example. These regional initiatives allow for more relevant and contextual discussions, greater participation from local CSOs and stakeholders, and the building of regional coalitions and networks.

Establishing and supporting regional IGFs emerges as a key strategy. For instance, SMEX (a CADE partner) actively participates in the Lebanon Internet Governance Forum (LIGF) and previously co-organised the Arab Internet Governance Forum (ArabIGF). These regional forums provide platforms for discussing local issues and priorities, ensuring that voices from specific regions are heard in global internet governance discussions. On the other hand, capacity-building initiatives tailored to local needs also play a crucial role in localisation efforts.

One key expert noted that his organisation's fellowship programmes support smaller CSOs by providing financial resources and training. *'This empowers local organisations to initiate projects and research digital rights, enhancing their advocacy capabilities.'*

6.4 Promoting Inclusivity and Digital Activism

CSOs are making concerted efforts to promote inclusivity and enhance digital activism in internet governance processes, recognising the need for more diverse and representative participation. These efforts span several key areas. CSOs from marginalised communities, developing countries, and those focusing on specific issues like disability rights or Indigenous peoples' concerns often find themselves excluded from critical discussions that shape the future of the internet. Key aspects of enhancing digital activism include building technical expertise to engage more effectively in internet governance discussions and supporting the translation of complex internet governance issues into accessible language for broader public engagement.

CSOs are advocating for internet governance processes to consider the realities of limited connectivity in many regions, particularly in the Global South. This focus is exemplified by initiatives like the GAIA research group in the IRTF. Key efforts towards addressing the digital divide may include pushing for policies prioritising universal access and affordability and advocating for infrastructure development in underserved areas. Promoting technologies and standards that work in low-bandwidth environments can also be included in measures to ensure that internet governance decisions reflect the needs and constraints of all internet users, not just those in well-connected regions.

The study found a clear need to bridge generational divides in internet governance participation. CSOs recognise the importance of developing mentorship programs to connect experienced internet governance practitioners with young activists while creating targeted outreach initiatives to engage youth in internet governance processes. Incorporating youth perspectives in policy

discussions and decision-making can also be crucial for cultivating the next generation of civil society internet governance leaders and ensuring the long-term sustainability of CSO engagement. Using knowledge gained from internet governance participation to inform policy advocacy at national and regional levels can also enhance digital activism. This would further deepen CSO involvement in internet governance processes as CSOs become better equipped to influence digital policy outcomes and hold powerful actors accountable.

6.5 Closing the Gender Gap

There is a growing awareness of the importance of increasing women's participation in internet governance forums. While progress has been made in some areas, such as gender balance on the IETF's nominating committee through a CSO representative, more systematic efforts are needed across all internet governance bodies. CSOs are pushing for targeted outreach and capacity-building programs for women and implementing gender-sensitive policies and practices within internet governance institutions. Other options for promoting gender inclusivity may include mentorship and leadership development initiatives for women in tech and policy. However, challenges remain in achieving meaningful gender balance, particularly in technical forums where women are historically underrepresented.

6.6 Strengthening Collaboration with Other Stakeholders

Collaboration between CSOs and other stakeholders is crucial for effective internet governance. Some strategies that can be implemented to enhance cooperation across sectors, such as regular multistakeholder dialogues, are essential for building trust and identifying collaborative opportunities. Supporting joint advocacy efforts can amplify messages and increase policy influence. Encouraging CSOs to partner with other stakeholders on shared priorities.

To maximise their impact on policy development, CSOs could strategically shift their collaborative approaches away from solely establishing new working groups, towards a model that prioritises deep integration within existing policy-making structures. This includes actively participating in government and multistakeholder study groups, bringing data, lived experience, and alternative policy solutions to the table. CSOs need to invest in capacity-building programmes that empower diverse CSOs, especially those representing marginalised communities, to effectively contribute to technical discussions.

Simultaneously, CSOs should adopt a more agile and responsive coalition-building strategy, including supplementing broad cross-sector collaborations with smaller, issue-specific coalitions that can quickly address emerging policy windows. CSOs should also leverage digital tools for real-time communication and coordination, ensuring these coalitions remain fluid and adaptable.

Furthermore, CSOS can transform messaging strategies into dynamic, multi-modal communication. They can tailor messages to resonate with specific audiences, utilising diverse formats like digital storytelling and data visualisation. They should also employ data analytics to refine communication strategies and maximise impact.

Lastly, CSOs should establish platforms for continuous knowledge exchange and capacity building. They must move beyond one-off events by creating online forums, peer-learning networks, and joint research initiatives. This will foster long-term collaborative capacity, enabling CSOs to build sustainable policy influence.

