

POLICY BRIEF

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Youth Participation at the Internet Governance Forum

Nadia Tjahja and Carlos Fonseca

Highlights

1. The term youth encompasses many different forms based on self-identification and community-designated identification which impacts their engagement with the IGF. In essence, how do you perceive yourself, and how does the community perceive youth?
2. We addressed five themes of engagement that elaborate on how youth are being empowered and what barriers they face at the IGF: accessing the IGF, the youth voice, availability of resources, integration of youth activities, facilitators, and encouraging youth participation.
3. We propose six recommendations which will support a growing youth community at the IGF: autonomy within IGF spaces, integrating youth ideas, programmes for returning participants, educator and student participation, establishing an IGF database of resources, and changing funding barriers.

Introduction

The United Nations Secretary-General's (UNSG) vision on the future of global cooperation was presented in the UN 'Our Common Agenda' report, in which one of the categories aims to enhance youth engagement and to take future generations into account in policy decisions (United Nations, 2021). Additionally, the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have made youth central to their engagement agenda by declaring 2022 as the year of youth (ASEAN, 2022; European Commission, 2022).

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) – a multistakeholder dialogue platform held under the auspices of the UN – is in the unique position to be a space in which youth can learn about and participate in discussions on Internet governance and develop their capacity to participate in the processes that lead to decision-making. The IGF space is evolving, however, and discussions regarding how to improve the IGF and create an IGF+ is developing the way stakeholders see global cooperation and the future of multistakeholderism. While these changes are being made by and with acknowledged stakeholders according to the 2005 Tunis Agenda (World Summit on the Information Society, 2005), youth who are not structurally or systematically represented should not be forgotten.

This paper seeks to add insights to the IGF 2020-2025 strategy on Strengthening Engagement of Youth in Internet Governance (Internet Governance Forum, 2022a) by examining youth participation and themes that empower or create barriers. We analysed IGF's participant data and conducted interviews with youth activists and youth facilitators to understand who the youth attending the IGF are and how they are able or not able to engage in and with the IGF. Our findings convey that the term youth encompasses many different forms based on self-identification and designated identification which impacts their engagement with the IGF. Beyond the definition, we addressed five themes of engagement that elaborate on how youth are being empowered and what barriers they face at the IGF. This is followed by six recommendations that were identified which will support a growing youth community at the IGF.

Who are Youth? And where are they in the data?

2.1 Position perceptions about youth

To position youth within this policy brief, we must first outline the different understandings and perceptions there are about youth:

- **Age** – Across the different regions, the age definition is based on the socio-economic circumstances of youth, however, this means there are different age ranges that are being maintained. For example, the UN covers the age ranges of 15-24 (UNESCO, 2022), the EU collects data on youth from the ages of 15-29 (Eurostat, 2022), the African Union (AU) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) define youth as those between the ages of 15-35 (African Union, 2006; ASEAN, 2017). Within the IGF itself, the Youth Coalition on Internet Governance (YCIG) maintains the age range of 13-35, to reflect the age in which you can sign up for a Facebook account and the upper limit age according to regional organisation definitions.
 - **Newcomers** – Youth are often perceived as newcomers (Fung, 2022) based on age and academic affiliation, which is also reflected in the programmes that are being created for them (i.e., focused on introductory courses, capacity building, and networking that focuses on organisational familiarity). However, this does not acknowledge the aforementioned wide age-span that can extend over 22 years – and across a range of developments and conditions, from high school students to young professionals – nor does it accurately reflect those who are returning youth participants and have been engaging for more than five years (Chukov, 2022, Oghia, 2022, Schauer mann, 2022).
 - **Transitions** – As youth get older, they encounter many different transitions which makes it difficult to understand when or whether one can identify as a youth (Fung, 2022). These changes are mostly associated with age and job role, in which youth become of a certain age that is socially not understood or recognised as youth anymore, or they accept a job role and become part of an official stakeholder group (Oghia, 2022, Schauer mann, 2022). While they may still be a young person, or are affected by youth issues, they may not self-identify as youth anymore. Another point to consider are life stages. For example, when a girl or woman becomes a mother, they may not perceive themselves as a youth anymore because they have a child. For a man that goes into mandatory military service, they may see themselves as an adult when they leave service and not associate themselves anymore as youth. Across these different transitions, it is imperative to acknowledge the needs these young adults may face while they navigate these life stage changes.
 - **Self-defined or defined by others** – From the above, youth are navigating the landscape and fall in and out of the youth category on a variety of benchmarks. They may choose or not choose to self-define themselves as youth (Fung, 2022, Herring, 2022, Oghia, 2022, Walpen, 2022), but also the same youth experts are often re-invited to represent youth although they start to transition out of the category benchmarks (Schauer mann, 2022).
 - **Multiple identities** – Although this policy brief focused on youth, they are not limited to self-identifying as belonging to solely one stakeholder group. They may be able to put on multiple representational “hats” (Socarana, 2022) and change their hat based on the context of the discussion (Chukov, 2022 Socarana, 2022).
- To delineate youth accurately, we must also briefly address who are specifically not perceived as youth in this policy brief:
- **Ambassadors** – Youth who identify as organisation ambassadors and are participating or are funded on behalf of an external organisation are generally perceived as an extension of that funding organisation (Chukov, 2022, Schauer mann, 2022)
 - **Those who do not self-identify as youth** – As a young

