

# DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

#UnderPressure

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# FOREWORD

## Cem Özdemir

For many of us, especially civil society, the past months have not been easy. Apart from the effects on people's health from the COVID-19 pandemic, countless plans had to be thrown overboard, projects were postponed, and events cancelled. Furthermore, the pandemic made it clear to many of us just how little our daily working life has been digitalised and how dependent we continue to be on pen and paper, physical binder systems and filing.

With regard to digitisation, however, the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a shock, but also an opportunity. When national borders were initially strengthened by means of travel restrictions to become once again a system of order within the EU, many of us noticed just how important free movement has become in our daily lives, and that thinking in terms of national states has long been inappropriate, but most certainly at a time when digital exchange is becoming more intensive. In fact, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international exchange became even more intensive in some areas. Since most events are currently taking place online, target groups for projects have become so much bigger and more diverse. Although online tools cannot fully replace a face-to-face discussion, we found out quite quickly that many processes can be moved to the digital space without any difficulty. In fact, home office and online meetings have

given us the opportunity to enhance the compatibility of work and family life and even protect our climate.

Making use of the opportunities digitisation affords while, at the same time, strengthening civil rights is one of the key challenges which not only civil societies, but societies overall are facing. Huge tasks lie ahead of us: making use of the full potential of digital space for progressive issues, preventing and combating cyber attacks, fake news and hate speech, maintaining digital civil rights and establishing digital justice. Digital technologies and innovations must not be an end in themselves; instead, they must serve people's lives as well as our societies.

Digital space provides great opportunities for increasing exchange in civil society and international mobilisation when it comes to progressive issues such as the protection of human rights or combating the climate crisis. In July and August 2020, for example, hundreds of thousands of people all over the world expressed their solidarity with the women in Turkey after 27-year-old Pinar Gültekin was murdered by her ex-boyfriend. Although femicide numbers have increased continuously, the Turkish Government is threatening to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty that aims to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. International attention

– especially in digital space – is now exerting pressure on the Turkish Government not to take this step. Such pressure is sorely needed.

A further and very impressive example of the possibilities digital space provides to civil society and human rights work is the >OVD-Info< project, a Moscow-based NGO. Founded in 2011 by volunteers, OVD-Info has meanwhile developed into one of the most important sources of information on repressive measures in Russia. Among other things, the project uses a Telegram bot to record mass arrests during protests. Thus, in an interview with the German newspaper Taz, Grigory Okhotin, one of the founders of OVD-Info, praised the »emancipatory potential of the internet« and its lack of hierarchies.

A lack of hierarchies and control, however, may also pose risks. Cyber crime and hacking are becoming increasing dangers, making it necessary, for example, to check our critical infrastructures for weak spots. Online hate speech and the distribution of fake news are rapidly increasing and threatening the democratic public. When fighting these, one of the challenges is to carefully weigh up the principles of regulation and openness. On the one hand, we must improve law enforcement but, on the other hand, respect freedom of expression and not force private actors even more into the role of deputy sheriffs. The protection of civil rights is the foundation of a free society, and this applies to digital space as well. It is the duty of the state to effectively protect private communication and personal data.

Autocrats know about the opportunities and potential of the internet for democratic movements. For this reason as well, they are curtailing digital civil rights. China is using the idea of the >transparent citizen< to exercise even more control over its society. Its >Social Credit System< is a dystopia which could have been written by George Orwell. For two years, the Russian

Government attempted to do away with the messenger Telegram, but in the end it failed due to the company's resistance and creativity, which continually managed to bypass the blockades that were set up. More and more states are passing laws that seriously restrict freedom of expression on the internet. In violation of human rights, they are even spying on private online communication so as to combat democratic activism. It is our responsibility to develop and use tools that will permit everyone, but especially human rights defenders, to minimise the risk of communicating in digital space.

Beyond the challenges posed by autocrats we must still do a great deal to establish digital justice, which has a significant influence on the possibilities for political participation. Those who have no access to the internet could well be left behind and not heard. Thus, establishing digital justice means, among other things, creating equal opportunities for everyone to use the internet. In Germany, for example, the expansion of the broadband network, a foundation for social participation and economic innovation in times of digitisation, should be completed much more quickly. In this respect, we are still a developing country. When travelling by train, I have to accept the fact that often neither mobile internet nor Wi-Fi are available. In some regions in Germany, outside larger cities, the internet is extremely slow. We must invest far more, not only in digital infrastructure, but also in digital education to give all of our citizens equal opportunities to exploit the full potential of the internet.

In order to make use of the opportunities provided by digitisation and minimise the risks, we must develop a digital regulatory policy that does justice to the principles of human rights. To this end, politicians need both pressure and support from civil society. I find it very reassuring to know that we can count on all the diverse and powerful voices raised in this publication.



Cem Özdemir  
Member of the German Bundestag  
Chairman of the Committee on  
Transport and Digital Infrastructure

# EDITORIAL

## *Simon Ant and Tim Hülquist*

Digitisation is not just a technical innovation but also a fundamental social, economic, and political change that is taking place at a rapid pace. This change confronts civil society with both opportunities and challenges. If we want digital transformation to benefit the common good, civil society must become more involved in this process; otherwise, certain societal groups could be excluded. Currently, actors from the economic sector are dominating the process and setting the standards for shaping the digital future. There are already many examples such as surveillance, censorship, and customer-tracking that show how this imbalance is creating digital risks for civil society.

As Germany's oldest intermediary organisation for international cultural relations, ifa supports cross-border exchange, knowledge transfer and networking between civil society actors through its CrossCulture Programme (CCP). The steadily growing network with civil societies in North Africa, the Middle East, Central, South, and Southeast Asia, in countries of the Eastern Partnership, Russia, Germany, and, increasingly, in Latin America and the Caribbean is the point of contact for ifa to support civil society actors face digital challenges and seize the opportunities digital transformation offers. Starting with a first annual workshop in 2019, CCP has been bringing together key stakeholders from German civil society, CCP fellows, and alumni for in-depth discussions on the topics of digital security and digital inclusion. The findings of the first workshop, supplemented by additional perspectives, have been compiled in the first issue of a series of publications and present global perspectives from civil society actors on the topics of digital security and digital inclusion.

### *Digital security*

The infringement of digital security and privacy not only concerns activists; it affects all of society. Early warnings about the mass collection of data by tech companies and authorities were largely ignored. One of the arguments used in response to criticism is that everyone is free to decide whether they use digital tools. As digitisation gradually infiltrated all areas of life, civil society's view of this trend began to change. Critics, such as the Belarusian publicist, Evgeny Morozov, now speak of a »techlash« which refers to growing criticism and scepticism from civil society, particularly with regard to the omnipresent power of some large tech groups, authorities, and secret services.

Civil society is increasingly demanding the right to have a say in how data is collected and used. Civil society actors are looking for ways in which individuals can regain control over their digital footprint and thus over their privacy. In addition, they want to be part of the decision-making process that defines the framework for a common digital environment.

### *Digital inclusion*

It is undeniable that digitisation also offers vast opportunities for civil society. Wikipedia's success story is one very popular example. It has revolutionised the availability of knowledge by allowing easy access to large portions of the world's population. This reflects one of the opportunities that digitisation offers civil society: the possibility of including the majority of the population through open, free, and shared access.

But digital exclusion remains a constant challenge. There are still great inequalities between world regions in terms of access to the internet and what that access costs, leaving many people behind. At the same time, others are making decisions that affect everyone and will determine how digital transformation will develop.

Civil society needs to challenge digital exclusion and foster the inclusion of marginalised groups, a task that is a continuing process and needs to be enforced with every digital innovation.

### *Digital civil society*

It has become apparent that the challenges of digitisation for civil society are the result of the concentration of data and power, while the opportunities of digitisation offer the means to achieve the exact opposite: promote the widespread inclusion and participation of an increasingly large proportion of society.

Therefore, the term digital civil society refers not only to digital specialists but also to pioneers and newcomers from civil society who are confronted with the effects of digital transformation and are searching for solutions.

### *Objectives*

The CrossCulture Programme's focus on digital civil society has four objectives:

1. *Promote knowledge transfer:* Share new, proven digital programmes, methods, and instruments. Discuss and adapt tools to meet the needs of the corresponding social and political contexts in different countries.
2. *Promote diverse perspectives:* Give civil society organisations in Germany access to regional expertise as well as to the networks of the CCP fellowship holders and vice versa.
3. *Strengthen multipliers:* Empower fellowship holders in their role as activists and multipliers.
4. *Promote networking:* Foster international networking and cross-border knowledge transfer. Enable non-European perspectives to contribute to current debates, ensuring more diverse and inclusive solutions.

### *First impressions*

This publication is a collection of a variety of outlooks, recommendations, and input from the participants of the workshop and others. On the subject of digital security, we interviewed Omar (name changed by editors), an Egyptian CCP alumnus, who spoke about the repression that the LGBTIQ community in Egypt is experiencing in the digital space and how they are trying to defend themselves. The NGO Access Now is a global expert in the field of digital security for civil society organisations. They introduced us to specific mechanisms governmental authorities use to collect data and demonstrated how these practices are endangering a viable civil society. Dutch digital security expert Sanne Stevens spoke in an overview about how civil society could better defend digital safety. Finally, we compiled some general recommendations for taking back control over our digital footprint.

On the topic of digital inclusion, CCP alumna Saba Khalid told us about her start-up Aurat Raaj which empowers girls in Pakistan through health and sex education. Geraldine de Bastion from Global Innovation Gathering shared her perspective on how digitisation can be more inclusive. Lastly, we collected recommendations for promoting digital inclusion.

We wish you a good read!