This study highlights the critical need for sustained, multi-pronged strategies to strengthen CSO participation in internet governance issues, particularly in standard-making bodies. Addressing the challenges is not only a matter of equity but a crucial step toward ensuring the internet's future that reflects the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders. By prioritising the recommendations presented, stakeholders can cultivate a more equitable and participatory internet governance landscape. Ultimately, a more inclusive and representative internet governance ecosystem will generate more robust and legitimate policies, better equipped to navigate the complex and emerging challenges and opportunities of the digital age and ensure the internet serves as a catalyst for positive social and economic development worldwide.

6.7 Conclusion

This section analysed emerging challenges and opportunities for CSOs in shaping internet governance frameworks. Key findings underscore the critical need for CSOs to prioritise targeted engagement in high-impact domains, including cybersecurity and the emerging issues around the ethical dimensions of AI. Strategic collaboration through multistakeholder platforms – such as national, regional, and global IGFs, is a pivotal mechanism for enhancing policy influence. Advancing inclusivity through digital activism requires concerted efforts to bridge connectivity disparities and generational divides while addressing systemic barriers to equitable participation. Persistent gender and inclusion gaps manifested through unequal access to digital resources, pervasive online harassment, and insufficient gender-responsive policy frameworks continue to hinder the meaningful involvement of women and marginalised communities in governance processes. A holistic strategy integrating technological innovation, societal initiatives, and policy reforms is imperative. Such an approach must align technical solutions with grassroots advocacy and institutional accountability to ensure inclusive representation in the evolution of internet governance systems.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Key Interviewed Experts

No	Expert Name	Organisation	Internet Governance Focus
1	Abed Kataya	SMEX	IGF
2	Pilar Sáenz	Karisma	IGF
3	Karolina Iwańska	ECNL	IGF, ICANN
4	Vanja Skoric	ECNL	IGF, ICANN
5	Amrita Choudhury `	CCAOI, Internet Society India	ICANN, IGF
6	Marília Maciel	DiploFoundation	ICANN, ITU
7	Anupam Agrawal	India Internet Foundation	ICANN, IETF
8	Bimsara Manannalage	Sarvodaya-Fusion	IGF
9	Stephanie Borg Psaila	DiploFoundation	ITU, IETF, IGF
10	Gitinywa A. Louis	Kigali Attorneys	Regional IGF
11	Michaela Shapiro	Article 19	IETF, ICANN
12	Ashnah Kalemera	CIPESA	ITU, Regional
13	Mallory Knodel	Social Web Foundation	IETF
14	Bram Fudzulani	AFRALO	ICANN
15	Caleb Ogundele	NPOC	ICANN
16	Victor Kapiyo	KICTANet	ITU

Annex 2: List of Sampled CSOs

No	Name of your Organisation	Type of Organisation	Country/Region of Operation
1	**Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)**	CSO	Bangladesh
2	**Freeworld International**	CSO	Ghana
3	**Rayznews**	Grassroots Group	Nepal
4	**Foro Ciuidadano - Asociación Feminista Marcosur**	Regional Coalition	LAC
5	**Social Web Foundation**	CSO	United States
6	**E-Governance and Internet Governance Foundation for Africa (EGIGFA)**	CSO	Ghana
7	**Digital Impact Alliance**	International NGO	Africa
8	**Colnodo**	CSO	Colombia
9	**ISOC Uganda**	CSO	Uganda/Africa
10	**Community United for Rural Development in Africa**	CSO	Kenya
11	**Women Empower and Mentor All**	Community-based Organisation	Kisumu, Kenya
12	**Vinceservesolutions**	Community-based Organisation	Nakuru, Njoro, Kenya
13	**Ideal hub**	CSO	Sri Lanka
14	**Digital Rights Zimbabwe**	CSO	Zimbabwe
15	**Apex Media**	CSO	Uganda
16	**PEOPLES FEDERATION FOR NATIONAL PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT (PEFENAP)**	CSO	Malawi
17	**DiploFoundation**	CSO	HQ = Malta; operating globally
18	**Internet Society Colombia Chapter**	CSO	Colombia
19	**Tecnoética Colombia**	CSO	Cundinamarca, Colombia
20	**African Centre for Climate Research and Innovations**	Regional Coalition	Kenya
21	**Data Privacy & Governance Society of Kenya (DPGSK)**	CSO	Kenya
22	**Icon Data and Learning Labs**	Community-based Organisation	Kenya
23	**My Africa Trust**	CSO	Botswana
24	**Going Green Botswana**	CSO	Botswana Gaborone, Francistown
25	**Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication**	CSO	Bangladesh, South Asia
26	**Association For Promotion of Sustainable Development**	CSO	India
27	**Nepal development initiative**	CSO	Nepal
28	**Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad**	CSO	Bangladesh
29	**Samahan ng Responsableng Anak ng Nayon, Inc. (SARANAY)**	Community-based Organisation	Philippines
30	**Matebelel and Pulse**	CSO	Zimbabwe
31	**Global Forum for Media Development**	CSO	Global