person, you can be hidden among the other stakeholder groups (Walpen, 2022).

2.2 Finding hidden figures among academia

The IGF registration form does not have an option to self-identify as a youth stakeholder or as an end user, neither of which are acknowledged stakeholder groups according to the working definition of Internet Governance in the Tunis Agenda (World Summit on the Information Society, 2005). However, participants are requested to share their affiliation and stakeholder group. Therefore, looking at the database by (Tjahja et al., 2022), we aimed to find youth in the data and decided to briefly look at the academia stakeholder group (see Table 1).

In section 2.1, we identified that youth are often associated by their academic affiliation. Therefore, we analysed the academia stakeholder data to identify those who are established academics (those who teach and research at schools and universities), member of university staff (such as an information technology (IT) department, human resources, communications, etc.), and end users (those who are students or not identifiable or not traceable) (see Table 1).

Individual participants who self-identified as part of academia at the IGF varied from year-to-year. For example, having increased by 68% in 2015 compared to 2014, and decreased by -136% in 2017 compared to 2016. From all the years analysed, 2015, 2016, and 2019 stand out as the years with the most participants who self-identified to this stakeholder group with 568, 650, and 421, respectively. Interestingly, these are the years in which we found the highest number of end users. Of the 568 participants who self-identified with academia in 2015, 346 were end users (these includes students and those who were not identifiable). 2016 had the highest number of individual participants affiliated to academia with 650, but also the highest number of end users with 456. While in 2019, 421 individual participants self-identified to academia and 141 were end users.

In analysing these three versions of the IGF, we found that the location has a significant implication on the number of end users. IGF 2015 held in João Pessoa, Brazil, for instance, attracted 346 end users (within the academia category), of which 58% (204) were from universities and institutes located in Paraíba, the state where João Pessoa is located. If we exclude from our sample all Brazilian universities and educational institutes, the number of end users reduced to 44. The same is true for IGF 2016 held in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. Of the 456 end users identified, 45% (206) come from

Table 1: Stakeholders within academia category (recoded)

Year	Academia	Academics	End Users	Staff
2006	13	12	1	0
2007	191	114	59	18
2008	86	60	24	2
2009	143	98	37	8
2010	96	67	23	6
2011	93	44	38	11
2012	181	87	82	12
2013	120	79	36	5
2014	180	137	39	4
2015	568	198	346	24
2016	650	169	456	25
2017	276	167	86	23
2018	266	147	110	9
2019	421	261	141	19
All	3,284	1,640	1,478	166

Legend:

Academia: All those who self-identified as academia or affiliated to an educational institution

Academics: Those we have identified as Professors, researchers, teachers, or PhDs within the academia category

End Users: Those we have identified as students or couldn't identify or trace within the academia category

Staff: Those we have identified as university staff such as IT staff, communications, management, etc. within the academia category

one educational institute that serves as a high school and university: Universidad de Guadalajara, located in and around the state of Jalisco. If we exclude all Mexican universities and schools, the number of end users reduces to 78. Similarly, at IGF 2019 in Berlin, Germany, the number of end users was 141. Of these, 72% belonged to German schools or universities, with the number of end users being only 40 when sampling foreign universities and schools.