We try to stay up to date on ideas, concepts, topics, and technologies related to digital civil society. If you have any feedback, advice or questions, please let us know: [crossculture@ifa.de](mailto:crossculture@ifa.de)



*p. 6–13*  
 For several years now, the photographer Heinrich Holtgreve (born 1987 in Bochum, Germany) has been trying to photograph the internet. For his photo series »Is it a Box? – The Internet as a Place« (2013), he travelled to different places in Germany and Egypt which are seen as focal points for the regional and worldwide web. His travels were always guided by the questions: What exactly is the internet? Can you visit it? And is it nice there?

6 A computer behind each window – in downtown Cairo the inhabitants are connected to the world via different technologies.

*Heinrich Holtgreve*



Is it a Box?  
 The Internet as a Place

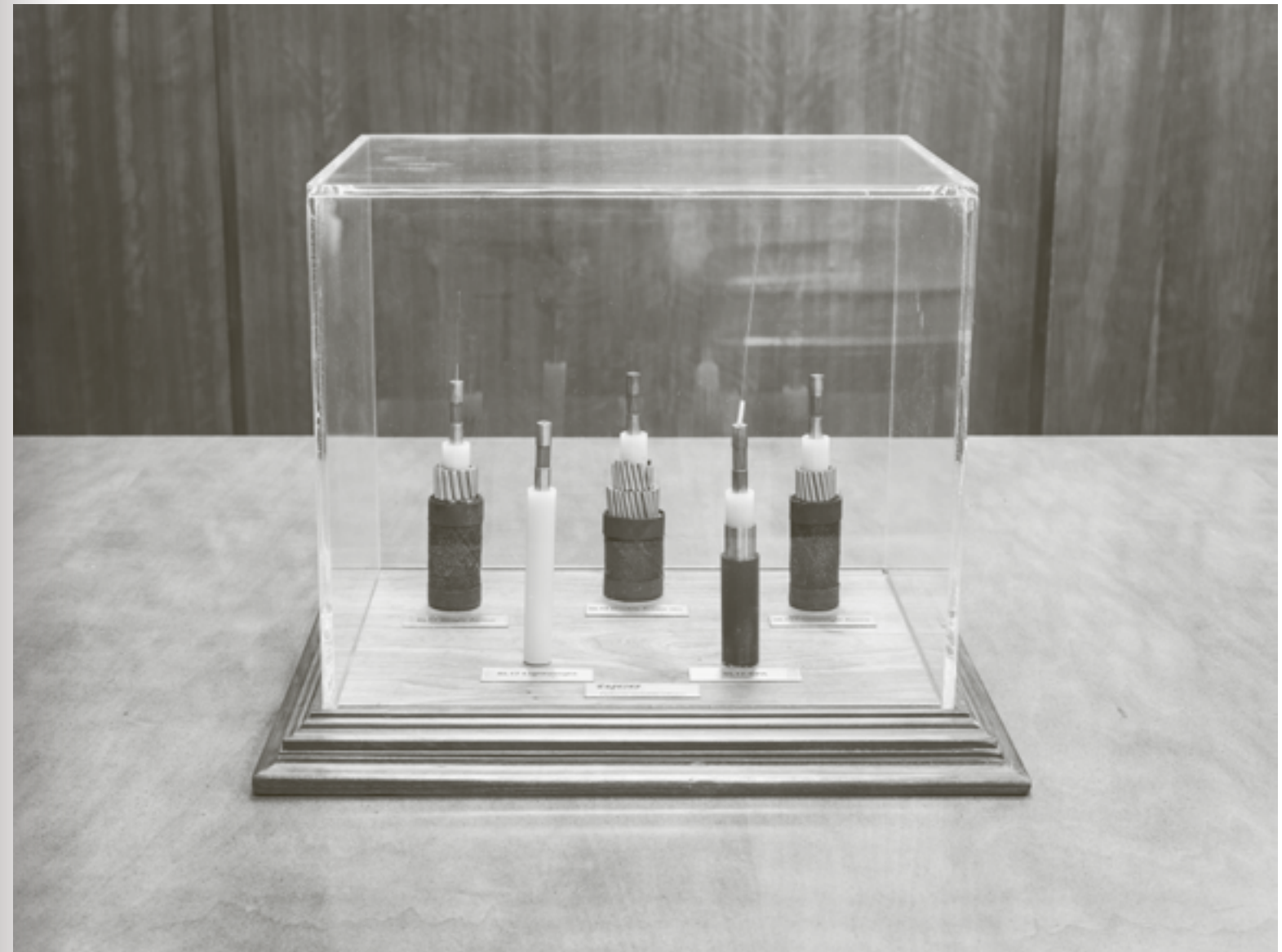
Inside the Competence Center Submarine Cables of the German Telekom in Norden, Germany, a team oversees disturbances. This is where the important high-speed data cable TAT-14 starts in Europe, which runs across the Atlantic to New York.

7



A temporary part of the Internet – at Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo, television crews set up satellite dishes during the protests against former President Mursi in 2012.

*Heinrich Holtgreve*



Is it a Box?  
The Internet as a Place

Submarine cables are vital for global internet connections such as the MENA SCS (Submarine Cable Systems) which connect Italy, Greece, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and India.





# »THERE IS A SILENT TRUST THAT UNITES THE LGBT COMMUNITY ONLINE«

*Omar\**

Online censorship and persecution of LGBT<sup>1</sup> people is commonplace in Egypt. Local organisations and activists like *Omar* (\*name changed by the editors) are trying to help those affected by informing them about digital and personal security measures.

*This workshop brings together CCP alumni and organisations working on the topics of digital inclusion and digital security. What does digital security mean to you personally?*

It's hard to tell because there's no such thing as digital security, neither in Egypt nor in any other country around the world. Whether governments or companies – they both know what we buy, where we are, what we talk about. Digital security should entail allowing us to decide what information we share with others and what not. In Egypt, we are targeted by the government itself. The regime has no interest in making the Internet a safe space.

*In August 2018, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi approved a so-called cybercrime law, which comprehensively regulates Internet activities and basically legalised censorship. What are the biggest security threats that human rights activists face online?*

The law granted the government more authority for online surveillance, often leading to arrests and imprisonment whenever someone says something that the regime dislikes. That could be a critical post on Facebook, a picture of a rainbow flag or anything else that threatens >society's values< or >national security<. Already marginalised people such as LGBT people are even more prone to these threats. For example, if someone hacks your computer and gains access to sensitive data such as your sexual orientation, that information will be given to journalists or to police officers, and they'll start blackmailing you. If they use that information to out you publicly, your life will be ruined. You might go to prison, lose your job, and your family will probably stop speaking to you. It happened to many of my friends. Security forces also started to create fake profiles on dating apps like Grindr to target LGBT people and arrest them.

»Losing data is better  
than prison«

*After a concert in Cairo in September 2017 by the Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila – whose lead singer is openly gay – around 75 people were arrested because some activists waved rainbow flags. How was this crackdown justified?*

People were arrested and charged for >promoting debauchery and prostitution< and >inciting immorality<, based on law no. 10 from 1961. Technically, homosexuality is not illegal in Egypt, but the regime uses vague laws to prosecute people anyway. For example, if you are checked by the police and are carrying a con-

dom or over 200 Egyptian pounds in cash – which is not more than ten euros – this can be used as evidence in court. They will claim that you got the money from sex work.

*In 2017, you participated in ifa's CrossCulture Programme, working with the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (LSVD). What was the most impressive moment during your fellowship?*

I still remember the day when I first saw the rainbow flag waving in front of the historical city hall in Cologne. It was in September 2017, shortly after my arrival in Germany and after the Mashrou' Leila concert in Cairo. I thought about those friends in Egypt that had been arrested just because they had waved a similar flag.

»Online security  
is a constant process«

*You work for an organisation that aims at empowering the LGBT<sup>1</sup> community in Egypt and promoting their online security and personal safety. What are your top four digital security recommendations?*

In my workshops, I usually recommend using a virtual private network (VPN) to hide your IP address and location from the government. End-to-end encrypted instant messaging services like Signal are useful as well; and of course, strong passwords and tools like the password manager KeePass. All these programmes are available for free. I further suggest installing emergency programmes because, since al-Sisi declared a nation-wide state of emergency in 2017, security forces can check people's mobile phones whenever they want. They usually force people to open their Facebook account or they confiscate their devices on the spot. The emergency app deletes and formats your data immediately. Of course, you'll lose all of your data, but that's better than spending ten years in prison. I also recommend a programme that stores photos in a folder with a name that is less obvious than >gallery< or >pictures<. It encrypts the photos and stores them in a fake folder such as >settings<.

*How do you reach the community and encourage people to attend these workshops?*

Over the years, we have developed a kind of procedure for selecting and targeting relevant members of the LGBT community. We try to identify influencers or go-to persons that people trust. If we don't know them personally, we contact these people via Signal, then we train them in digital security and safety. In exchange,

they promise to share their knowledge and teach other LGBT people what they've learned.

*In 2019, al-Sisi ratified a law that regulates the activities of civil society organisations (CSOs). Even if it replaced the controversial 2017 NGO law, it still grants the authorities wide powers to dissolve NGOs or to prosecute them under very vague charges. How does your organisation deal with these restrictions?*

Any national or foreign NGO in Egypt concerned with LGBT rights is illegal because they threaten >public morals<. Our organisation is run by people based in a foreign country. The data is stored abroad, our identity is hidden from the government, so they don't know who is behind the organisation. Normally we announce our workshops under fake names, but it is still difficult to find host institutions for our events. To put it simply, the law you mentioned inhibits the work of any NGO in Egypt. For example, if I receive funding from Egyptians or foreigners, even 100 Egyptian pounds, I am obliged to report it to the Ministry of Social Solidarity. They have 60 days to approve this funding; if they don't reply within 60 days, that counts as a refusal. It's ridiculous.