No	Name of your Organisation	Type of Organisation	Country/Region of Operation
32	**Hiperderecho - Perú**	CSO	Perú
33	**Software Freedom Law Center, India**	CSO	India
34	**Article 19**	CSO	UK / Global
35	**Duara Tatu Technologies**	Software Company	Kenya
36	**DECENT WORK FOR ALL BURUNDI**	CSO	Burundi /EAC
37	**Forus**	CSO	Africa
38	**Karisma Foundation**	CSO	Colombia
39	**IPANDETEC**	CSO	Central America
40	**CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT (CRAD)**	CSO	Central African Republic
41	**National Association of Teaching Assistants**	CSO	Morocco
42	**ASSAUVET NGO**	CSO	Cameroon
43	**EDUC-ACTION Association**	CSO	Cameroon
44	**INNOVAZING VISION**	CSO	Democratic Republic of Congo
45	**Development Fraternity (FRADE)**	CSO	Guinea, national territory
46	**National Council of Humanitarian and Development NGO Forums of the DRC CONAFOHD DRC**	CSO	DR Congo
47	**Forum of NGOs for Sustainable Development**	CSO	Republic of Guinea
48	**CROWN Global SA**		CAMEROON
49	**CJACO**	CSO	DR Congo
50	**Lawyers Without Borders Association**	CSO	Republic of Congo
51	**Association for the conservation of nature, development and supervision of young people**	CSO	DRC
52	**AIDD (International Aid for Sustainable Development)**	CSO	Ivory Coast
53	**CHR Lomé-Commune**	CSO	Togo
54	**Universal Union SOLIDARITY DEVELOPMENT**	CSO	Spain
55	**IFCA Institute for the Common Future of Amerindians**	CSO	HONDURAS
56	**Directorate General of Civil Society**	Other	Equatorial Guinea
57	**Permanent Forum of Civil Society Organisations FPOSC**	CSO	Honduras
58	**Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication**	CSO	Bangladesh
59	**KICTANet**	CSO	Kenya
60	**Nigeria Network of NGOs**	Network/Umbrella/Association (Civil Society)	Nigeria
61	**Taiwan Alliance in International Development**	National platform	Taiwan
62	**Caucus of Development NGO Networks**	CSO	Philippines
63	**NGO Federation of Nepal**	CSO network or national platform of NGOs	Nepal
64	**Lithuanian NGDO Platform**	Regional	Lithuania
65	**Insight**	Public organisation	Ukraine

No	Name of your Organisation	Type of Organisation	Country/Region of Operation
67	**Droits et Justice**	Association promoting the rights of women, children, migrants and asylum seekers	Morocco
68	**Global Focus**	National platform organisation for civil society	Denmark
69	**Citizens Engagement Platform Seychelles**	CSO National Platform	Seychelles
70	**National Council of Development NGOs, CNONGD**	National platform organisation for CSO	Africa
71	**CONGAD**	National platform of CSO	Africa
72	**PFNOSCM**	CSO Platform	Africa
73	**REPONGAC**	National platform CSO	Africa
74	**UNITAS Network - National Union of Institutions for Social Action Work**	National platform organisation for civil society	Africa
75	**POJOAJU, Association of NGOs of Paraguay**	National platform	Paraguay