Nevertheless, of these three cases, IGF 2019 has the lowest

number of end users in relation to the number of individuals who self-identified as part of academia. Of the 421 participants who self-identified as academics in Berlin, 33% are end users, while this figure rose to 60% in João Pessoa and 70% in Jalisco. Remarkably, 2019 witnessed the first version of the Youth IGF Summit. Considering the efforts and resources that had to be used to promote this initiative, we could think of a decrease in the outreach of students and young people in Germany to explain the decline in end users.

How has youth participation in the IGF been empowered or hindered?

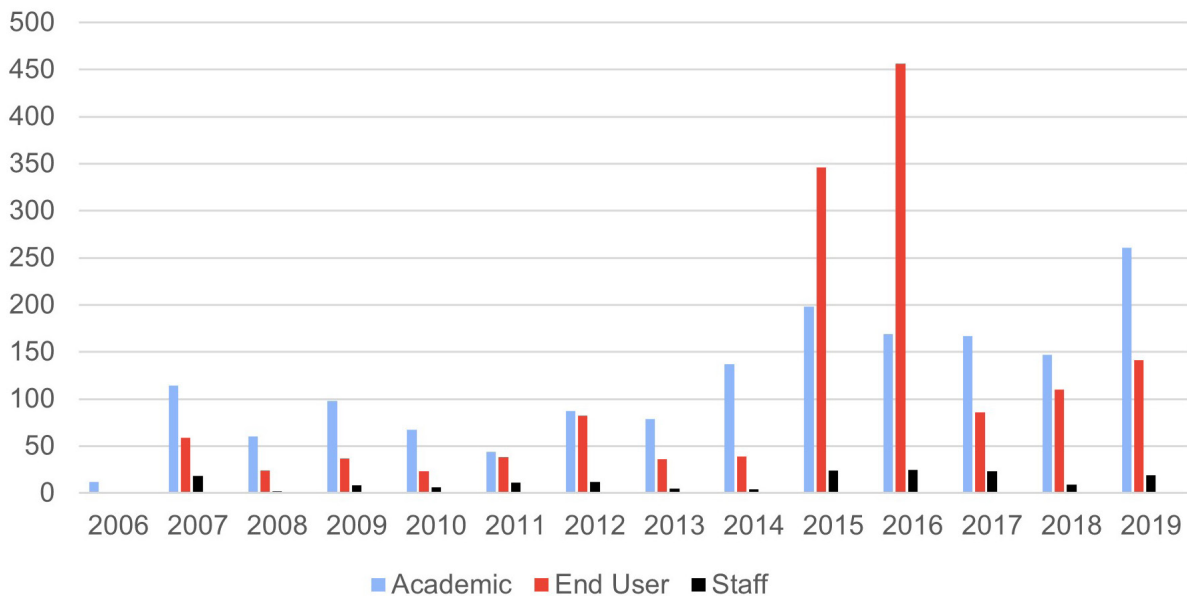
Throughout the history of the IGF, youth have reflected on their participation within the IGF ecosystem (IGF 2017 Youth Coalition on Internet Governance, 2017; IGF 2018 DC on Youth, 2018; IGF 2019 Youth Coalition on Internet Governance, 2019; Internet Governance Forum, 2020, 2022b) identifying themes such as resources, access, and inclusion. In this section, we will reflect on six common themes that youth have discussed, and explore their impact:

1. Accessing the IGF
2. The youth voice
3. Availability of resources
4. Integration of youth activities
5. Encouraging youth participation
6. Youth facilitators

3.1 Accessing the IGF

There are different manners of engaging with the IGF. There are the IGF initiatives that are organised throughout the year by relevant stakeholders known as IGF intersession work, such as the National, Regional, and Subregional IGF Initiatives (NRIs), Policy Networks, Dynamic Coalitions (DCs), and consultations (Tjahja and Potjomkina, 2022), but also the annual IGF event hosted each year by a different government at a different location. Whereas the most intersessional work focus on online engagement, the NRIs and the annual IGF event is a physical event in which anyone can participate (Gengo, 2022, Meyer, 2022, Prieto, 2022). This includes providing a remote participation option since 2011 (Internet Governance Forum, 2011); however, this has developed into a hybrid form since COVID-19 that provides accessibility to those who cannot attend in person (Prieto, 2022). Yet, online participation is not seamless in its delivery (Modey, 2022), and much of this is still reliant on accessibility of services and hardware. Notably, certain groups lack resources and capacity and are, therefore, underrepresented (Modey, 2022, Monnet, 2022). On-site participation is also limited to government approval. As the IGF is being organised by governments, and participants need to apply for a visa, governments supervise participation (Chukov, 2022). This can impact participants engaging with the IGF for whom it may be expensive, as they may have to travel far within their country or even to another country to obtain a visa, or dangerous without the protection

Graph 1: Stakeholders within academia category



of the UN, for example LGBTQ+ activists who travel to a country in which their identity is considered illegal or a crime (Pajaro Velasquez, 2022).