*What other obstacles do you face in your work?*

One of the main challenges is to keep people alert and careful about their digital security. They will be cautious after a training course or major incident like the arrests that followed the Mashrou' Leila concert. But two or three months later, they will get lazy again. People need

to understand that online security is a constant process and that they always have to protect themselves. Everyone needs to be aware of the risks it is the responsibility of every individual.

*Did you as a political and LGBT activist suffer any attacks personally?*

I was harassed several times because of my political activism, but they didn't find out that I am gay. I was forced to visit the Egyptian Intelligence Service many times. They put some pressure on me, but I didn't suffer any physical attacks. Now that I'm in Germany, I feel safe. But I still don't share anything revealing on Facebook. I hate it, but at least I don't lead a double life like many LGBT people in Egypt do. They have two Facebook accounts, two mobile phones, two identities. Only very few live openly as LGBT. Some are protected by big families; some don't think they have anything to lose so they live the life they want, ready to pay a high price. And then there are those who have been outed by the government or by others, and their life is ruined. My friends, at least some of them, know that I am gay. They wouldn't reveal anything on the Internet. There is a silent trust that unites the LGBT community online.

Interview by  
Juliane Pfordte

1 LGBT is an abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender/Transsexual



**OMAR** was a CCP Fellow in 2017 and participated in the 2019 CCP workshop on Digital Civil Society. He absolved his fellowship at the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (LSVD).

» Privacy is a right, not an option. It should not be something I need to choose to have or not before I go online. We should all have it, and the regulations, the laws, should support us and not work against us. «

**HAYA ALDINEH, JORDAN**  
CCP FELLOW 2019

Collaboration and international exchange are key to establishing equal rights and promoting inclusion for a global digital civil society.



# CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER ATTACK

*Sage Cheng*

Government actors are pressuring civil society by collecting, manipulating, and exploiting data, often with the help of big tech companies. *Sage Cheng* from Access Now gives examples of the digital threats society is facing, highlighting patterns of attack and ways to fight back.

Media reports and research from across the world show that digital threats to civil society are increasing, with more people being targeted and threatened.<sup>1</sup> State actors are surveilling rights activists and hacking their devices in an environment shaped by an increase in mass surveillance, such as the FBI's extensive spying on African American communities. Many Facebook ads during the Brexit campaign showed lobbyists disguised as grassroots organisations using targeted political ads to leverage data that was collected by the private tech sector and is therefore easy to exploit. Government campaigns are discrediting or defaming journalists and independent media, especially during elections, conflicts, and political events. As the political climate grows more extreme and insecure around the globe – especially during the COVID-19 outbreak – many authorities are consolidating channels of power. Increasingly, this is leaving civil society very little room for manoeuvre.

Widespread data collection and the misuse of our personal data, motivated by the desire to make profit, heighten the risk to civil society. Arguably, the rapid growth of the information and communications technology (ICT) sector has resulted in data becoming this century's most lucrative capital. Security and privacy have therefore often become an afterthought, and the fallout affects society as a whole. Now that we all depend on modern technologies, we live in the shadow of massive data collection, breaches, and exploitation. Civil society organisations are struggling to operate at a time when it's not clear whether the services, platforms, and technologies we trust will be used against us.

## GOVERNMENT HACKING AND SURVEILLANCE

Ahmed Mansoor is an internationally acclaimed human rights defender and critic of the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) who has been repeatedly imprisoned, most recently in 2017 for 10 years. In 2016, security researchers at the Canadian academic research facility Citizen Lab found that Mansoor was the target of repeated and sophisticated hacking attempts. They concluded the hacking was facilitated by a government-grade spyware sold by the NSO Group, a tech company from Israel. The NSO Group's Pegasus malware has been implicated in a series of cases that have been brought to the public eye.<sup>2</sup> Victims have included anti-corruption activists in Mexico,<sup>3</sup> journalists in India,<sup>4</sup> and Jamal Khashoggi, the Washington Post journalist whose brutal murder shows the real threat these malware attacks pose. Just one click on a malicious link is all it takes to install Pegasus on a victim's phone. The malware can then extract personal data from the

mobile device by compromising apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, and iMessage. Unfortunately, Pegasus can be operated remotely and indefinitely, and it can be deactivated without leaving a trace.

Intelligence agencies continue to use spyware, and some governments are allowing the technology to be exported without any safeguards to protect human rights under deals made behind closed doors. The lack of regulations on government hacking and the failure to enforce existing laws on surveillance has led UN Special Rapporteur David Kaye to call for a global moratorium on the transfer of spyware technologies.<sup>5</sup>

Civil society organisations are demanding global reforms and export bans on digital surveillance technologies that can violate human rights.<sup>6</sup> The global network CiviCERT provides advice, support, and training on digital security. As a founding member of this network, Access Now's Digital Security Helpline offers 24/7 assistance, free of charge, to activists, human rights defenders, and journalists.

## PERSONAL INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION

While governments continue to hack at will, companies are still leveraging user data for profit. It seems many have lost sight of the humans behind the data and no longer respect their rights. After the COVID-19 outbreak highlighted security weaknesses in Zoom's video-conferencing technology, CEO Eric Yuan admitted, »[t]he risks, the misuse, we never thought about that.«<sup>7</sup>

The growing power of companies like Facebook means that these tech giants have increased control over our data. At the same time, these platforms are easily weaponised against us. The Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018 revealed how easy it is to manipulate users on social media platforms. During the 2016 US presidential election and the »Brexit« campaign in the UK, lobbyists leveraged data to deliver polarising and divisive messages that were made to look as if they came from grassroots or charity groups in the hope of swaying public opinion.

This misuse of personal information creates an atmosphere of distrust. Organisations providing important information, services, and advocacy to their communities now have to spend additional resources to prove they are a legitimate voice in a landscape intentionally polluted by those who want to silence dissent. These problems are especially severe for communities whose governments have not implemented a data protection framework or fail to enforce existing laws.

Even in the fight against COVID-19, where certain data sets could contribute to limiting the spread of the

virus, civil society remains vigilant against overreaching surveillance and is advocating for governments to only utilise tools that respect fundamental privacy and data protection rights.<sup>8</sup>

## DISCREDITING JOURNALISTS AND HARMING FREE EXPRESSION

Instead of enacting data protection laws to safeguard people's rights and help prevent data misuse, many governments are attempting to silence critical voices in order to control the flow of information, which is an attack on free expression.

Indeed, in some countries, government initiatives to fight misinformation only serve to censor information, manipulate public opinion, and discredit critics. In some cases, governments resort to blunt, inherently disproportionate measures such as internet shutdowns. As documented in the 2019 #KeepItOn report, which tracks global trends of these shutdowns, the most common justification governments around the world offered that year was »fake news and hate speech.«<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, a number of governments have discredited journalists and activists to fortify their use of fighting fake news. Chinese law enforcement actively tracks and arrests people for criticising the government online. In Malaysia, the government has threatened journalists and punished people for daring to share information that is critical of the government under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.<sup>10</sup> In other countries, such as Vietnam, Azerbaijan, and Venezuela, pro-government groups have repeatedly hacked the accounts of journalists and community organisers, contaminating their online persona by impersonating, harassing, and trolling them.

Another avenue for censorship is increasing intermediary liability. The Chinese government has doubled down on its »real name« policy for identifying internet users and has put into effect a series of regulations that make internet platforms responsible for what people say and do on those platforms. Authorities are pushing intermediaries to suspend accounts and delete content in a disproportionate manner, with zero transparency as to the standards or procedures used.

Aligning content and information governance with human rights principles is the key to a free and open internet, which is nearly the only space the most oppressed or marginalised groups can rely on to send their messages. Advocates from civil society are warning against content and platform regulations that do not protect or respect human rights. As part of this effort, Access

Now released a policy guide on content governance with detailed recommendations for governments and companies.

## STRENGTHENING PROTECTIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

To defend civil society, those who advocate for human rights must join the call for global responses to counter government hacking; support the implementation of strong data protection and privacy frameworks; and demand an end to internet shutdowns, harmful disinformation laws, and other practices and regulations that put free expression in the cross hairs. Civil societies must continue to learn from one another and share digital security concepts and other strategies for protecting our space and fundamental rights and freedoms. Going forward, leaders in the public and private sectors must engage directly with civil society to forge policy and technological solutions to restore a healthy civic space and keep it strong.

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**ACCESS NOW** ([accessnow.org](https://www.accessnow.org)) defends and extends the digital rights of users at risk around the world. By combining direct technical support, comprehensive political engagement, global advocacy, grants for grassroots organisations, and conferences such as RightsCon, the organisation fights for human rights in the digital age.



Trainer Sanne Stevens emphasised the importance of maintaining personal rights online while CCP Alumna Asma Abidi (on the right) discussed ways to promote the digital inclusion of marginalised groups.



# » PEOPLE ARE INSPIRED TO IMPROVE THE INTERNET «

*Sanne Stevens*

Big companies track the behaviour of users who often blindly support these practices by not caring enough about their digital footprint and security. The digital activist *Sanne Stevens* talks about freedom and opportunities on the web as well as the downsides of the internet.

»My idea is to have an Internet Freedom Festival in every region. We need digital security schools and local resource centres. Do they need to be physical centres? I think so, yes! Even when it comes to digital issues, face-to-face contact is still very important for building trust.«

*As a social activist working in the digital security field since 2005, would you say digitisation has had an impact on society over the last years and how would you describe that impact?*

From the beginning, I closely followed how the internet was amplifying marginalised voices online. It was a place where people could find others with similar ideas and realise that a lot of struggles were very visible in different places and countries. It was a place to mobilise people and share knowledge, so I think it had a very positive side that connected people with each other. But sadly, we very soon saw the downside as well: the increased potential for surveillance, tracking people, recording data and a false sense of anonymity despite being followed.