Annex 3: List of CSOs Engaging with the ITU Sector by Region

African Region

CSO Name	ITU Sectors	Issues Represented
1. Association for Progressive Communications (APC)	All Sectors	Internet governance, digital rights, access, gender equality
2. Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)	All Sectors	ICT policy, access, affordability, cybersecurity
3. Internet Society	All Sectors	Internet governance, standards, access, security
4. Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)	ITU-D, ITU-T	Media freedom, freedom of expression, access to information
5. African Civil Society for the Information Society (ACSIS)	All Sectors	ICT policy, access, digital inclusion, capacity building
6. Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)	ITU-D	Gender equality, ICT access, digital inclusion
7. IT for Change	ITU-D	ICT for development, social impact, digital inclusion
8. Paradigm Initiative	ITU-D, ITU-T	Digital rights, privacy, freedom of expression
9. Global Partners Digital	All Sectors	ICT policy, digital rights, internet governance
10. Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet)	ITU-D	ICT policy, access, affordability
11. South African Communications Forum (SACF)	ITU-T	Telecommunications policy, standards, spectrum
12. Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISS)	ITU-D	Media development, freedom of expression, access to information
13. Media Rights Agenda (MRA)	ITU-D, ITU-T	Media freedom, freedom of expression, digital rights
14. OpenNet Africa	ITU-D	Internet access, affordability, net neutrality
15. Zimbabwe Internet Service Providers Association (ZISPA)	ITU-T	Internet service provision, infrastructure, policy
16. Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA)	ITU-D	Gender equality, media freedom, access to information
17. Zambia ICT Forum	ITU-D	ICT policy, access, digital inclusion
18. Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
19. Rwanda Information Society Authority (RISA)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
20. Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
21. Communications Authority of Kenya (CA)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
22. Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
23. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

24. Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
25. Namibia Communications Regulatory Authority (CRAN)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

Americas

CSO Name	ITU Sectors	Issues Represented
1. Public Knowledge	All Sectors	Internet governance, net neutrality, broadband access, intellectual property
2. Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)	All Sectors	Digital rights, privacy, free speech, innovation
3. Access Now	All Sectors	Digital rights, internet freedom, open internet
4. Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT)	All Sectors	Digital rights, privacy, free speech, technology policy
5. Internet Society	All Sectors	Internet governance, standards, access, security
6. Derechos Digitales	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, internet freedom, Latin America focus
7. R3D: Red en Defensa de los Derechos Digitales	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, internet freedom, Latin America focus
8. Intervozes - Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social	ITU-D	Communication rights, media diversity, freedom of expression
9. APC	All Sectors	Internet governance, digital rights, access, gender equality
10. Global Partners Digital	All Sectors	ICT policy, digital rights, internet governance
11. ARTICLE 19	ITU-D	Freedom of expression, access to information, media freedom
12. WITNESS	ITU-D	Human rights, technology, video advocacy
13. Open Technology Institute (OTI)	ITU-T	Net neutrality, broadband access, spectrum policy
14. New America's Open Technology Institute (OTI)	ITU-T	Net neutrality, broadband access, spectrum policy
15. Media Access Project (MAP)	ITU-D	Media policy, access to media, diversity
16. National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC)	ITU-D	Media diversity, representation, access
17. Benton Institute for Broadband & Society	ITU-D	Broadband access, digital inclusion, policy
18. Free Press	ITU-D	Media reform, net neutrality, broadband access
19. Common Cause	ITU-D	Media reform, democracy, accountability
20. Consumer Reports	ITU-T	Consumer protection, technology standards
21. National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)	ITU-D	Digital inclusion, broadband access, affordability
22. Federal Communications Commission (FCC)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
23. Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

24. Agência Nacional de Telecomunicações (ANATEL)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
25. Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones (IFT)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

MENA

CSO Name	ITU Sectors	Issues Represented
1. 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media	ITU-D	Digital rights, freedom of expression, internet freedom in the Arab world
3. APC	All Sectors	Internet governance, digital rights, access, gender equality
4. ARTICLE 19	ITU-D	Freedom of expression, access to information, media freedom
5. SMEX	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, freedom of expression, Lebanon focus
6. Maharat Foundation	ITU-D	Media freedom, freedom of expression, digital safety, Lebanon focus
7. Access Now	All Sectors	Digital rights, internet freedom, open internet
8. Global Partners Digital	All Sectors	ICT policy, digital rights, internet governance
9. Cyber Arabs	ITU-T	Cybersecurity, capacity building, awareness
10. Arab IGF	All Sectors	Internet governance, digital policy, regional cooperation
11. Jordan Open Source Association (JOSA)	ITU-T	Open source software, access to knowledge, digital skills
12. Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)	ITU-D	Human rights, freedom of expression, access to information
13. Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)	ITU-D	Human rights, freedom of expression, digital rights
14. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)	ITU-D	Human rights, freedom of expression, digital rights
15. MENA Communications Programme (MCP)	ITU-D	Media development, freedom of expression, access to information
16. Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), Jordan	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
17. National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (NTRA), Egypt	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
18. Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC), Saudi Arabia	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
19. Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), UAE	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
20. Regulatory Authority for Telecommunications and Posts (ARTP), Senegal	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
21. Instance Nationale des Télécommunications (INT), Tunisia	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

22. Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications/TIC de Côte d'Ivoire (ARTCI)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
23. Moroccan Agency for Digital Development (ADD)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
24. Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA), Qatar	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
25. Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), Bahrain	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

LATAM

CSO Name	ITU Sectors	Issues Represented
1. Derechos Digitales	All Sectors	Digital rights, privacy, internet freedom, Latin America focus
2. R3D: Red en Defensa de los Derechos Digitales	All Sectors	Digital rights, privacy, internet freedom, Latin America focus
3. Intervozes - Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social	ITU-D	Communication rights, media diversity, freedom of expression
4. APC	All Sectors	Internet governance, digital rights, access, gender equality
5. ARTICLE 19	ITU-D	Freedom of expression, access to information, media freedom
6. Fundación Karisma	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, internet freedom, Colombia focus
7. Asociación por los Derechos Civiles (ADC)	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, surveillance, Argentina focus
8. OBSERVACOM	ITU-D	Media freedom, access to information, transparency
9. Red de Desarrollo Sostenible (RDS)	ITU-D	ICT for development, sustainability, digital inclusion
10. InternetLab	ITU-T	Internet governance, net neutrality, privacy
11. Coding Rights	ITU-D	Digital rights, gender, technology, open data
12. IP.rec	ITU-T	Intellectual property, access to knowledge, innovation
13. Núcleo de Informação e Coordenação do Ponto BR (NIC.br)	ITU-T	Internet governance, infrastructure, cybersecurity
14. Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información (CELE)	ITU-D	Freedom of expression, access to information, transparency
15. Red de Telecomunicaciones Sostenibles (RTS)	ITU-D, ITU-T	Sustainable ICT, energy efficiency, climate change
16. Colnodo	ITU-D	Community networks, digital inclusion, access
17. TEDIC	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, internet freedom, Paraguay focus
18. Fundación Vía Libre	ITU-D	Free software, open source, access to knowledge
19. Hiperderecho	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, internet freedom, Peru focus
20. Agência Nacional de Telecomunicações (ANATEL)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
21. Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones (IFT)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

22. Comisión de Regulación de Comunicaciones (CRC), Colombia	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
23. Subsecretaría de Telecomunicaciones (SUBTEL), Chile	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
24. Ente Nacional de Comunicaciones (ENACOM), Argentina	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
25. Organismo Supervisor de Inversión Privada en Telecomunicaciones (OSIPTEL), Peru	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

Asia-Pacific

CSO Name	ITU Sectors	Issues Represented
1. 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media	ITU-D	Digital rights, freedom of expression, internet freedom in the Arab world
2. Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF)	ITU-D	Digital inclusion, community empowerment, ICT for development
3. LIRNEasia	All Sectors	ICT policy, regulation, access, digital economy
4. EngageMedia	ITU-D	Digital rights, freedom of expression, media activism
5. Internet Society	All Sectors	Internet governance, standards, access, security
6. APC	All Sectors	Internet governance, digital rights, access, gender equality
7. Global Partners Digital	All Sectors	ICT policy, digital rights, internet governance
8. ARTICLE 19	ITU-D	Freedom of expression, access to information, media freedom
9. Bytes for All, Pakistan	ITU-D	Digital rights, internet freedom, access, net neutrality
10. Centre for Internet and Society (CIS)	All Sectors	Internet governance, digital rights, access, open data
11. Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, online safety, gender
12. Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA)	ITU-D	Digital rights, internet freedom, surveillance
13. Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD)	ITU-D	Media freedom, freedom of expression, digital rights
14. Open Net Initiative (ONI)	ITU-T	Internet censorship, filtering, surveillance
15. Privacy International	ITU-T	Privacy rights, surveillance, data protection
16. SMEX	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, freedom of expression
17. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
18. Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
19. Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
20. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), Japan	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

21. Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), Thailand	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
22. Communications and Information Ministry (MCI), Singapore	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
23. Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
24. Department of Communications and the Arts, Australia	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
25. Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), Indonesia	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