A major underestimated component of navigating the IGF, regardless whether that is the intersessional work or the annual event, is based on accessing the relevant information and materials, which is conducive to a more inclusive learning environment and exchange (Schauermann, 2022). This challenge exists out of guiding participants, especially newcomers to documents and meeting notes of ongoing

whether they are allies (Socarana, 2022). There are concerns that youth are being treated disrespectfully when youth communicate their position, often because stakeholders feel that youth are inexperienced and do not understand the topic (Monnet, 2022), which is further reflected by patronising feedback (Monnet, 2022, Oghia, 2022). This is also noticeable when decision-makers choose not to engage with youth and only participate for the formal components and not the interactive exchange (Piccolo, 2022), and if there is any engagement, generic answers are provided without going into the technical details or challenges (Ettema, 2022).

Notably, the youth messages have not been acknowledged, and decision-makers choose not to engage with them (Piccolo, 2022), which defeats the purpose of the activity that was designed specifically for the IGF. However, while the IGF community may not actively engage with the thought processes of youth,

Conversations about youth participation generally revolve around the lack of available resources for youth participation, especially funding for in-person participation

activities that stakeholders are invited to participate in at any point of the process. This abundance of materials with diverse outputs are difficult to navigate, hard to find, and complicated to contextualise without guidance (Schauermann, 2022). Therefore, capacity building and educational activities should include how to navigate these materials and discussions (Schauermann, 2022). Providing this type of access, allows for better integration of participants within themes because of a better understanding of the current state of development, the purpose of the activity, and the goals that it aims to achieve. This allows individuals to better situate themselves within the different settings that the IGF provides.

3.2 The youth voice

At all IGF activities, youth are welcome to participate. Whether that is joining the discussion of a Dynamic Coalition or a Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) working group (essentially the IGF's steering and programme committee); to be invited as a speaker or intervene from the floor at the annual IGF event; or designing their own policy messages to present to other stakeholders. However, it has been noted that there is resistance from the multistakeholder community (Prieto, 2022, Pajaro Velasquez, 2022). Input provided by youth or what youth consider to be important are not being considered and is often seen as an addendum – in essence, their contribution does not form part of the decision-making process (Schauermann, 2022, Socarana, 2022). While their voice is there, it is unclear whether their voice is being followed up on because it depends on who is in the room and

youth choose to expose themselves and continue voicing their opinions, positions, and communicating their thoughts on this (Socarana, 2022) – all while youth are impacted by the policies set by the community in their respective areas. Youth aim to repeat and amplify their messages, through repetition and by including their peers (Schauermann, 2022, Socarana, 2022).

However, here is also where youth split into two directions regarding their participation at the IGF. Facilitators of youth activities and older youth do not want specific youth sessions (Fung, 2022, Oghia, 2022, Prieto, 2022, Walpen, 2022) or topics that are about youth specifically (Prieto, 2022), as those sessions do not bridge into the wider community discussions (Fung, 2022). There is a reluctance to discuss those topics or from that perspective (Fung, 2022). Here, the older youth want to be acknowledged as a young person or a young professional providing a youth perspective on established topics to the attention of government and policymakers (Socarana, 2022). Yet, the younger youth seek out these spaces to have a dedicated safe space in which they understand the process, network with their peers, and find support with one-another. (Monnet, 2022, Piccolo, 2022, Socarana, 2022).

3.3 Availability of resources

Conversations about youth participation generally revolve around the lack of available resources for youth participation (Ettema, 2022, Meyer, 2022, Monnet, 2022, Oghia, 2022, Walpen, 2022), especially funding for in-person participation, which lead to discussions related to inclusion and elitism.

Many young people are unable to participate without the support of an organisation (Ettema, 2022, Prieto, 2022). Therefore, they apply for as many different programmes to be able to continue their participation (Piccolo, 2022), which then creates a funding cycle in which a select group of youth are moving from one fellowship to another and repeat courses that they received from other similar programmes.