Another problem appeared after a lot of the infrastructure was taken over by big tech companies who did not assume the responsibility that comes with this role. For a lot of people, Facebook was amazing for organising or forming groups, but harassment took place from the beginning. Already during the Arab revolution, people were being harassed on Facebook as well. First, there was this enthusiasm and excitement, then people began to recognise the downsides, e.g. that governments were also beginning to use the medium for surveillance and countermeasures, harassment, troll armies and so on. Now you can see that, slowly, awareness is growing as people start to recognise the other side of the coin. The researcher and writer Evgeny Morozov calls this a »Techlash«.

I especially noticed that people were recognising what Facebook was doing after what happened during the US elections. I do see a difference now because when we tried to address the issue with the big tech companies before, they wouldn't listen, saying instead: »If these people are being suppressed, maybe they shouldn't be on Facebook. That's not our problem.« They still aren't taking enough responsibility, but at least they can't get away with ignoring the issue anymore. We are seeing more

awareness and curiosity. People are inspired to work on these issues to improve the internet and digital tools.

»It's hard to understand what safe practice is«

*As a trainer, you work with NGOs and other civil society organisations (CSO). How would you describe the current situation – are these organisations becoming more aware of digital security?*

I would say, in general, the current situation isn't great, but that assessment is not limited to NGOs and CSOs. I think for many people, it's hard to understand what safe practice is and how to keep up with everything. Often people aren't even familiar with baseline security measures. The problem for NGOs and civil society is that they lack the resources to address these issues; in the end, you need someone who is specialised in information and communications technology to deal with these matters. You need someone who understands what kind of policies are needed, someone who can help implement them. And you need secure infrastructure so you don't need to rely on commercial actors that are less secure.

*Is there a network of organisations working on this topic or is this something that needs to be created in the next years?*

There are a lot of networks and people working on this issue. But considering how big the problem is, I think we still need more. My idea has always been to have regional networks where people communicate in their local language, so they can properly discuss issues with each other. There is this Internet Freedom Festival in Spain, which revolves around issues like digital security,

internet freedom and censorship. The attendees are increasingly diverse, but it only takes place once a year and is still sponsored and organised by an American organisation. I would like to have an Internet Freedom Festival in different places. What I really like are the Digital Security Schools in Belarus and Ukraine. They're a kind of local hub providing advice and support to human rights defenders, journalists, activists and their organisations to effectively assess, mitigate and tackle emerging risks to privacy and digital security. In addition, they serve as a point of collaboration for people working on issues related to internet freedom, for digital security trainers and so on. In the future, it would be great to have more local resource centres for people to go to.

I think it is also important to organise opportunities for people to share cross-regional knowledge and experiences. I worked with Harassment Online for a while where we connected women from different countries with one another. Women from Indonesia have similar stories to those in Russia and it's very helpful for them to be able to share these experiences with each other and come up with strategies together.

»It is important not to  
depend on  
these companies«

*You said that tech companies weren't really being held liable in recent years. But at the same time, they often seem to be one step ahead. So while we are talking about the basics in a CCP workshop, we have no clue what they will be coming up with next. Will there be a day when civil society can finally catch up with these companies and hold them accountable?*



**SANNE STEVENS** has a background in grassroots activism and works on issues related to internet freedom and digital security in support of a wide range of dedicated people – from journalists, activists, and artists to students and human rights defenders.

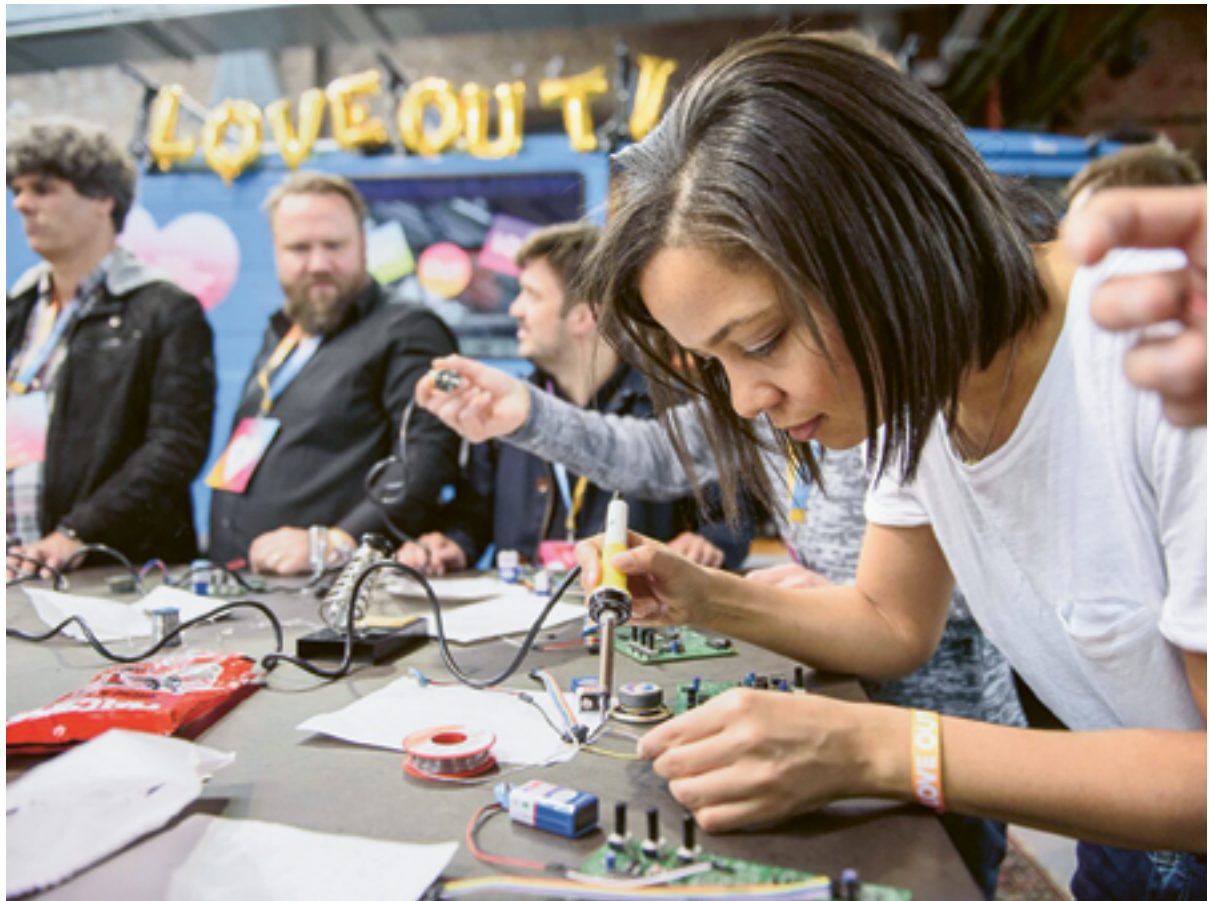
Unfortunately, I can't look into the future; but to be honest, I don't think so. What we have learned is that campaigning and awareness raising do make a difference, however change is rather slow and critical scrutinizing should be integrated into the process from the start.

It is important not to depend on these companies. For example, the non-profit advocacy group Access Now is working together with other organisations to make small improvements regarding digital rights and an open internet, but there is also a hidden side of the security industry. Some companies are pushing for more security using technologies originally intended for military contexts. Now these technologies are being normalised as consumer electronics, e.g. biometric scanners are used in mobile phones for fingerprint or face scanning. We have recently seen a lot of examples in the COVID-19 response such as drones to facilitate the monitoring of lock-down measures. This is an example from a security industry that isn't usually visible because it isn't public, even though it has a lot of influence. That is where the money is and it's why Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Amazon are all looking for a share of the industry. Consequently, their technologies will be built with a stronger focus on militarisation than on the interests of civil society. And even if these companies say they are working for the public interest, we have to consider whether they should have that much power. First and foremost, civil society must fight to ensure that public goods are in the hands of the public and not those of private corporations. That includes the internet and the digital infrastructure that we all depend on.

Interview by  
Simone Schiffer

»The in 2020 newly proposed data protection law in Egypt will presumably regulate companies and prevent them from having limitless freedom when it comes to using consumer data, but it will still have to prove its effectiveness in practice. When it comes to analytics, it is really scary how companies are currently getting insights on how you think, what you buy, and when you buy it. Digital literacy is of the utmost importance. We as individuals have to be aware of how much data we are actually giving away and how we're basically handing our guns over to private companies.«

**ASSEM ABDELWAHAB, EGYPT**  
**CCP FELLOW 2019**



The re:publica in Berlin is one of the world's biggest conferences on the internet and digital society. In the Makerspace, hosted by the Global Innovation Gathering, participants receive hands-on training on how to build robots or use open source tools to discuss the future of biotech.



# REGAIN CONTROL —REDUCE YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

Digitisation has become so comprehensive and digital applications so intuitive that trying to take privacy and security seriously presents a real challenge to our everyday routines. When someone brings up the topic, the reaction they get is often a shrug of the shoulders: what can we do? You might not become a digital security specialist overnight, but it is important to understand that users are not simply at the mercy of the tech industry and their digital inventions; we can regain most of the control over our personal data and increase our digital safety. Based on the outcomes of joint discussions at the CCP workshop in 2019, we would like to present six recommendations for using digital devices more safely:

## 01 BOOST YOUR BROWSER — SIMPLE STEPS TO DECREASE YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

There are a number of browsers that value privacy such as Firefox or Brave. Switching to a browser that takes your privacy seriously is a good first step. In addition, some browsers offer add-ons to further protect your privacy. The anti-tracking add-on Privacy Badger and the content-filter Ublock Origin block content from third-party domains that record your online behaviour. If you need a high degree of anonymity, you could consider using Tor Browser. It protects users from tracking and surveillance and allows them to circumvent censorship. However, Tor Browser is prohibited in some countries.