Europe

CSO Name	ITU Sectors	Issues Represented
1. European Digital Rights (EDRi)	All Sectors	Digital rights, privacy, net neutrality, platform regulation
2. Access Now	All Sectors	Digital rights, internet freedom, open internet
3. ARTICLE 19	ITU-D	Freedom of expression, access to information, media freedom
4. Privacy International	ITU-T	Privacy rights, surveillance, data protection
5. Homo Digitalis	ITU-D	Digital rights, human rights, technology and society
6. Panoptykon Foundation	ITU-D	Surveillance, privacy, data protection, transparency
7. epicenter.works	ITU-D	Digital rights, privacy, open internet, activism
8. Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights	ITU-D	Digital rights, transparency, accountability, human rights
9. Chaos Computer Club (CCC)	ITU-T	Cybersecurity, hacking, privacy, technology ethics
10. European Consumer Organisation (BEUC)	ITU-D, ITU-T	Consumer rights, telecommunications, digital services
11. European Disability Forum (EDF)	ITU-D	Accessibility, digital inclusion, assistive technologies
12. GSMA Europe	All Sectors	Industry representation, mobile technology, spectrum
13. ETNO, the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association	All Sectors	Industry representation, telecommunications policy, infrastructure
14. DIGITALEUROPE	All Sectors	Industry representation, digital technology, policy
15. European Internet Service Providers Association (EuroISPA)	ITU-T	Industry representation, internet infrastructure, policy
16. Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC)	All Sectors	Regulatory cooperation, telecommunications policy
17. Office of Communications (Ofcom), UK	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
18. Bundesnetzagentur, Germany	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

19. Autorité de régulation des communications électroniques et des postes (ARCEP), France	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
20. Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni (AGCOM), Italy	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
21. Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia (CNMC), Spain	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
22. Portuguese Communications Authority (Anacom)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
23. Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (PTS)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
24. Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation
25. Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM)	All Sectors	National regulatory perspective, policy implementation

Annex 4: CSO Participation within IETF Processes

Organisation Name	Issues/Topics of Interest at the IETF
Access Now	Internet accessibility, digital rights, privacy, surveillance, encryption
Article 19	Freedom of expression, censorship, internet shutdowns, human rights online
Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT)	Privacy, surveillance, cybersecurity, encryption, consumer protection
Citizen Lab	Internet censorship, surveillance, digital security, human rights online
Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)	Digital rights, privacy, free speech, encryption, intellectual property
European Digital Rights (EDRi)	Data protection, privacy, surveillance, net neutrality, platform regulation
Freedom House	Internet freedom, censorship, digital authoritarianism, human rights online
Global Partners Digital	Digital rights, internet governance, access to information, cybersecurity
Human Rights Watch	Human rights online, privacy, surveillance, freedom of expression, internet shutdowns
Internet Society	Internet governance, accessibility, security, openness, standards development
Open Technology Institute (OTI)	Net neutrality, broadband access, spectrum policy, open-source software
Privacy International	Privacy, surveillance, data protection, government transparency
Public Knowledge	Intellectual property, copyright, net neutrality, broadband access
Ranking Digital Rights	Corporate accountability, freedom of expression, privacy, transparency
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)	Press freedom, internet censorship, surveillance, digital security for journalists
Tor Project	Anonymity, privacy, censorship circumvention, online security
Wikimedia Foundation	Open access, knowledge sharing, copyright, net neutrality
WITNESS	Human rights documentation, video advocacy, digital security
Association for Progressive Communications (APC)	Internet rights, gender equality, digital inclusion, community networks

Center for Internet and Society (CIS)	Internet policy, privacy, free speech, digital inclusion in India
Derechos Digitales	Digital rights, privacy, net neutrality, open internet in Latin America
Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)	Digital rights, gender equality, online safety, privacy in Pakistan

Annex 5: Baseline Survey Questionnaire

Online Survey Questionnaire

Introduction

As part of the Civil Society Alliances for Digital Empowerment (CADE) project co-funded by the European Union, Forus has commissioned Expectation State to conduct **a comprehensive mapping and baseline study on civil society organisation engagement in multilateral and multistakeholder Internet Governance processes**. CSOs, especially those from the Global South/Global Majority, continue to be inadequately represented in these essential discussions. This lack of representation and meaningful engagement hurts civil society's ability to advocate for critical issues such as human rights, accessibility, inclusion, and gender equality in the digital realm.

The baseline survey aims to address this issue by identifying and documenting existing, emerging, and cross-cutting issues and gaps in CSO engagement across key Internet Governance (IG) forums. It will delve into the challenges and opportunities CSOs face in these processes, focusing on capacity-strengthening needs and on the top policy asks from civil society. The data gathered will be used to develop actionable recommendations and share best practices, with the objective of enhancing CSO participation in IG.

The online survey is estimated to last 15 – 20 minutes. The completion of the online survey is entirely voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers; you can refuse to answer any question and terminate the survey at any time. The online survey does not collect personally identifiable information (PII) and will not ask personal questions. Your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Data will be used to develop trends that will be shared with the Forus membership in upcoming workshops as well as at this year's Internet Governance Forum. It will also help us identify the long-term, medium-term and short-term needs of Forus members when it comes to engagement in digital and internet governance.