Youth do everything on a voluntary basis (Fung, 2022, Piccolo, 2022, Socarana, 2022). The activities youth organise and the spaces they create for their peers come out of their own time availability while simultaneously managing other responsibilities (Socarana, 2022). While youth want to engage, learn, and gain experience, they also need to make a living (or support their studies), so in addition to financial resources, there are time resources that need to be considered (Fung, 2022, Modey, 2022, Socarana, 2022). One of the most common reasons for youth to stop participating at the IGF is because they obtained a full-time job somewhere and are unable to continue investing time and money to attend (Fung, 2022). On the other side of that coin, the private sector largely does not see the value of their employees participating in the IGF or Internet governance processes, in part, because the private sector uses different terminology such as digital policy or public policy to address Internet governance (Fung, 2022), but also because of the requirements regarding company representation. Ironically, it is often the people holding top-level positions that are encouraged to participate at the IGF (Modey, 2022), but that value does not necessarily extend to middle and senior managers, or general employees.

3.4 Integration of youth activities

At the IGF there are many sessions, activities, and communities organised by and for youth. However, these are mostly youth organising programmes for youth that are working independently (Monnet, 2022, Schauer mann, 2022). Yet, youth in youth leadership roles create roles that are individualised to them with no long-term plan on how to integrate other young people in the process (Schauer mann, 2022). When there are calls for youth representatives, these are mostly by invite-only, highly individualised, and an opportunity for some, but it does not always consult or integrate pre-existing working structures (Schauer mann, 2022, Botsyoe, 2022, Herring, 2022). As youth are open to involve youth and willing to build a community around them, though, it becomes easier to exchange contacts and facilitate each other's progress in the community. Due to the short time span of youth leadership and lack of structural continuity, however, there are cases in successor generations where established practices were forgotten and projects were

started that duplicate other pre-existing completed projects. This is hurtful because work was not being acknowledged or made redundant, wasting time, morale, and resources (Herring, 2022, Schauer mann, 2022).

There is a need for a structured recognition of opportunities for youth at the IGF. While these exist as projects or communities such as the Internet Society's (ISOC) IGF Ambassadors scheme, the Youth Coalition on Internet Governance (YCIG), and the Youth Standing Group, people come and go because of structural, one-year terms (Fung, 2022). There is not enough commitment and knowledge transfer to have continuation into the structure of the youth community (Fung, 2022, Schauer mann, 2022) if one compares it to, for instance, the Dynamic Coalitions. Processes and language also need to be simpler to make it more accessible (Herring, 2022), and steps are being made to institutionalise and legitimise these activities, such as the YCIG, which adheres to the same regulations as the other DCs (Youth Coalition on Internet Governance, 2020), in addition to institutionalising the IGF Youth Summit and the IGF Youth Track to foster further integration (Internet Governance Forum, 2022c).

3.5 Facilitators

Finally, when considering youth as a stakeholder, we also need to consider the facilitators of youth activities whose role is to empower youth participation (Ettema, 2022, Prieto, 2022). While youth want to connect with other youth to discuss and network (Fung, 2022), they themselves may not be youth or are growing out of the youth age group (Oghia, 2022, Prykhodko, 2022, Schauer mann, 2022). The role of facilitators is to identify and provide for the gaps they see in youth participation and engage in finding solutions to meet youth goals (Prieto, 2022, Prykhodko, 2022) as well as empowering them by building skills and spaces for participation (Ettema, 2022, Meyer, 2022, Prieto, 2022). Facilitators identify youth to bring to the IGF (Chukov, 2022, Ettema, 2022, Walpen, 2022) and mentor participants from all over the world (Prykhodko, 2022). It is important to facilitators that they themselves do not teach or lecture during a youth event (Prykhodko, 2022). However, contrary to expectations, facilitators also limit the participation of those who are not young people. Every person above the age of 35 needs to move on and not take space away from youth, this way young people can decide by themselves what topics they want to have discussed (Prykhodko 2022).

3.6 Encouraging youth participation

Youth participation is changing. Arnstein's ladder (2019) provides an overview of the different ways youth are invited to engage that range from activities that intend to manipulate youth, to empowering young people to have true citizen power. However, it is clear that at the IGF, participation is divided into two activities: being part of the experience and being part of the decision-making processes (Oghia, 2022). Yet, while it should be clear why youth should be interested and active participants at the IGF, there's no clear benefits for participating (Modey, 2022). The focus should be on how to communicate to young people that Internet governance affects their lives (Walpen, 2022) and how they can become more informed and knowledgeable to engage with the digital transformation. Once this understanding can be achieved, it will also be easier to understand the different opportunities that are available at the IGF, starting with the notion of genuine participation – that stakeholders work jointly to face the challenges of the global Internet and the digital space (Chukov, 2022), with the opportunity to have direct communications with role models of your field (Chukov, 2022). This builds networks (Monnet, 2022, Prieto, 2022) and builds connections and bonding experiences (Fung, 2022). This, in turn, can lead to job opportunities (Botsyoe, 2022, Prieto, 2022) that can foster further integration in the community.

Yet, what one also must consider are the vulnerable groups that are not represented in the dialogue process (Ettema, 2022, Modey, 2022): those who are not invited because they are not seen or known about (Modey, 2022). These are participants who may not know how to access the necessary support or what they need to be able to participate, and therefore cannot create the necessary spaces where they can meet and get organised (Ettema, 2022, Modey, 2022). Educators have been trying to raise awareness related to Internet governance courses (Meyer, 2022). However, the timing of the IGF is difficult for students because it falls directly during the semester, so it is difficult to manage travel to participate in person (Meyer, 2022). Participation at the IGF is not about the tangible result, however, but about the importance of participation, exploration, and confidence building, as students may not know what they are interested in until they have the opportunity to explore (Meyer, 2022). The difficulty with engaging at the IGF is that educators need the support with designing a programme to help them navigate the IGF, provide resource guidance, and debriefing discussions. Teachers often have to be selective, as they have limited time and resources (Meyer, 2022). Schools, universities, and courses are not the only way to get youth more involved, though. Young people have been invited in

volunteer roles to organise, help, or facilitate the IGF (Fung, 2022, Prykhodko, 2022), and then transition from participating as a duty to becoming involved due to interest (Prykhodko, 2022).

Recommendations

1. To foster active participation, youth should be given autonomy within the IGF spaces. This means that in addition to separate youth spaces in which they foster peer-to-peer engagement (Botsyoe, 2022, Socarana, 2022) young people should organise, lead, manage, and be responsible for regular sessions (Herring, 2022) and be included in all sessions (including high-level sessions) (Walpen, 2022), and to be represented in sessions where they can present their views in front of all stakeholders (Botsyoe, 2022). This engagement can encourage stakeholders to continue discussions with youth and extend the involvement of youth as well (Schauermann, 2022).
2. To integrate youth ideas, representatives could share at the beginning of sessions their thoughts about the needs of the future generation (Walpen, 2022) or present the related messages from the IGF Youth Summit to receive feedback from policymakers (Piccolo, 2022).
3. To further integrate youth within the IGF community, additional programmes for returning programmes could be built to close the gap between being a newcomer and an expert (Botsyoe, 2022, Socarana, 2022, Schauermann, 2022).
4. To foster educator and student participation, an education package for teachers could be made, similarly to a guided visit to museums (Meyer, 2022) with background information, materials, exercises, and activities for students to actively engage with the IGF. This could also take the form of a Best Practice Forum (BPF) or in partnership with an existing school on Internet governance (SIG) (such as the European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG)).
5. To improve the ability to navigate documentation provided by the IGF (Schauermann, 2022), a library database could be established or integrated into existing UN services that provides long-term sustainability and navigation of IGF files for educational and research purposes. Additionally, a protocol should be implemented on how to request data from the IGF for research purposes.
6. The IGF and all participating organisations should strive to provide easily accessible funding to support youth to participate at the IGF (Fung, 2022, Modey, 2022,

Monnet, 2022, Piccolo, 2022, Schauermaun, 2022). Youth and youth-focused organisations should be able to access financial resources in the form of project grants, fellowships, awards, sponsored travel, paid internships, or full-time employment to support their internet governance inclusion. Factors such as complex application processes, education degrees, and traditional work experience that make many of the currently available funding opportunities out of reach for youth should be eliminated from processes that aim to attract youth (Mody, 2022)

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Nadia Tjahja is a PhD Fellow at UNU-CRIS and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

Carlos Fonseca was a Research Intern at UNU-CRIS until the end of January 2023.

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