## 02 SETTING STRONG PASSWORDS — STILL A MAJOR SECURITY RISK

Strong passwords are a necessity, as weak passwords are one of the major threats to your digital security. Passwords often get stolen, especially when they are easy to guess. Some experts estimate that the most common 25 passwords, e.g. »password«, »123456« or »qwerty«, make up 10% of the total amount of passwords that are hacked. Digital security experts therefore recommend password managers such as KeePass that help you create strong passphrases and store them in an encrypted form.

## 03 SECURE YOUR ONLINE COMMUNICATION — ENCRYPTED COMMUNICATION SHOULD BE THE STANDARD

We communicate via e-mail, Facebook, WhatsApp, and many other applications. Keep in mind that many of these applications are not transparent, and it is therefore not entirely clear if and how your messages are being used for text-mining or other purposes. Encrypting your communication is not as difficult as it may seem. To secure your e-mail communications, you can use an e-mail client such as Thunderbird (computer) or K-9 Mail (mobile device). These clients make it possible to encrypt your e-mail communications by adding tools

such as GPG and Enigmail. For encrypted e-mail communications, the sender and the receiver each have to be able to encrypt and decrypt the e-mails with a public and a private key. If you want to use an instant messaging service, you could consider Signal or Threema as more secure alternatives to WhatsApp.

## 04 DIGITAL SELF-DEFENCE — BE PREPARED FOR THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Imagine your digital device has been lost or stolen, along with all your sensitive data. This situation is bad enough on its own, so you should prepare for it before it happens by backing up your data on a regular basis. This at least gives you access to lost data and allows you to contact anyone who might be affected by the loss of the data. Use a lock screen that is automatically activated after periods of inactivity. Consider encrypting your entire hard disc. This is relatively easy to do on Windows using Bitlocker or Veracrypt. Furthermore, a remote wipe tool enables you to remotely delete sensitive data on a lost device. Employers should have an emergency response protocol at hand in order to allow a quick response after work devices are lost. Organisations such as Access Now offer support for anyone confronted with data loss.

## 05 BE ACTIVE — WIDEN THE NETWORK AND SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES

There are plenty of well-established networks and organisations that you can learn from and contact for help. However, inter-regional exchange still needs to be improved as it is the key to fostering the digital maturity of civil society groups. The Global Innovation Gathering network is a good example for how open-source solutions are shared within a global network. With regard to digital security, inter-regional cooperation at physical meetings strengthens civil societies by sharing experiences and coming up with solutions together. →

06 HAVE WE PIQUED YOUR INTEREST? FURTHER READING ON DIGITAL SECURITY

*Security in a box* is a tactical guide that covers basic principles on how to use some essential digital security software and services on social media and mobile phones.

*Surveillance self-defence* is a guide from the Electronic Frontier Foundation aimed at protecting users from electronic surveillance. It was designed for rookies and experts.

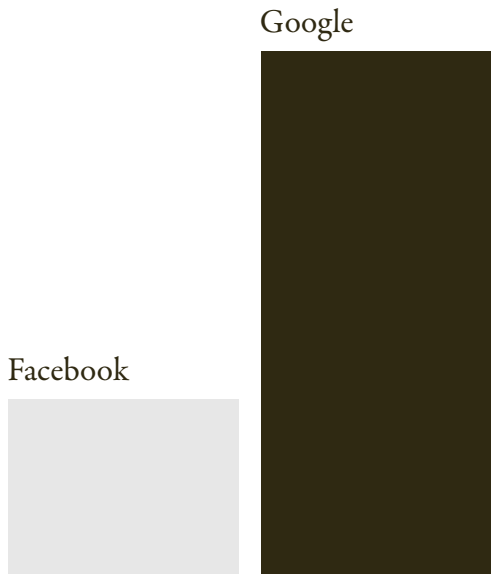
Want to know more about tracking? Tactical Tech's *Me and My Shadow* project helps you control your data traces, see how you're being tracked, and learn more about the data industry. *Trackography* is an open-source project by Tactical Tech that aims to increase transparency about the online data industry by illustrating who tracks us online and where our data travels to when we access websites.

Do you want to find out if your e-mail passwords have been compromised? The website *have i been pwned?* records all known data breaches and informs the public about compromised accounts.

5 MOST COMMON PASSWORDS

Rank	Password	This password appeared in data breaches x million times	Source: <a href="https://www.haveibeenpwned.com/">https://www.haveibeenpwned.com/</a>
1	123456	23.0	
2	123456789	7.8	
3	qwerty	4.0	
4	password	3.7	
5	1234567	2.5	

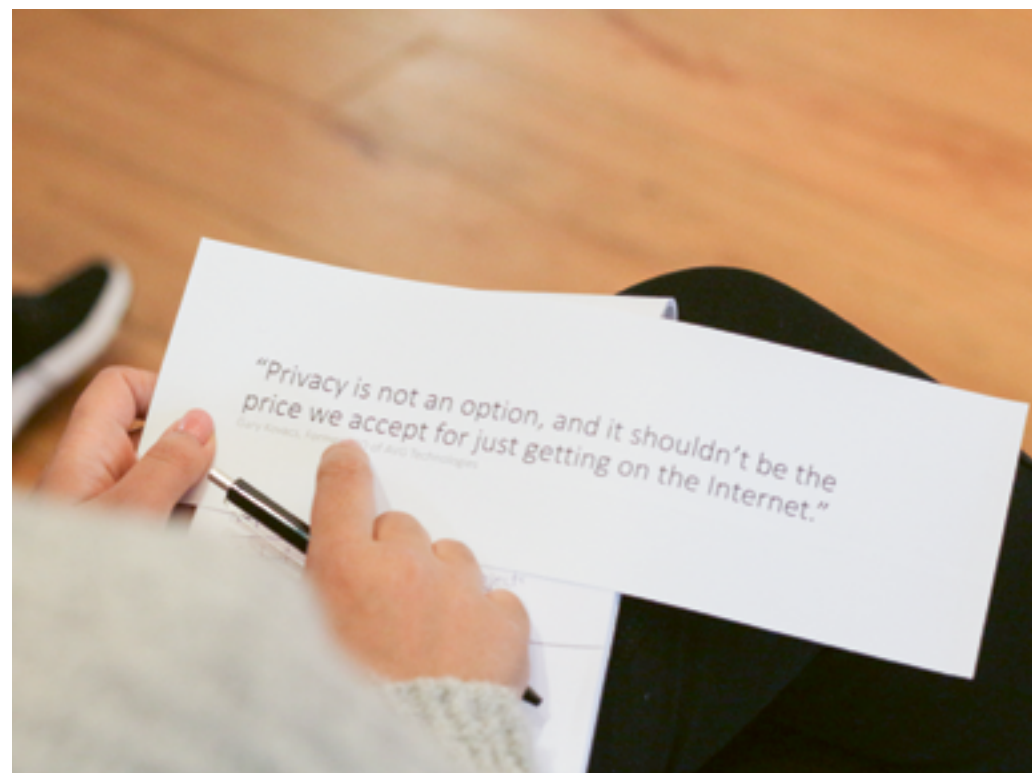
TRACKING OF USERS



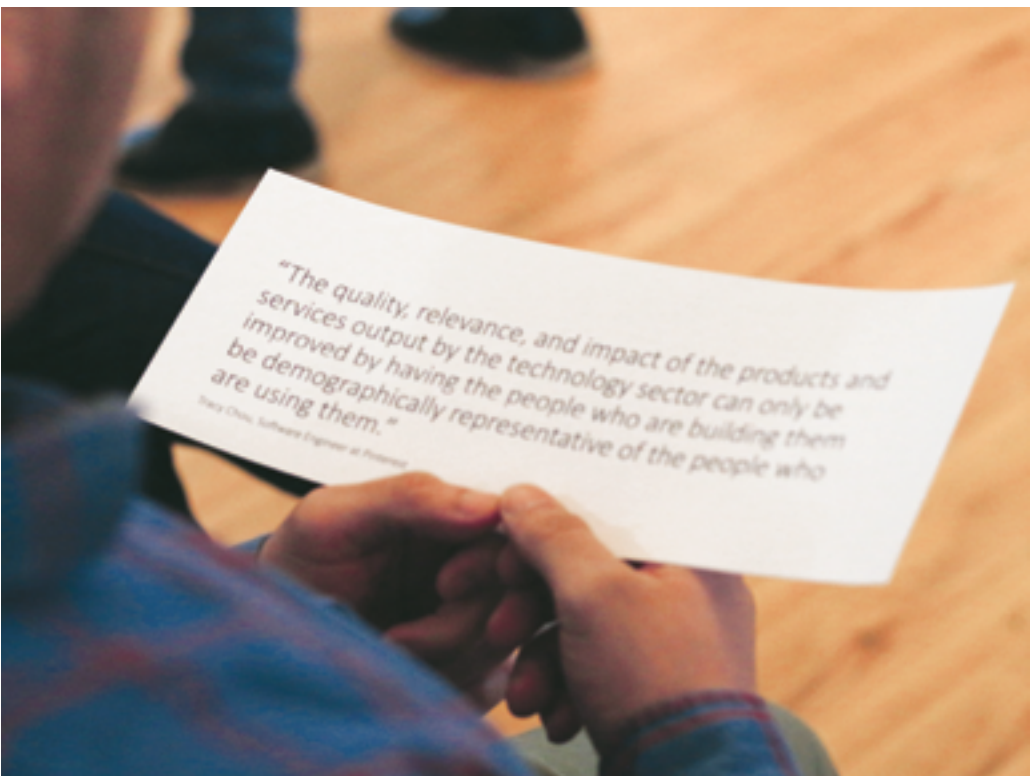
Google's trackers are installed on 75% of the top million internet websites. The next closest is Facebook at 25%. Source: [https://www.cs.princeton.edu/~arvindn/publications/OpenWPM\\_1\\_million\\_site\\_tracking\\_measurement](https://www.cs.princeton.edu/~arvindn/publications/OpenWPM_1_million_site_tracking_measurement)

»ICT and digitisation have the potential to reinforce existing forms of discrimination. This is what has been happening in Bangladesh for five years now. Five major cases of communal violence were committed simply because of a Facebook post.«

SAIFUL HAQUE, BANGLADESH  
CCP FELLOW 2016



How to protect your privacy and fight back against harassment online were much discussed topics during the CCP workshop.