Should you need support or should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us as well as Kenneth from the Forus team kenneth@forus-international.org

Survey Link | EN https://iyvkyxaur7h.typeform.com/to/sJWNuUsm

FN https://iyvkyxaur7h.typeform.com/to/anIOQzfq

SP https://iyvkyxaur7h.typeform.com/to/o7KMcTeV

Learn more about the CADE project here as well as Forus' work for digital governance and rights.

Section One	Demographics and Organisation Information
Name of Organisation:	Select option: • Local CSO • National CSO • Regional Coalition • Grassroots Group
Type of Organisation:	Insert response
Country/Region of Operation:	Insert response
Primary Focus Areas:	Select option (multi-choice): • Human Rights • Internet Freedom, Digital Rights and Digital Security

	• Gender Equality • Others: _____
Size of Organisation:	Insert • Number of full-time staff: • Number of volunteers:
Year of Establishment:	Insert response
Annual Budget Range:	Insert (optional): _____

Section Two	**CSO Engagement in IG Forums**
Has your organisation participated in Internet Governance (IG) forums in the past two years?	Select option: • Yes • No
If yes, which IG forums has your organisation participated in?	(Select all that apply) ○ Internet Governance Forum (IGF) ○ Regional IG Forums (e.g., Africa IGF, Asia-Pacific IGF) ○ National IG Forums ○ Thematic IG workshops or webinars ○ Others (Please specify)
On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your organisation's level of engagement in these forums?	Select Option ○ 1 (Very Low) ○ 2 (Low) ○ 3 (Moderate) ○ 4 (High) ○ 5 (Very High)

Section Three	**Challenges in CSO Participation**
What are your organisation's primary barriers to participating effectively in IG forums?	(Select all that apply) • Financial constraints • Lack of technical expertise • Policy-related challenges • Limited access to relevant information • Language barriers • Digital infrastructure limitations • Other (Please specify)
Please elaborate on how these challenges impact your participation:	Insert response

Section Four	Opportunities for Enhanced Engagement
What opportunities does your organisation see for increasing its engagement in IG processes?	(Select all that apply) • Increased funding opportunities • Capacity building in digital advocacy • Partnerships with other CSOs • Access to better digital tools • Policy advocacy support • Other (Please specify)
Please describe any successful strategies your organisation has employed to enhance engagement in IG forums:	Insert response

Section Five	Capacity Building Needs
What areas does your organisation need capacity building in to engage better in IG forums?	(Select all that apply) • Artificial Intelligence (AI) • Digital activism • Gender inclusivity in digital spaces • Online privacy and security • Policy analysis and advocacy • Other (Please specify)
Would your organisation be interested in participating in training or workshops on these topics?	Select option • Yes • No

Section Six	Inclusivity Factors
Does your organisation focus on issues related to gender inclusivity, sexual minorities, or people with disabilities?	Select option • Yes • No
If yes, please describe the specific challenges your organisation faces in addressing these issues within the context of IG:	Insert response
12. What strategies or practices have promoted inclusivity within your organisation's IG-related activities?	Insert response

Section Seven	Final Thoughts
What additional support would help your organisation better participate in and influence IG processes?	Insert response
Any additional comments or suggestions:	Insert response

Annex 6: Key Expert Interview Guide

Introduction

Forus commissioned Expectation State to conduct a comprehensive mapping and baseline study on civil society organisation's (CSOs) engagement in multilateral and multistakeholder Internet Governance (IG) processes. Your participation in this research is of utmost importance. This baseline survey is critically essential because CSOs, especially those from the Global South, are not adequately represented in these crucial discussions. This lack of representation hinders their ability to advocate for critical issues such as human rights, accessibility, inclusion, and gender equality in the digital realm.

The baseline survey addresses this issue by identifying and documenting existing, emerging, and cross-cutting issues and gaps in CSO engagement across key IG forums. It will delve into the challenges and opportunities CSOs face in these processes, focusing on capacity-building and strengthening needs. By gathering this valuable data, the baseline survey will develop actionable recommendations and best practices to enhance CSO participation in IG, ensuring their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed.

The Key Expert Interview is estimated to last 60 minutes. Your completion of the KEI is entirely voluntary. Your participation is crucial to the success of this baseline survey, and we respect your decision to contribute. There are no right or wrong answers; you can refuse to answer questions and terminate the interview at any time. The KEI session will collect limited personally identifiable information (PII) and not ask personal questions.

The information collected will only be kept on a secure server to evaluate the project and ensure better delivery service. Your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. ES assure you that your privacy is our top priority. Your trust is important to us. However, even if the information you provide is used in the baseline survey report, the issues raised may lead to immediate changes in the future.

No Harm Principle

Expectation State will adhere to these Ethical Principles:

- ES will not further expose people to physical hazards, violence, or other rights abuses.
- ES will not undermine any partner or beneficiary's capacity for self-protection.
- ES will manage sensitive information so as not to jeopardise respondents' security or those identifiable from the data.
- Specific measures and data protection protocols have been identified in the risk mitigation strategy developed by ES.

Section One	Background Information
Name of Organisation:	Select option: • Local CSO • National CSO • Regional Coalition • Grassroots Group
Type of Organisation:	Insert response
Country of Operation:	Insert response
Primary Focus Areas:	Select option (multi-choice): • Human Rights • Internet Freedom, Digital Rights and Digital Security • Gender Equality • Others: _____
Please provide a brief overview of your organisation and its primary focus areas.	Insert response
What has been your organisation's involvement in Internet Governance (IG) forums?	Insert response

Section Two	CSO Engagement
How would you describe your organisation's level of participation in IG forums over the past two years?	Insert response
IG Fora Participation: Which Internet Governance Fora has your organisation participated in over the past three years?	Select Option • IGF • ICANN • IETF • ITU
Type of Engagement: In what capacity does your organisation engage in these fora?	Select Option • Response prompt • Advocacy, • Policy development • Research • Capacity building • Others
Engagement Role: What roles have your organisation taken in these fora? And which functions are typically involved in your engagement? **Response Prompts:** • Panelist. • Workshop organiser. • Attendee	Insert response

• Others	
What motivates your organisation to engage in these forums?	Insert response

Section Three	Engagement Challenges
What are the key challenges your organisation faces when engaging with IG forums? **Probe:** Financial, technical, policy-related challenges? **Response Prompts:** • Lack of funding. • Limited technical knowledge. • Language barriers. • Time constraints • Others	Insert response
Can you share a specific example of how these challenges have impacted your participation?	Insert response
External Challenges: What external factors hinder your organisation's engagement in IG processes? **Response Prompts:** • Political environment. • Regulatory restrictions. • Lack of stakeholder support • Others (insert)	Insert response

Section Four	Engagement Opportunities and Capacity Building
Perceived Benefits: What benefits does your organisation gain from participating in IG fora? How do you think IG fora can make improvements? **Response prompt:** • Networking opportunities. • Influence on policy. • Knowledge sharing. • Capacity building • Others	Insert response

Success Stories: Can you provide examples (s) of successful engagements or initiatives your organisation has undertaken within IG fora? If you can provide an example, what contextual factor facilitated this success?	Insert response
What opportunities do you see to increase your organisation's IG forum participation? **Probe:** Partnerships, funding, capacity-building initiatives?	Insert response
What areas does your organisation need the most support or training to enhance its engagement in IG? **Probe:** AI, digital activism, policy advocacy?	Insert response

Section Five	**Inclusivity**
How does your organisation address inclusive issues, particularly regarding gender, sexual minorities, and people with disabilities, in your IG-related activities?	Insert response
Representation of Sexual Minorities and People with Disabilities: How does your organisation include and represent sexual minorities and people with disabilities in IG fora?	Insert response
What challenges do you encounter in promoting inclusivity within these forums?	Insert response
Can you share any successful strategies or best practices that your organisation has used to enhance inclusivity?	Insert response

Section Six	**Localisation and Decolonisation**
Does your organisation incorporate localisation principles in its IG engagement activities? **Probe:** If yes, please provide information on how this is done. If not, please give a reason for this.	Insert response
How does your organisation incorporate localisation principles in its IG engagement?	

What challenges and opportunities have you identified in implementing localisation principles?	
Does your organisation address decolonisation principles within existing IG engagement processes? **Probe:** If yes, please provide information on how this is done. If not, please provide details on why this is so.	Insert response

Section Seven	Future Directions and Recommendations
Digital Gaps and Activism: What digital gaps hinder your organisation's participation in IG processes? (e.g., access to technology, digital literacy). **Probe:** How does your organisation engage in digital activism within the context of IG, i.e., at regional and national levels?	Insert response
What recommendations would you make to enhance the engagement of CSOs in IG forums, especially those representing marginalised groups?	Insert response
What are your organisation's top priorities for engaging in IG processes?	Insert response
Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't covered?	Insert response