

## **Substantive short paper**

### **By Youth Coalition on Internet Governance**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new reality for everyone all over the world. Below we will reflect upon the challenges and opportunities posed by the pandemic to the work of YCIG as the DC focused on encouraging and enriching youth participation in the Internet Governance (IG) processes.

#### **The COVID-19 pandemic and YCIG work:**

- ❖ *All events and initiatives going virtual have been both a blessing and a curse:*
  1. On one hand, the exponential growth of online IG activities provided an excellent opportunity for the YCIG to participate in many IG activities on national, regional and international levels, without the travel/visa/financial constraints. This served as an outstanding chance for the youth to participate in different initiatives on equal footing with all stakeholders and they had more equal opportunities to contribute. YCIG hosted a session on youth participation in IG during EuroDIG 2020 and is currently preparing for hosting another session during Youth LACIGF 2020.
  2. However, on the other hand, the overabundance of initiatives makes people lose interest in relevant activities. It has also become more difficult to find and keep the community focused on several top issues as it has been already overwhelmed to be engaged properly in the DC's community activities.
  3. In any case, as this year there are a lot of online activities regarding Internet policy (the most important being the UN Digital Cooperation Roadmap and the survey on the future IGF models) our DC has been very active, and did their best to raise the youth voice during various activities/events.
  
- ❖ *"Old" issues became more pressing*
  1. Issues of access to the internet became more evident and require imminent response as the pandemic exacerbated the situation with digital divide<sup>1</sup>.
  2. As everyone has begun living online more than offline, online safety has become one of the most important issues, especially for younger children<sup>2</sup>. This is particularly evident with all the educational activities transferring into the online domain.
  3. Online education gained momentum and attracted attention with regards to its accessibility to everyone and overall effectiveness<sup>3</sup>, in particular for marginalized groups.

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<sup>1</sup> See more: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-digital-divide-internet-data-broadband-mobbile/>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g.: <https://www.unicef.org/laos/stories/keeping-children-safe-online-during-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g.: <https://news.itu.int/covid-19-how-students-view-the-sudden-shift-to-online-learning/>

## **Lessons learnt and the way forward:**

- ❖ On the positive side, we will have new generations and more people that will be used to online participation (including teenagers and older people).
- ❖ Online participation has been a recurring topic in the IG ecosystem and the participants have complained historically of the lack of appropriate infrastructure for online participation. Therefore, taking advantage of this opportunity, we can conceive a model of events set in online participation by default, which will allow for more people to be involved in IG.
- ❖ Furthermore, with many developments with regards to the Future of the IGF, if the IGF+ model is implemented, DCs can become one of the key players, potentially as part of the policy incubator, pointing out the policy issues that should be prioritised and addressed in frames of the Internet Governance processes.
- ❖ Moreover, the governments will have to invest more in their connectivity networks, in order to provide the Internet, which has turned into an immediate necessity in this new set of circumstances.
- ❖ Last but not least, the future of education has become an imperative, as, unfortunately, the pandemic is not over yet, and the next academic year is right around the corner.

In short, YCIG has witnessed and experienced many new challenges due to COVID-19 pandemic, especially with regards to access to the Internet, online safety, accessibility and effectiveness of online education. Nonetheless, it has attempted to take advantage of the presented new opportunities, such as the chance to participate in the IG processes on more equal footing with all stakeholders, without any travel/visa/financial constraints.