# » BREAKING TABOOS WITH TECHNOLOGY «

*Saba Khalid*

The death of a female Pakistani social media activist prompted then journalist *Saba Khalid* to start her mission to empower girls and young women in Pakistan. In 2017, she founded her start-up Aurat Raaj which informs about reproductive health and hygiene through online counselling.

*Saba, in 2017, you founded Aurat Raaj, a start-up and digital content platform that advocates for women's empowerment in Pakistan. Was there a particular incident that encouraged you?*

It was a personal and a social concern. At that time, I took an inventory of my life: Was I really doing the things I wanted? Was I really making a change within my country? I was a journalist and a consultant for advertising companies. But it didn't feel right anymore. In addition, I was investigating a story about Qandeel Baloch, a social media activist who had been honour killed by her brother. Being very active on Facebook myself, I was shocked how many women thought she deserved it for exposing her body online. So, I started to write stories about empowered Pakistani women and female entrepreneurs to show young girls that another life, besides early marriage and children, is possible.

*The platform also screened an animated series about Raaji, a woman who survived a so-called »honour killing«. Why did you opt for animated videos?*

I knew that the topics I wanted to address such as harassment, child marriage and reproductive health wouldn't be well received by a large majority in Pakistan. Animation allowed me to address taboo topics without putting myself at risk. Many activists had died and my parents were scared about my safety. Besides, the combination of education and entertainment allowed me to connect with younger girls who usually like animated videos.

»AI supported by human experts«

*Raaji was also the basis for the homonymous chatbot app that you created. How did you come up with this idea?*

When we screened the series in schools and community centres, I realised how much the girls wanted to talk and learn about health issues. Women and girls in Pakistan are culturally shamed for natural body processes; many girls lack education on menstruation and birth control. A lot of girls asked for advice and mentorship. One day I thought, what if I create a version of myself that could help all of them, 24/7 and from anywhere? I consulted on this idea with my co-founder, and he suggested using artificial intelligence (AI).

*The app was released on Google Play Store at the beginning of 2019. Could you briefly introduce Raaji? How does it work?*

Raaji is an AI-infused chatbot with speech and voice recognition. It mainly answers questions on harassment and menstrual health and is supported by human experts such as gynaecologists, psychologists and lawyers. In case of an urgent need, the chatbot forwards the query to the right expert who takes over the conversation.

*The power of technology naturally comes with the capacity to be misused. How do you protect the data Raaji collects?*

We do not collect names or any comprising data, only age and location without tracking. We don't give the information to any brands or sponsors and our servers are stored within a global software solution.

*You mentioned that Raaji mainly addresses taboo topics. How do you encourage girls to use the app?*

I actually had to change my approach several times. After I had created the app, I noticed that younger girls often share their mobile phones with their sister or mother. We saw that someone downloaded the app and deleted it right away because they didn't want their questions to be seen. We then toured around Pakistan bringing Raaji into the classrooms and explaining the app. The girls really liked it as it was a play-based learning tool outside of the traditional teaching methods. So, by bringing information and communications technology into the schools, we promoted digital inclusion as well.

*Speaking of inclusion, if we look at the Internet penetration rates in Pakistan the urban-rural divide still remains, even if government initiatives to provide access to remote areas have progressed in recent years. How do you reach girls in rural areas?*

We launched a specific campaign for girls in remote communities across Pakistan. We went there with our laptops, carrying our own Internet, so that the girls could have a conversation with Raaji. We were lucky to have the support of UNESCO and UNICEF. They were our door opener because you cannot go there and say »Hi, I'm going to talk about menstrual hygiene in your school.« These rural communities are very traditional-minded. Unfortunately, there were other challenges that made it impossible for us to focus on rural areas.

*For example?*

It wasn't only the language barrier – we had to adapt the app to Sindhi and other local languages – it was also the logistical part. We had to travel about seven or eight

hours which is unsafe and exhausting. But I hope that in five years we will be able to reach girls in rural areas, too. Currently, we focus on schools in urban areas that are willing to pay for the app. We actually took the app off the Google Play Store as we had to build a business model around it. We didn't want to become a non-profit organisation because they have a very negative reputation in Pakistan. A lot of donors' money has been used in an inefficient way.

*Aurat Raaj received several international awards, most recently the MIT Solve Award. How was your start-up received and supported in Pakistan?*

We don't receive real support in Pakistan. Aurat Raaj is a woman-led start-up within a patriarchal society. Corporates usually have problems with our name and want us to change it. Aurat Raaj means >women rulers<; it is based on a feminist, satirical film from the 1970s that imagines a world where women and men switch roles. I often let go of good corporate sponsorship deals because I don't want to give up my entrepreneurial independence. But thanks to international recognition, people have started to take us seriously.

»Digital technology is an opportunity«

*What about support by the government?*

They have no interest in supporting us. Besides, I am often reluctant to work with them myself. For example, in a recent case of harassment, the local government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa distributed burqas to >protect< women and girls. The origin of harassment still lies in women. These backlashes upset me, but I guess at some point it will be necessary to partner with the government and get them to promote the app in schools and community centres.

*Digital transformation is probably one of the greatest changes of our lives after the industrial revolution. Would you generally say that the increasing use of digital technology facilitates social inclusion or hinders it?*

Being an optimist, I'd say that digital technology is an opportunity, especially for women's empowerment. For example, the ride-hailing app Careem made travelling more convenient for many Pakistani women in urban areas. They are now able to move without depending

on a relative to pick them up. However, digital transformation still hasn't included everyone. Even Aurat Raaj is far from including everyone, for example people with disabilities.

*How would you describe your personal vision of the future?*

I think expansion is the right word – expansion of mindset and expansion of the work that I'm doing. I really want to focus on including women in rural areas and slums; in the long run, maybe people with specific needs as well. And I don't have to do everything myself. I can inspire other women to start their own business and work on these important problems.

»I can inspire other women to start their own business«

*Are you planning to expand to other countries as well?*

I am currently exploring to what extent Raaji is transferable to other countries and cultures. When I attended the International Conference on Population and Development in Nairobi, I heard about a girl who committed suicide because of period shaming. This was so reminiscent of what is happening in Pakistan that it made me think of expanding to African countries as well. Also, the ifa workshop gave me new ideas. One Egyptian participant told me that his country lacks health innovations for women. Since he works with start-ups, I will probably cooperate with him as well.

*What other ideas and contacts from the ifa workshop are you taking with you that might benefit your work?*

It would be great to work with some of the CorrelAid data scientists. I am thinking about an interactive map that visualises health and sanitation facilities for women in the communities and slums of Pakistan. I want to learn how innovation is happening in other places and how we can spread that mindset of innovation. If there is one thing I have learned over the past years, it is that mindset is crucial and that failure is part of doing innovative things.

Interview by  
Juliane Pfordte



**SABA KHALID** was working as a journalist before she founded her start-up Aurat Raaj ([www.auratraaj.co](http://www.auratraaj.co)) in 2017 which works for the empowerment of girls and young women in Pakistan. She was a CCP fellow in 2012; in 2019 she joined the CCP workshop »Digital Civil Society« in Berlin as an experienced alumna.



The Pakistani start-up Aurat Raaj uses an app and a virtual female avatar to teach girls about their body and sexual health.



# GLOBAL SHARING CULTURE

## *Geraldine de Bastion*

Hackers, social entrepreneurs, and NGO employees come together at the *Global Innovation Gathering* network. The joint goal is to make digital services accessible and usable for the majority of the global population, explains co-initiator *Geraldine de Bastion*.

Global Innovation Gathering (GIG) is unique across the globe. There are various networks for innovation spaces, but none of their structures is as heterogeneous, global, and diverse as ours is. GIG was founded in 2013 at re:publica, Europe's largest conference on the internet and digital society. Twenty-five representatives from innovation hubs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were invited to present their projects. Initially an annual event, the gathering later developed into a permanent global network. At GIG, we believe in diversity and the benefits of exchanging ideas and information with different people in various kinds of innovation hubs.

Our network's heterogeneity is rooted in its global nature, in our members' wide range of focuses, from commercial startup accelerators to non-commercial hackerspaces, from software innovation hubs to maker-spaces. This heterogeneity shows how diverse innovation can be. But it also reflects our wide variety of target groups. We have spaces designed specifically for children or for members who work in humanitarian aid and therefore in areas of conflict or in places where natural catastrophes have occurred. Their experiences with using digital technologies differ greatly. Our network gives them the chance to share these experiences with others. That inspires new products and opportunities to share and scale open technology in an environmentally friendly manner.

At GIG, we believe in diversity and openness, a culture of sharing and wanting to share, and we believe in open structures and processes. That means we are an open network where anyone who is interested can become a member. We don't believe in elitist, secretive structures; we believe in being open towards other cultures, opinions, and people and we believe in open technology. That means technologies that benefit humankind and can help to solve today's big problems, e.g. technology that promotes climate protection, should be freely accessible to everyone. Even if someone were to discover a key technology for reducing carbon emissions, it should not be proprietary. Everything the GIG network promotes or produces in our own projects, like our Careables healthcare platform, are open source.

### TECHNOLOGY MUST BE AFFORDABLE

In my opinion, digital inclusion starts with access – to the internet and to technology. But it also means being able to use these technologies, i.e. they have to be affordable, discoverable, and thus accessible and they must be suited to our social environment and daily lives. The prerequisite is always the same: people must benefit from digitisation. Aside from being accessible, techno-

logy must also create fair and equal opportunities, provide education that is equally accessible to everyone, to women and men, girls and boys.

GIG shows that digitisation often comes from unexpected places with no difference in quality. The only things that are different are opportunities and accessibility. In the film »The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind«, a boy uses wind turbines to save his Malawi town from starvation. Someone like that boy is just as much a born innovator as someone like Bill Gates. It's merely a question of equal opportunities.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Development cooperation from Germany should focus on establishing equal opportunities and, especially, facilitating regional partnerships for developing infrastructure. Instead of promoting individual start-ups and constantly launching new accelerator programmes just because it currently happens to be sexy, the Federal Government of Germany should support the creation of infrastructure, specifically infrastructure that provides access to electricity and the internet but also physical infrastructure for online financial transactions and digital services.

Fostering exchange could also be an important contribution to global cooperation, the kind of exchange that took place at the CCP workshop or at GIG or on the policy level. The General Data Protection Regulations are a great example for how Europeans can bring their politics to the world at large. It's important to talk to countries and ask what consequences the regulations have for them, what they mean to them, how they approach issues like data protection and other policy discussions.

### CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR NGOS

Of course, there are a great many challenges on various levels. It is still virtually impossible or very difficult for not-for-profit organisations to receive basic funding. GIG's projects receive plenty of funding from programmes like the EU's Horizon 2020. But it is difficult to secure funding for the organisation itself, for example for setting up networks. And there are also political hurdles. Even in Germany, civic engagement is not always welcomed by all. I frequently notice how important it is to the federal state to start their own projects, hold their own campaigns, and start up their own channels instead of cooperating with civil society. Our priority is

on the challenges our members face and those are mostly political issues like the current right-wing populist subversion in Brazil. Our members there have to deal with cuts to funding or are being threatened because of the colour of their skin. Those are serious problems and we, as a network, must try to offer international support and work together to develop more resilience.



**GERALDINE DE BASTION** is the co-initiator of the *Global Innovation Gathering (GIG)*, a world-wide network of innovators and innovation spaces that provide an environment for digital innovation in the fields of hardware and software. In 2013, she also co-founded *Konnektiv*, a consulting agency that offers advice on digital transformation, among others to the *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*, a service provider in the field of international cooperation.



In response to the need to bring digital activists from the global South and North together, the Global Innovation Gathering was founded in the wake of the 2013 re:publica conference.

# ON DIGITAL INCLUSION

»ICT in education has the potential to help provide quality education for students and gradually improve the socio-economic status of a country's citizens. Thus, developing the digital skills of the young and the old is a key step towards economic development.«

**WALA MOHAMMED, SUDAN  
CCP FELLOW 2019**

»Personally, I think the strongest positive effect of digitisation is that it opens up previously untapped segments that have been underserved and under-represented in society, start-ups working on issues like women's health – especially in rural areas – and education for children in areas like upper Egypt where the average level of education is lower than in the capital.«

**ASSEM ABDELWAHAB, EGYPT  
CCP FELLOW 2019**

»The German Digital Opportunities Foundation uses a broad definition of inclusion, similar to the one used by the United Nations within the context of the Internet Governance Forum. We chose to do so because we want all social groups to be a part of the digital transformation: from young professionals to people with disabilities and seniors.«

**MICHAEL RAEDER, GERMANY  
DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES FOUNDATION**

»NGOs use social media very actively to promote their activities, but when we talk about digital inclusion, there is room for improvement. For example, when we talk about disadvantaged groups like disabled people, NGOs need to consider their needs as well. Access, adaption, application – this is what we have to focus on.«

**GULNARA ISMAILOVA, AZERBAIJAN  
CCP FELLOW 2019**

»Once people start differentiating between facts and fake news, digital tools gain the potential to reduce the tension and hatred that is spreading among the youth. If people knew how to use these tools, that would hopefully create a better space for people to participate in a formal debate.«

**SAIFUL HAQUE, BANGLADESH  
CCP FELLOW 2016**

# START SHARING – A DIGITAL WORLD FOR EVERYONE

While speaking about digital inclusion at our CCP workshop and the Internet Governance Forum in 2019, we found it helpful to differentiate between two definitions of digital inclusion, each of which reflect the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation.

First, digital inclusion refers to the ownership of the internet and the process of digitisation by all people and societal groups. This means that everyone should have access to the internet and related technologies. It also requires us to have the knowledge and resources to use these technologies. The technologies must also meet the needs of the people, which means that the affected communities should identify which of these technologies they need.

Second, digital inclusion refers to the opportunities that new technologies offer to marginalised groups such as people with special needs, women affected by patriarchal structures or people with limited financial resources.

Keeping these definitions in mind, we want to share six aspects of digital inclusion that we established during our workshop. Each aspect shows a facet that needs to be addressed if we want to make digital transformation more inclusive. Depending on individual circumstances, additional considerations may also be necessary.

## 01 NO ACCESS TO THE INTERNET – INFRASTRUCTURE REMAINS AN OBSTACLE

Access to high speed internet removes one of the barriers to digital inclusion and is often a pre-requisite for social and economic participation in the digital space. Internet and digital devices have to be available and affordable, and the infrastructure needs to be where the people are. In 2019, approximately half of the world's population had access to the internet. However, the quality of connectivity differed greatly among the world's regions. Furthermore, those who had the slowest internet paid the highest rates as the initiative Alliance for Affordable Internet showed.

## 02 SHARING IS CARING – OPEN SOURCE SOLUTIONS HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL WHEN IT COMES TO INCLU- SIVENESS

Digital devices and software have to be affordable. Open source solutions often offer excellent free tools that are updated by a committed community of people who are serious about data protection. Well-known examples include Linux, LibreOffice, and Firefox. Many people believe that promoting solutions of this kind is a key solution to making digital transformation more inclusive. However, some open source communities are facing challenges of their own concerning inclusion as described in No. 5.

## 03 COUNTERING FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION – DIGITAL LITERACY IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST LEARNING HOW TO USE DIGITAL DEVICES

Disinformation and fake news are playing a big role in dividing and radicalising society. Increasingly, this is resulting in violence in the real world. Since laws against spreading fake news have either little effect or are instead used to pressure inconvenient journalists, digital literacy is becoming a key skill. We have to learn how to recognise fake news before we share them, and we must understand how algorithms decide which information we see and which we don't. Fact-checking organisations – like Fact Check EU, which was especially active during the European Parliament elections – can help us separate fact from fiction. Furthermore, organisations like Mozilla offer free curricula for teaching digital literacy. While digital literacy focuses on combatting

fake news, it has a much wider scope. Digital literacy improves our understanding of how the internet and digital media work. It empowers us to code and write online. And finally, it enables us to participate more confidently in the digital sphere.

## 04 WHOSE INTERNET IS IT? CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD SIT AT THE POLICY TABLE

In order to foster digital transformation that is oriented towards the common good, civil society actors have to be involved in the decision-making processes. For this purpose, multi-stakeholder approaches have been established, e.g. the Internet Governance Forum of the United Nations, to bring together actors from different fields such as business, politics, the sciences, and civil society. In reality, however, civil society actors are often ignored by policy makers in favour of large corporate lobbies. However, civil society should be a decisive voice in shaping digital transformation. Furthermore, civil society is often dependent on donations and voluntary work. For an active involvement of civil society, financial support mechanisms should be established, which would result in stronger public digital infrastructure. On the other hand, civil society should place more emphasis on educating the public and promoting more inclusive digital transformation.

## 05 AM I WELCOME? WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN CIVIC COURAGE AND PROTECT THE ATTACKED

Hate speech and discrimination are major problems in the digital world. Gender discrimination, for instance, was transferred from the analogue to the digital sphere. Abuse and harassment on social media have an alarming impact on women, causing stress or anxiety and consequently resulting in them being less involved in the digital sphere. How can women shape the digital sphere and make it their space as well? The gif collection #saferisters from the organisation Coding Rights educates and informs users about how they can protect themselves against online harassment. It promotes safer digital behaviour, encourages users to document digital abuse and advises people to not feed the trolls. Other initiatives such as LOVE-Storm from the Federation for Social Defence offer training courses on how to identify and respond to hate speech. The open source

community itself is affected by the digital gender gap. Wikipedia articles are seldom written by or about women. Since Wikipedia is a major source of knowledge, this imbalance distorts reality. To compensate for this, initiatives have been organising hackathons where participants work on Wikipedia content on women and related topics.

## 06 DIGITAL DEVICES ARE MORE ENERGY-EFFICIENT THAN EVER – BUT WE HAVE A GREAT DEAL MORE OF THEM

Digital transformation has an enormous ecological footprint and the thirst for energy and resources is growing. Considering the Earth's limited resources, the intentionally short life-span of many digital devices is baffling. Android phones often only get regular updates of their firmware for two or three years. In order to prolong the lifecycle of mobile phone operating systems, some organisations such as the /e/ foundation offer custom ROMs, which allow users to replace Android firmware with a new version. The idea of repairing devices instead of replacing them is not new. Numerous repair cafes have been around for some time now. Some phones incorporate this idea by design and make it easier to replace broken parts instead of replacing the entire phone. Furthermore, the amount of energy needed for the internet is growing. More and more of our data, including e-mails, photos, and messages, is stored in data-centres. One e-mail amounts to approximately 10 gram of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. Deleting old e-mails, unsubscribing from newsletters that you never read, and deleting old photos from your messenger are several steps we can take to save energy.

## 07 HAVE WE PIQUED YOUR INTEREST? FURTHER READING ON DIGITAL INCLUSION:

Mozilla's *Internet Health Report* collects articles that explore the internet's >health< with a focus on five key issues: decentralisation, privacy and security, openness, web literacy, and digital inclusion.

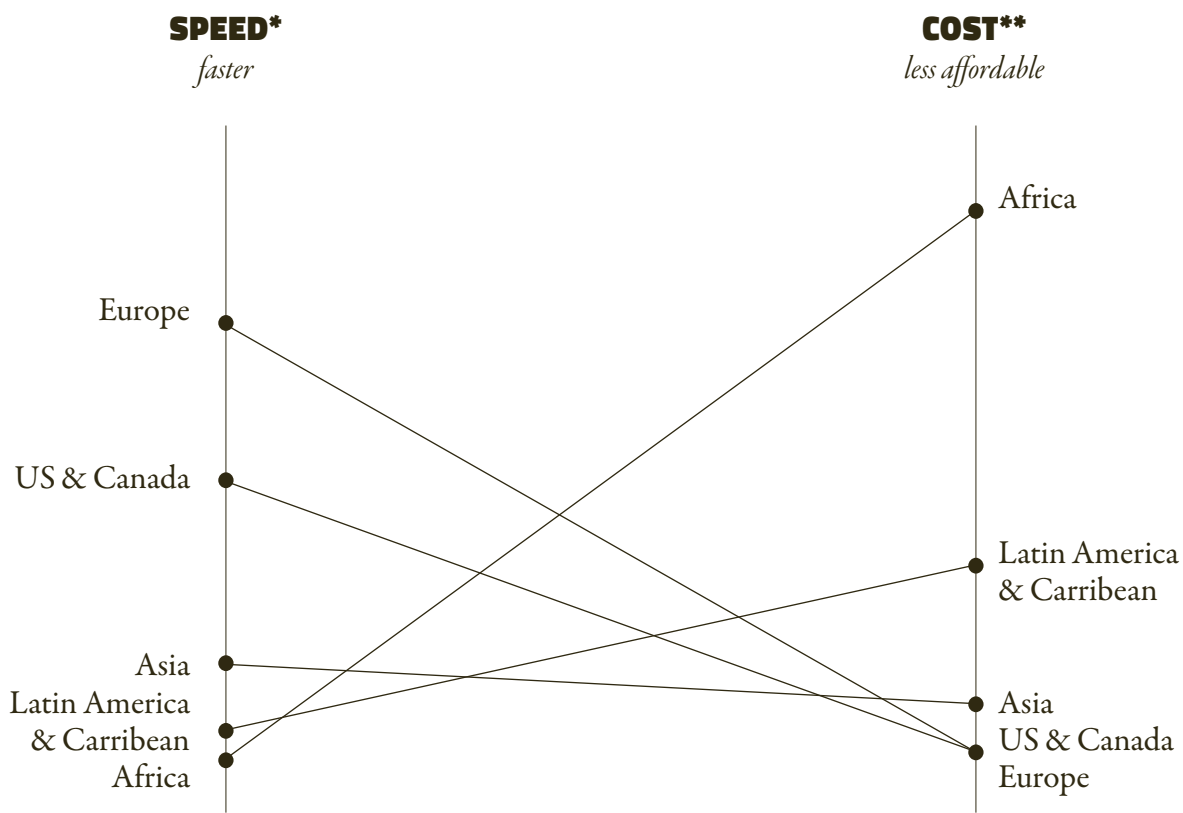
For over a decade the *Oxford Internet Institute* has been collecting data to reveal geographic inequalities related to the internet such as broad band affordability. *The Alliance for Affordable Internet* provides further research on the topic of internet costs. →

Mozilla published a free curriculum on web literacy designed to make the internet accessible for more people. It was created by a diverse community of educators, practitioners, and technologists.

The organisation *Coding Rights* challenges technologies that reinforce gender inequalities. Their project *#saferisters* is a collection of gifs aimed at helping women and non-binary people fight back against online harassment and other threats.

The */e/ foundation* offers an Android OS, which allows users to replace older outdated Android firmware. It is free and can replace old Android versions that are no longer updated on a regular basis and Google apps with open source alternatives.

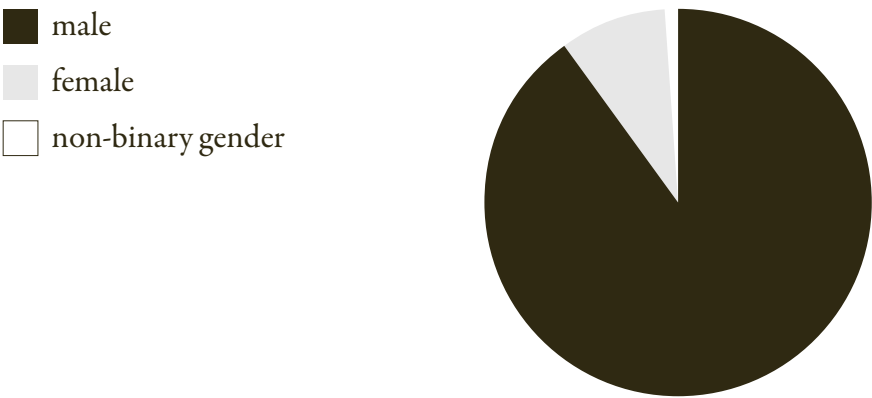
THE WORLDWIDE WEB



\* Median Download Speed (Mbps)  
\*\* Average Price of 1GB mobile broadband data relative to monthly average income

Source: Mozilla, Internet Health Report v.1.0 2018. CC BY 4.0  
<https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/internet-health-report/>

WIKIPEDIA GENDER DIVIDE



A Wikimedia survey found that in 2018 only 9% of contributors to Wikipedia have been female. 90% have been male and 1% non-binary gender.

Source: [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Community\\_Insights/2018\\_Report/Contributors](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Community_Insights/2018_Report/Contributors)

IFA AND ITS CROSSCULTURE PROGRAMME

With its CrossCulture Programme (CCP), ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) is working in partnership with the Federal Foreign Office to build strong civil society networks between Germany and the rest of the world. Since 2005, young professionals from the fields of culture, education, science, arts and media have benefited from the opportunities provided by work-related stays either in Germany or in CCP partner countries.

- *Strengthening civil society:* With the CCP Fellowships, the CrossCulture Programme funds around 100 professionals and committed volunteers from around 40 countries each year. During two to three months of professional exchange in host organisations in Germany or in CCP partner countries, participants deepen their expertise and acquire intercultural skills. In turn, the host organisations benefit from the expertise, regional knowledge and networks of the CCP Fellows. Upon returning to their home organisations, the participants bring their experiences gained abroad into their everyday working life. Work placements are currently being offered in the following areas: politics & society, media & culture, human rights & peace, and sustainable development. From 2019 to 2023, the focus will also be on civic & citizenship education and digital civil society.
- *Networking civil societies:* Civil society organisations from Germany and from a CCP partner country are supported by the CCP Synergy programme as they work together on a project and create a lasting network. Funding for short stays is provided to employees of the two cooperating organisations. Aims of the cooperation can be the development and the expansion of joint projects, publications or events. The programme encourages the direct exchange between organisations and helps to bring together civil society actors across borders in order for them to learn from each other.
- *Intensifying collaboration:* With travel grants and regular seminars, workshops and symposia, the CCP Alumni programme promotes the professional development of hundreds of CCP Alumni worldwide. Since 2005, the programme has been helping participants build upon their established partnerships and networks. Travel grants are available to alumni to attend conferences, work on small joint projects and undertake fact-finding missions. In addition, CCP appoints volunteer representatives in the respective countries to act as contact persons in cooperation with alumni, the German Embassy, ifa and other interested parties. Together with the CCP, they organise regular alumni network meetings on topics of regional and professional interest.

For more information about the programme, please visit: [www.ifa.de/en/crossculture-programm](http://www.ifa.de/en/crossculture-programm)

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY	NETWORKING CIVIL SOCIETIES	INTENSIFYING COLLABORATION
CCP FELLOWSHIPS 2 – 3 months	CCP SYNERGY 7 – 30 days	CCP ALUMNI individual
Fellowships for professionals and volunteers (aged 23 to 45)	Promoting collaboration between civil society organisations	Travel grants and networking meetings for CCP Fellowship alumni
Cultural exchange, professional development, networking and knowledge transfer	Developing cross-border bilateral partnerships between organisations	Individual training and networking

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The Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) supports civil society actors worldwide in their advocacy for democracy and peace, encourages dialogue within civil society and contributes to the protection of minorities and persons at risk.

With the fellowships of the CrossCulture Programme (CCP), ifa supports the interlacing of German and foreign civil society actors from the cultural, educational, scientific, artistic and medial sectors from more than 40 partner countries. The goals for the participating fellows and organisations are to broaden and deepen their expertise, share and acquire intercultural skills, learn from each other and impart their own knowledge.

»Digital Civil Society« is one of the focal topics of the programme which is treated within the scope of CCP Fellowships and thematic workshops. In 2019, CCP fellows, alumni and experts came together in a workshop to exchange ideas, share practices and seek solutions in the fields of digital inclusion and digital security. This publication is the product of this global cross-cultural cooperation and collects personal commentaries, best-practice examples and recommendations for action.

**STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY**