

European Dialogue on Internet Governance 2008 – 2022

Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance: A Decade of Youth Participation

Nadia Tjahja



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About EuroDIG

Launched in 2008, EuroDIG, the European Dialogue on Internet Governance, is a unique annual event that brings together Internet stakeholders from throughout Europe (and beyond), and from across the spectrum of government, industry, civil society, academia and the technical community. Stakeholders and participants work over the course of each year to develop, in a bottom-up fashion, a dynamic agenda that explores the pressing issues surrounding how we develop, use, regulate and govern the Internet. EuroDIG participants come away with broader, more informed perspectives on these issues and new partners in responding to the challenges of the information society.

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Foreword



*Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General's
Envoy on Youth*

It has been nearly 15 years since youth was first recognized as one of the stakeholders at EuroDIG. During the span of this period of time, the generation of young people has grown to surpass 1.9 billion¹, multidimensional crises have taken center stage, and we continue to reach new peaks of technological advancement. In 2022, approximately 5.3 billion people², or 66 percent of the world's population, were using the Internet. Participation in the digital space has now become even more critical in an era where we have become more connected than ever, and technology has become a central part of our daily lives. At the same time, frontier technologies such as

blockchain and Artificial Intelligence have witnessed exponential progress over the past decade. All of this has resulted in an increase in connectivity and democratization of knowledge, skills, and access accelerated by the availability and advancement of the Internet.

Although we have seen a positive trend in terms of increased participation in digital spaces, with the Internet serving as the backbone of digital advancement, the question of Internet governance remains challenging as the world struggles with technology developments that often outpace regulations. The world today often faces a reality where guidance and regulations are playing catch up with

digital transformation, making it even more challenging to safeguard fundamental principles such as human rights and equality. From the beginning, we have known that it will take strong collaboration from multistakeholder partners to address these challenges. Inclusive and equitable Internet governance is critical to bringing together diverse stakeholders in building a safe, sustainable, and inclusive digital future.

As a generation of digital natives, young people understand first-hand the significant impact of technology in shaping our lives and futures. Young people often directly experience both the positive outcome of technology and its risks and potential harm. According to the Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space, 78 percent of youth³ in civic spaces reported having experienced some form of digital threat. Given this reality, it is only natural for young people to continuously advocate for better, safer, and more inclusive digital spaces that take youth concerns and recommendations into account.

The journey to meaningfully include young people in the decision-making spaces of Internet governance is a journey that has been taking place for more than a decade, supported by EuroDIG's Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance (YOUthDIG) programme. Through years of hearing directly from young people

regarding their first-hand experience, accompanied by efforts to transform the structures of youth participation and feedback mechanisms to strengthen youth consultations, the YOUthDIG programme has showcased the possibility to strengthening institutionally mandated youth engagements over time.

As highlighted in the UN Secretary-General's policy brief on "Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes"⁴, it is imperative that we mainstream core principles of meaningful youth engagement across all levels of youth participation: "When youth engagement strays from these principles, it risks becoming tokenistic and can result in decision-making that is divorced from young people's lived realities." At the height of digital development, our world cannot afford to risk further siloing the participation of its most connected generation in the Internet governance space. This imperative for meaningful youth engagement in the digital space is likewise put front and center of the UN's own work building towards the Global Digital Compact⁵.

Through this publication and the key findings that it aims to highlight, I hope the key lessons and best practices of EuroDIG and YOUthDIG's journey in navigating youth participation over the past decade can help inspire other efforts that are taking place to support

youth in Internet governance at both regional and national levels across the world, and most importantly to help fast-track the implementation of meaningful youth engagement principles across all Internet governance process. I likewise hope this publication can serve as a critical reminder of the value of recognizing youth as partners and experts; it is through research and advocacy led by young researchers, such as Nadia, that evidence on youth participation at decision-making levels, including both its opportunities and challenges, are now made available for the world to see and learn from.

References

- ¹ <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/>
- ² <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/facts-figures-2022/index/>
- ³ <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Report-on-Protecting-Young-People-in-Civic-Space.pdf>
- ⁴ <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-youth-engagement-en.pdf>
- ⁵ <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-gobal-digi-compact-en.pdf>

Introduction



Nadia Tjahja, Co-coordinator of the Digital Governance Cluster at UNU-CRIS, PhD Fellow at the VUB and current YOUthDIG Coordinator

Recent years have highlighted the importance of empowering youth in governance processes. The European Union (EU) and the Association of South Asian Nations (ASEAN) both dedicated 2022 to youth, with the Commonwealth following the year after. The United Nations (UN) Secretary General included in his report *Our Common Agenda* recommendations for “meaningful, diverse, and effective youth engagement through better political representation, transforming education, skills training, and lifelong learning.”¹

The Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance (YOUthDIG), the youth programme of

the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG), brings together youth from the pan-European continent to learn and exchange on issues pertaining to the Internet. An interactive programme created and organised by former YOUthDIG participants for new YOUthDIG participants to help newcomers navigate the European Internet governance landscape, identify the different actors, and understand the processes and terminology related.

There have been youth events at EuroDIG since its inception in 2008, however this publication will specifically focus on YOUthDIG from 2017 until 2022.

To write this EuroDIG publication, the author conducted outreach to all 150 former YOUthDIG participants from 2017–2021 through a survey to which only 6 former participants responded. Further investigation into the lack of response conveyed that many participants had left their affiliation while they were with YOUthDIG and, therefore, had new email addresses, which resulted in a better understanding of youth engagement sustainability. Based on this understanding, the research focused on the participation lists of YOUthDIG, EuroDIG, and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to reflect on YOUthDIG participation, and identified 40 people to approach for interviews, of which 20 people responded. The other 20 people did not respond or were not available for an interview.

For the interviews, there were four selection criteria:

1. Attended EuroDIG three or more times, to reflect on how YOUthDIG participants integrated into EuroDIG and through which activities, or
2. Attended EuroDIG and an IGF, to reflect on how YOUthDIG participants navigate the regional and global IGF, or
3. Did not return to EuroDIG after their YOUthDIG year, to reflect why they didn't further engage, or
4. Did not attend the IGF, to reflect why they did not engage on a local, regional, or global level.

Background – youth events at EuroDIG

Since 2009, youth has been acknowledged as a stakeholder at EuroDIG, and included in the main programme as contributors to the discussions. However, youth were also engaged in side and pre-events organised by several organisations and individuals. In 2010, the Council of Europe organised a youth roundtable side event that resulted in best practice recommendations as part of the EuroDIG Messages. In 2011, DiploFoundation organised an Internet Governance Capacity Building Programme². In 2012, the Nordic Youth IGF organised a pre-conference to EuroDIG, and it was in this conference where they introduced the first youth recommendations. From 2013 onwards, the New Media Summer School (NMSS) was introduced, which mobilised European youth from the ages of 18-to-30-years-old to discuss the opportunities and challenges regarding the Internet. The NMSS served as a platform for educational capacity building and empowerment as well as for intercultural exchange between young people from across the European continent, created in a bottom-up manner by youth in cooperation with several international organisations and individuals.

In 2017, EuroDIG decided to institutionalise an official yearly youth pre-event and named

the event the Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance (YOUthDIG). The objective was to foster peer learning and networking among youth residing in Europe based on the EuroDIG programme, discuss and exchange views with experienced Internet policy practitioners, and create YOUthDIG messages, which are presented at EuroDIG and the IGF. During 2017 and 2018, the youth activist group Copyfighters as well as the Council of Europe organised parallel and joint sessions with YOUthDIG to bring together different groups and purposes to foster exchange and perspective sharing.

In 2019, YOUthDIG introduced online webinars as a pre-event to YOUthDIG to bring together participants to familiarise themselves with the group, terminology, and the EuroDIG structure, which proved an important development for the two following years when the world went into lockdown in 2020 and 2021. Despite the ensuing hardships, EuroDIG decided to continue hosting EuroDIG and YOUthDIG virtually and had two dedicated cohorts. In 2022, YOUthDIG brought back both the virtual and on-site experiences.

The following sections will solely focus on YOUthDIG.

YOUthDIG Philosophy

This section reflects on the principles underpinning the YOUthDIG programme. Since its institutionalisation in 2017, YOUthDIG aims to continuously update their working methods – ones that address the needs of youth to be able to participate in EuroDIG and other Internet governance processes, and support their integration in the wider EuroDIG community

as an active stakeholder in multistakeholder governance.

The success of YOUthDIG demonstrates that if allocated sufficient resources, it can provide a crucial platform for youth to actively contribute to national, European, and global Internet governance.

YOUthDIG logo



YOUthDIG stands for the Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance and the logo reflects that YOU(th) should be part of the dialogue. The small “th” of the logo symbolises the bridge

between YOU and participating in Dialogue on Internet Governance (DIG). However, for written purposes, authors may choose to write YOUthDIG instead.

Participation

Young people are increasingly being encouraged to participate in different activities in society. In Europe in particular, there have been efforts to foster youth participation in a variety of activities organised on local, national, and regional levels³. However, as there is a rise in youth participation in society⁴, there is the need to reflect on the nature of their participation.

Building on the Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969), the Ladder of Children’s Participation is a model developed by Roger Hart (1992), which critically evaluates the quality of youth participation in any

project and seeks to assist organisations to reflect on the inclusion of young people in different activities and identify non-participation practices. This also allows young people to identify activities that genuinely engage youth in higher levels of participation and decision-making.

Roger Hart defines participation as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the community in which one lives,” and this ladder provides a visual and descriptive representation of eight levels of decision-making, agency, control, and power that can be given to children by adults.

8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Degree of participation
7. Child-initiated and directed	
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children	
5. Consulted and informed	
4. Assigned but informed	
3. Tokenism	Non-participation
2. Decoration	
1. Manipulation	

Table 1. Roger Hart’s Ladder of Children’s Participation

With the institutionalisation of youth participation at EuroDIG in 2017, YOUthDIG adopted Hart's Ladder framework with the aim to achieve rung 6 on the ladder, which is classified as an "adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people" initiative, which means that adults had the initial idea and invited young people to be involved with making decisions, planning, and implementing the project. For YOUthDIG 2017, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) of the EuroDIG programme participated in YOUthDIG and presented developments in their subject matter topics, supported by YOUthDIG Focal Points, who were youth facilitators collecting questions and inputs from the group. The idea was that the SMEs and the Focal Points jointly organised the sessions.

In 2018, the structure was further developed to introduce a YOUthDIG coordinator who led the programme design. The coordination moved to YOUthDIG alumni who became increasingly engaged in the process and started taking over duties. By 2019, this resulted in a completely YOUthDIG-alumni lead event with an embedded YOUthDIG Coordinator in the EuroDIG Secretariat. Yearly, the YOUthDIG Coordinator invited YOUthDIG alumni to join the YOUthDIG Organising Team. This incorporated youth as part of the organisational structure. Here the focus shifted to youth as incoming stakeholders to the EuroDIG community, and

the programme adjusted to reflect this by including interactive YOUthDIG sessions with Internet governance experts in dialogue, which brought into context upcoming EuroDIG topics for discussions, capacity building to engage in the EuroDIG process, and introducing the YOUthDIG messages as a keynote speech at EuroDIG.

In 2022, to reflect the changing engagement of YOUthDIG participants in the wider EuroDIG ecosystem, YOUthDIG adopted the Pyramid of Participation model (forthcoming). This model revised Arnstein's Ladder by looking at how stakeholders are navigating participation within an institution and acknowledges that the process is dynamic, where an activity is not solely one rung, but can indicate multiple rungs. For example, YOUthDIG participants are at the bottom of the pyramid integrating in the ecosystem, and they are participating by being informed – they are learning about EuroDIGs topics and processes. They are consulting by providing their ideas and experiences through the YOUthDIG messages that are presented at EuroDIG. Yet, with the same activity, the YOUthDIG Org Team are at the leadership level and are organising YOUthDIG through delegated power where "public institutions, officials, or administrators (i.e., the EuroDIG Secretariat) gives up some degree of control, management, decision-making authority, or funding

to [the YOUthDIG Organising Team] ... [the YOUthDIG Organising Team] hold the significant cards to assure accountability of the program[me] to them.” In essence, the YOUthDIG Org Team has the decision-making authority over the YOUthDIG programme that informs YOUthDIG participants.

This model acknowledges the integration of youth at different levels through the EuroDIG processes, and does not differentiate that power is between “adults” and “youth” as in-

dicated by Arnstein, but between an institution and its stakeholders. It also shows that participation is a dynamic process where you can take on different roles at different times. This reflection aims to provide better support for youth as they navigate through EuroDIG in different activities, roles, and processes as a valued stakeholder, and integrate them more effectively in the multistakeholder environment.

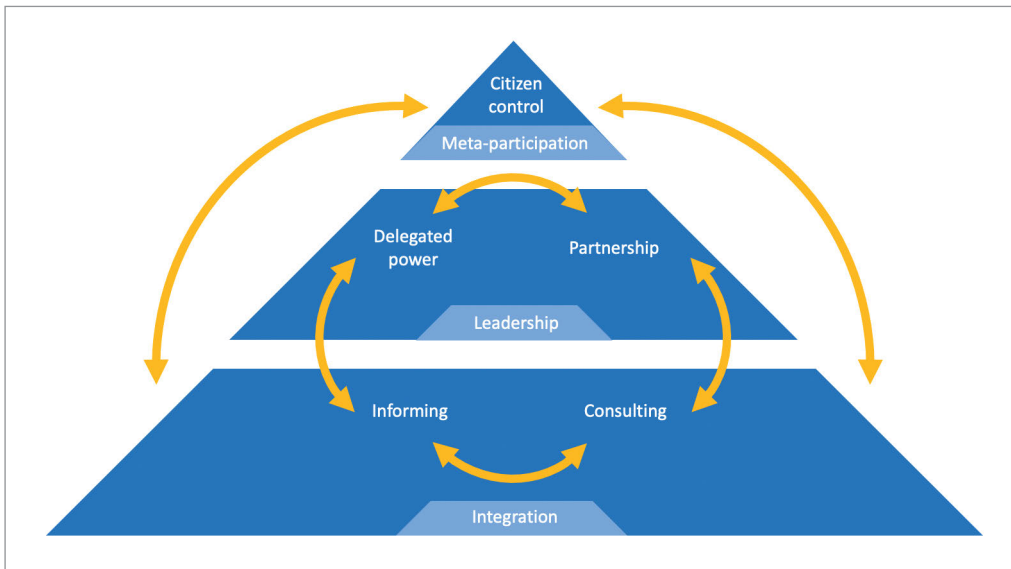


Figure 1. Pyramid of Participation: A revision of Arnstein’s Ladder from “YOUthDIG participation on regional and global level: the dynamics of meaningful youth participation” (Tjahja, forthcoming)

YOUthDIG Organising Team

YOUthDIG is organised by youth for youth, and its organising team is composed of former participants of YOUthDIG. As alumni, they have experienced the programme and are able to identify good and bad practices. They reflect on their own participation, provide feedback on what they felt they needed to participate more successfully at EuroDIG, and implement their proposals themselves to improve the experience for the following cohort. YOUthDIG aims to select a group that comes from different cohorts, coming from different cultures and backgrounds, and working in different fields to acknowledge the variety and dynamics of the youth stakeholder group.

In 2017, YOUthDIG followed the EuroDIG structure of SMEs and Focal Points to build the programme, later this became the YOUthDIG Programme Committee, but is now stylised as the YOUthDIG Organising Team.

Since 2018, there has been a YOUthDIG Coordinator who is part of the EuroDIG Secretariat, who is also an alumni and yearly invites a new YOUthDIG Org Team to create the YOUthDIG Programme. However, to ensure long-term sustainability, some members of former Org Teams are re-invited to contribute to the programme, or intervene at key moments of the

programme as advisors. This ensures that there are EuroDIG members that remain familiar with the YOUthDIG philosophy that can provide support for new Org Team members. This way, there is institutional memory about how YOUthDIG works beyond the EuroDIG Secretariat and builds a community of collaborators who are familiar working with each other. Moreover, many will take on roles of responsibilities in and outside of EuroDIG collaborating together intergenerationally.

YOUthDIG also strives to maintain its relationship with the Youth Coalition on Internet Governance (YICIG), which is an IGF Dynamic Coalition focused on youth participation in Internet governance. This fosters a connection between local and regional IGFs and the global IGF, providing contextual insights on issues that youth are engaging with on a global level that Europeans should be informed about or engaged with as well. It also provides YOUthDIG participants with an opportunity to become familiar with stakeholders at the global level that they can connect with when they attend events internationally. Furthermore, YOUthDIG messages are presented at the global IGF YICIG session for discussion among the official regions of the UN. Through this process, partici-

pants become more aware of opportunities that connect Europe and the global sphere.

At the same time, since 2017, there has always been a YOUthDIG alumni who was member of the YCIG Steering Committee who was a member of the YOUthDIG Org Team (see Table 2). Therefore, fostering the relationship between YOUthDIG and YCIG supports a YOUthDIG

Alumni Steering Committee member and provides them with a community with which to engage – whether that is informing what is happening on a global level, gathering European contributions that can be expressed on a global level, or providing opportunities for the pan-European youth community.

Year	Region	Name
2017 & 2018	Eastern European Group	Michael Oghia (NMSS alumnus) <i>Focal point on Security (2017)</i> <i>Member of the Org Team (2018)</i> <i>Co-facilitator of the YOUthDIG Messages (2018)</i>
2019 ⁵	Western Europe and Others Group	Nadia Tjahja (alumna 2018) <i>Lead Facilitator of the YOUthDIG Messages</i>
2020 & 2021	Eastern European Group	Meri Baghdasaryan (alumna 2019) <i>Member of the Org Team</i>
2022	Western Europe and Others Group	Daphne Stevens (alumna 2021) <i>Member of the Org Team</i> <i>Co-facilitator of the YOUthDIG Messages</i>
2023	Eastern European Group Western Europe and Others Group	Marko Palosi João Pedro Martins (alumnus 2018) <i>Not members of the 2023 Org Team⁶</i>

Table 2: YCIG Steering Committee Members supporting the respective YOUthDIG Organising Teams

Participant Selection

In 2023, YOUthDIG received a record number of applicants – more than 250 – from all over Europe from individuals who wanted to participate in YOUthDIG. Applicants to YOUthDIG can apply to receive travel and accommodation grants to support their participation at YOUthDIG and EuroDIG. This opens up opportunities for youth to participate, particularly for those who otherwise may not be able to participate in-person.

The YOUthDIG outreach strategy has equally focused on academic communities as working youth, bringing together youth from different moments in their trajectory to become involved with Internet governance processes. Outreach focused on the EuroDIG community networks, social media, and universities – namely specific departments that are known to have an interest in digital issues such as law, politics, and computer science, in addition to youth networks and organisations, university career centres, and niche community associations beyond traditional academic spaces. Increasingly, YOUthDIG is building familiarity with certain networks who look forward to receiving the YOUthDIG application form to spread among their members. And with each new YOUthDIG Org Team, outreach

becomes more specific by personalising the outreach experience.

The application form is revised each year by the Org Team after reflecting on the information they need to have a good understanding of the applicants. While applicants are asked to describe their educational background, the application form primarily focuses on the motivations and interests of applicants, which removes barriers based on experience and access to education. Newcomers are welcome without having any prior experience as long as they can clearly indicate their motivation to learn about Internet governance and what they want to achieve with this knowledge.

In 2019, blind peer review was introduced, where all identifying data is removed from the applicants, and the Org Team rates each application, where 0 is not eligible or does not have a complete application, and 5 is a strong application. However, due to wildly varying criteria that each Org Team member maintained, the discussions were elaborate, as YOUthDIG Org Team members would fight to include people in YOUthDIG. Therefore, in 2020, a reference table was introduced, which acknowledges and reflects the different backgrounds and experiences from the YOUthDIG participants and

provides guidelines on points to look out for assessment. Since this initial introduction, subsequent Org Teams update the reference table based on their understanding of their cohort and their communities and societies to ensure that the changing dynamics of the

youth stakeholder group are acknowledged. This has led to cohorts that were motivated to share their experiences, active in their participation, and curious to meet fellow cohort members while exploring Internet governance topics and the local culture.

Agenda building and programme design

The YOUthDIG programme is shaped by the interests of the chosen participants and the YOUthDIG Org Team. In the application form applicants outline what areas of interests they have and what they want to contribute to the discussions. At the same time, the results of the EuroDIG call for issues are published for review, and the YOUthDIG Org Team can reflect on topics and themes that may be interesting to include in the YOUthDIG programme to prepare the participants to attend EuroDIG. Lastly, the YOUthDIG Org Team can contribute their own expertise or identify topics that they are interested to know more about. This combination of input puts forward a programme that is reflective of current discussions at EuroDIG, includes feedback from former YOUthDIG participants about information and skills they would

have liked to learn, and respects the contribution of the diversity of the cohort and their individual backgrounds.

The programme was expanded and webinars were introduced in 2019 per the request of YOUthDIG participants. This would allow participants the opportunity to meet each other before travelling to a potentially unknown country and to start familiarising themselves with the topics. Since 2020, the webinars were standardised in the following topics:

- Session 1: Introduction to EuroDIG, Internet governance, and EU digital policies
- Session 2: A topic of the choice of the Org Team
- Session 3: Group presentations to share experiences or research from participant backgrounds and communities

- Session 4: Introduction to the YOUthDIG Messages process

The programme itself is composed of formal and non-formal methods, but primarily focusing on creating spaces for dialogue with industry and policy experts who are invited as guest speakers to provide insight into the subject areas, either by providing background, context

or updates on the latest developments in an interactive and engaging manner that focuses on the exchange between participants, preferring workshops over panels. This allows youth to bring in their ideas and discuss them with their peers and experts without the pressure of presenting for large crowds or in front of a camera.

YOUthDIG Messages

The YOUthDIG Messages were first introduced in 2012 as part of the Nordic Youth IGF pre-event. Since then, it was adopted by the NMSS and then by YOUthDIG in different facilitated formats. But the feedback was clear that there was never enough time to have these discussions and that working in groups often resulted in a small group taking the lead on a topic. This would exclude those who were less familiar with the topic, those whose English did not match the speed of the rest of the group, or those who needed more time to reflect on the topic before contributing to the discussion.

Therefore, from 2019 onwards, the YOUthDIG Messages are designed using the Syntegration

method, which was developed by cybernetician Stafford Beer⁷. This method enables groups to work together in a democratic, non-hierarchical manner to capture their best thinking by utilising different communication methods that address different engagement styles. It balances brain thinking and brainstorming to ensure optimal engagement and equal opportunity for participants, and allows for expression without any blocking. The different forms of communications include submitting topics in writing in the weeks leading up to the YOUthDIG Messages webinar, engaging live verbally to build upon these topics with any associated ideas or further develop-

ing topics. Setting time aside for direct discussions, but also include periodic feedback moments in which there is reflection on how the messages are developing and what is missing. Participants have the opportunity to engage on every topic, rather than specialising on one, by providing written and verbal feedback at specific occasions through the protocol. This method focuses on bringing the knowledge from the participants together, fostering their unique experiences to build their own discussion agenda, and designing the messages. Moreover, it is particularly appropriate for groups that are characterised by high levels of diversity, such as YOUthDIG. The facilitators in this method are not content experts, but protocol experts, and they ensure that discussions stay on track following the protocol to ensure an inclusive and creative discussion.

The messages are driven by one key question, “What are the issues and concerns that impact you or your community that you want to raise to the attention of decision makers at EuroDIG?” Based on this question, the agenda is developed by navigating what participants are interested in, what they are concerned about, and what ideas they may have to further progress. Participants are asked not to engage with motherhood statements – generalised statements that everybody will agree with – and to reflect which topics they could

contribute most to (rather than have the most interest in). This allows participants to focus on the messages and how they can contribute to them.

Unlike most group methods, the Syntegration method also includes time for reflection and feedback from the group. After an initial discussion, there is time to provide verbal, written, and visual feedback to the initial messages. This allows for dedicated time to process ideas, innovate, and be creative with our contributions. After this moment of reflection, the participants reconvene to draft the final messages.

Upon completing the messages, participants reflect how difficult the multistakeholder process is. Without including organisation representation, there are already values, visions, goals, and expectations that need to be managed in these processes. These discussions can be frustrating when there are different ideals or philosophies, yet the focus remains on progress and finding a common understanding on how to approach these topics. At the end of the long YOUthDIG Messages drafting session – reflective of the multilateral statement drafting process – a capacity building session is included in which participants explore advocacy, activism, and lobbying activities that bring ideas to the forefront of policymakers. During this session, participants

explore how they can present their YOUthDIG messages, and bring them to the attention of stakeholders during EuroDIG by navigating the programme for appropriate sessions and identifying the stakeholders related to the YOUthDIG messages that are attending. This empowers youth participants with content that they can contribute to discussions and provides them with the confidence based on the extensive discussions they already engaged on the topic to bring forward information from the entire group.

However, besides the individual actions at EuroDIG by YOUthDIG participants, EuroDIG seeks to provide additional spaces to raise attention to the YOUthDIG Messages. From 2019, the YOUthDIG Messages have been presented as a keynote at EuroDIG. Giving the opportunity to the YOUthDIG Org Team to present their created initiative, and for YOUthDIG partici-

pants to provide an insight from their cohort and present the YOUthDIG messages. The YOUthDIG Messages are also integrated in the EuroDIG Messages, which are then presented at the global IGF.

However, the YOUthDIG Messages go beyond EuroDIG and enter other spaces. Since 2017, the YOUthDIG Messages have been shared with the YCIG and presented at the annual YCIG session at the IGF and the aforementioned annual IGF EuroDIG session. The YOUthDIG messages are also sent each year to the Council of Europe, European Commission, and the European Parliament. Previously, YOUthDIG participants have also been received by EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and the Dutch Secretary of State for Economic Affairs and Climate, Mona Keijzer, to discuss the YOUthDIG messages.

YOUthDIG Feedback

At the end of YOUthDIG, there is an in-person feedback moment in which YOUthDIG participants reflect on their participation, the skills and knowledge they attained, and the struc-

ture and content of the programme. During this session, participants raise points on how the YOUthDIG Org Team can further support them during the EuroDIG event, to understand

what skills or knowledge they would like to know in addition to the programme, but also what could be changed for the next cohort. Participants will also have the opportunity to ask questions about how the programme was designed or intended, which is answered by the YOUthDIG Coordinator. These feedback sessions have actively contributed to changes

in the YOUthDIG programme, such as introducing the aforementioned webinars, adding additional background reading in the EuroDIG wiki⁸, and changing formats of some sessions. This session also identifies participants who express the changes they want to see, who are then considered to join the following YOUthDIG Org Team.

YOUth with a purpose

In recent years, youth participation has evolved beyond participating in a one-off event. Young people are motivated to actively contribute, to further their development, and to achieve goals. They have purpose and seek for opportunities that they can be involved with that support long-term objectives⁹.

The Call for Applications for YOUthDIG goes live every year at the end of January, where the EuroDIG Secretariat uses their communications channels to promote the opportunity, and the YOUthDIG Org Team conducts outreach via email and social media. While many learn about YOUthDIG through social media or website sharing opportunities, most participants get involved because they were invited to apply by the EuroDIG Community who reached out to their network. Often, these applicants find out about YOUthDIG by meeting someone at their university, extracurricular activities, their national, regional, and global IGFs, or Internet Society (ISOC) programmes such as the youth IGF Ambassador programme.

For many applicants, their main motivation to apply for YOUthDIG is to learn more about Internet governance as a new and dynamic environment of practice or implement-

ing academic knowledge into real-life experience by attending a meaningful event in which youth can voice their ideas among stakeholders in the field. Notably, they specifically target EuroDIG because they want to be more involved on a European level and be able to navigate the processes and identify actors.

Participating in YOUthDIG allows participants to become more aware of the most relevant issues on the policy agenda by being introduced to backgrounds to these issues and contextualising discussions. Due to the diverse cohort, participants meet interesting people from around the world, and the YOUthDIG Messages process teaches them how to draft multilateral body-style agreements, communicate interculturally, and explore different perspectives and ideas. Through this engagement, former participants feel prepared to start engaging at EuroDIG, and that they are being part of and are also actively building a community and a network of active citizens where they are able to contribute thoughts and ideas regarding the direction of the Internet with perspectives from their communities.

Notable benefits are the opportunities to learn about multistakeholder Internet governance discussions and processes, dive deeper

into digital policy issues, explore new cultures, to have access to and take the next step towards professional engagements, find new collaboration possibilities, gain confidence in presentation skills, and network in a foreign language (English).

At the end of YOUthDIG, participants are often engaged to participate in EuroDIG or the IGF, and are keen to explore further opportunities. For many, YOUthDIG has been their first step to getting employed or developing their career in Internet governance.

YOUthDIG at EuroDIG

YOUthDIG participants at EuroDIG take a variety of different roles to engage. Most participants will use the opportunity to explore different topics that are being addressed, listen to the different perspectives from stakeholders, and continue these conversations with their colleagues. There have also been participants who have been invited or who took action to participate in certain roles at EuroDIG, such as remote moderation, speaker, moderator, or Focal Points. However, in all these roles, YOUthDIG participants feel confident to contribute to conversations based on the structure of the session, openness of the community, and the support of their peer group. Their relevance was associated by knowledge and not because they are specifically identified as a particular stakeholder.

Due to the strong connection built during YOUthDIG, youth then support and inspire each other. Seeing peers speak at the event, seeing them being motivated to return to EuroDIG, and then actually continue their participation is inspiring and motivates others to return in subsequent years. Furthermore, it helps to foster professional connections with peers that continue to develop over time as their experience within Internet governance deepen and

their careers progress. At both YOUthDIG and EuroDIG, peers transfer their knowledge and start giving back to the network that they are trying to build, which also makes it easier to keep the group active. In some cases, participants connect with other like-minded youth and they set up projects together or are invited to participate in national or regional IGFs. Due to this community building, participants return to renew their connections, which has the snowball effect in that when participants know people who will be attending, and are regularly coming back to Internet governance events as well, making it easier to engage. However, in Internet governance youth communities, coordinators sometimes hand each other these opportunities out of good will and well-wishing for each other, which discourages an influx of new people in funded positions. Participants are then part of the in-group, which erodes one of the key principles of youth-led movements: openness.

One-third of YOUthDIG participants returned after their first time at EuroDIG and integrated themselves in the EuroDIG process, acknowledging that there is much more than just the conference days – setting the theme, defining the issues, and constructing the session. For

those who did not become session organisers due to time or resources constraints, they still participated through interventions or were invited to speak in sessions.

What is striking is that YOUthDIG alumni that return feel comfortable submitting issue proposals, where former YOUthDIG participants submitted 100 proposals between 2017 – 2022. They felt comfortable to contribute because the call for issues allows them to express an interest in particular topics that they may not have the opportunity to engage stakeholders from the multistakeholder community with themselves. The call for issues does not require specialised knowledge, background information, or a network of experts in which to refer in order to participate. This allows youth to bring forward topics that they find important on the agenda, while relying on the multistakeholder community to bring the collective knowledge of the field together to build a session that allows the issue to be further developed into something concrete.

Among the two-thirds of former YOUthDIG participants who do not return to EuroDIG, it is mostly related to access to resources and long-term planning. Resources does not only refer to the financial ability to attend, but also time investment. First, in regards to engaging

in EuroDIG processes, these can be time consuming and difficult for youth to engage in when they are not salaried. Youth engagement in EuroDIG processes is mostly volunteer-driven, and youth are required to strike a balance between their interest in Internet governance and work and/or academic commitments. Time commitments also refer to young families who also have to manage childcare – as the range of youth involved varies from students to young professionals. For other non-returning participants, YOUthDIG was a practical experience to explore the topics, but also the impact of digitalisation on their own fields. Some YOUthDIG participants come from backgrounds in which digitisation and digital policies have an impact, but are not at the core of their work. Others decided to make other elements the essence of their work such as sustainability or entrepreneurship. While YOUthDIG and EuroDIG have given them a clearer understanding of digital policies and how this will impact them, they do not directly work on Internet governance issues. Despite the discontinuation of their participation, as of writing, former YOUthDIG participants feel that they are always able to return to EuroDIG should an issue arise that they would like to contribute to.

YOUthDIG at IGF

One-fifth of former YOUthDIG participants attended the IGF, and were mostly able to attend because they were offered financial support to participate. Through financial support, YOUthDIG participants were encouraged to actively participate in sessions or to engage in reporting. Those who were self-funded were mostly participants from neighbouring countries. YOUthDIG participants are less active at the IGF level in sessions because the process to participate is based on proposals and is therefore harder to engage with as a newcomer. YOUthDIG participants feel that submitting one's own session proposal is difficult because it requires content knowledge and an established network to contribute and, thus, such proposals are less likely to submit session proposals unless supported by someone who invites them to join their Org Team. However, they do become involved with other IGF groups such as the ISOC IGF Ambassadors, the Global Internet Governance Academic Network (GigaNet), and a variety of different Dynamic Coalitions such as the Internet Rights and Principles Coalition (IRPC), the Dynamic Coalition on Data and Trust (DC-DT), and the YCIG.

A beacon at the IGF is the EuroDIG booth, where YOUthDIG participants will gather as a

meet-up point. There, they seek to connect with the EuroDIG Secretariat and other members of the EuroDIG community. In addition to being a meeting point, they inquire regarding potential sessions they could attend, which might be interesting, or ask for support in navigating the IGF. EuroDIG community members have been glad to propose sessions that might be of interest to youth and advise on how to get involved at the IGF.

Within the IGF, there are a variety of dedicated spaces for youth, and former YOUthDIG participants have often taken an active role to organise and lead discussions at the IGF Youth Summit, which brings together youth globally at the IGF, and the YCIG session. However, former YOUthDIG participants tend to seek out sessions based on content rather than stakeholder groups, and have limited engagement with the youth spaces.

The difficulty most YOUthDIG participants face is how to navigate the IGF environment. Having arrived in a city that they have not been to before with broadening diversity (international vs. local or regional), and also a physically larger space with multiple parallel sessions without a break, the former participants have felt overwhelmed. The difference

between those who returned to the IGF multiple times and have a stronger presence in the community are those who have found mentors who have been guiding them through the event. These mentors discuss which sessions to attend, introduce participants to relevant

stakeholders related to their work, and contextualise discussions. This support system builds confidence and a stronger understanding of the topics that are being addressed at the IGF.

Conclusion

Youth participation in Internet governance is continuously developing itself based on the needs of youth who are navigating a space which is innate to them but on which they have little influence. YOUthDIG seeks to encourage young people to explore these different areas of governance through peer-to-peer learning and dialogue. Participation is a dynamic process, and YOUthDIG participants take on different roles at YOUthDIG, EuroDIG, and the IGF, but they are also aware of their limitations to be able to continuously contribute in these spaces.

YOUthDIGs primary goal at this stage is to focus on participant integration and long-term sustainability. It is important that former YOUthDIG participants are not considered as only “YOUthDIG Alumni,” but that they are now “Members of the EuroDIG Community.” The focus here is to foster their future contribution,

rather than only acknowledge their past contribution. YOUthDIG is only a stepping stone into attaining knowledge about processes, actors, and context – YOUthDIG empowers young people to present their ideas, to engage and take leadership of further discussion processes, and to implement the changes that they would like to see in their communities.

This empowerment needs to be sustainable, which can only be achieved through a strong programme, built on feedback from the participants, and provided with sufficient resources to be able to continue long-term.

This can only be done with the support of the YOUthDIG and EuroDIG community, where the community continuously reaches out to each other to further discussions, create and promote opportunities, and support one-another to engage.

Afterword



Elisabeth Schauermann, YOUthDIG Coordinator 2018 – 2021

2017 marked a change for youth participation formats at EuroDIG with an adaptation of the new structure. It was also the year I entered the space and joined a group of young people who brought their ideas and played with them, being given the space by EuroDIG leadership to shape YOUthDIG differently than it has been done previously.

Since then, EuroDIG has continuously been spearheaded by youth themselves. Different people from diverse backgrounds have been involved over the years as participants and organisers, finding common ground and expanding their knowledge, their networks, and, collaboratively, their understanding of Inter-

net policy. Many of them are still highly involved in Internet governance communities on the national, regional, and global level. They serve their communities as mentors, and are consulted as experts in their respective fields. Many have started or expanded their careers in these spaces. For many, it was, in one way or another, a formative experience. It certainly was for me.

Alongside the people also evolved the concept of youth's role in policy-building. While we always conducted policy-drafting exercises and the YOUthDIG messages were an undisputed part of the EuroDIG messages, the understanding of youth participation has grown and

changed. Youth groups in Internet governance have become more networked, more vocal, and continue to claim space. We now see youth representatives being involved on a much higher level and more self-evidently than before. This expands across topics: as youth are advocating for the climate and their future, they are advocating for a healthy Internet as well.

The sustainable youth participation work at EuroDIG and its focus on tangible outputs and strong networks has inspired other communities and made an impact, which will certainly not stop anytime soon. My hope is that EuroDIG continues to offer room to young people to experiment with ideas and define their own participation, while always giving youth an equal seat at the table.

Annex

List of YOUthDIG Coordinators & Org Team Members (2017 – 2022)

This publication focuses on YOUthDIG, which was established in 2017.

There were youth programmes before 2017 organised by individuals and organisations, however there is no complete record of all organisers.

Year	Role	Name	Country of Origin	Country of Residence
2017	Focal Point	Daniel Waugh	Ireland	Ireland
2017	Focal Point	Elisabeth Schauermann	Austria	Austria
2017	Focal Point	Michael J. Oghia	USA	Serbia
2017	Focal Point	Oliana Sula	Albania	Albania
2018	Coordinator	Elisabeth Schauermann	Austria	Germany
2018	Programme Committee	Auke Pals	Netherlands	Netherlands
2018	Programme Committee	Michael J. Oghia	USA	Serbia
2018	Programme Committee	Oliana Sula	Albania	Albania
2018	Programme Committee	Raphaël Beauregard-Lacroix	France	France
2019	Coordinator	Elisabeth Schauermann	Austria	Germany
2019	Programme Committee	Charalampos (Harris) Kyritsis	Greece	Greece
2019	Programme Committee	Jana Mistic	Serbia	Serbia
2019	Programme Committee	Olga Kyrlyiuk	Ukraine	Ukraine
2019	Programme Committee	Oliana Sula	Albania	Albania
2019	Programme Committee	Raphaël Beauregard-Lacroix	France	America
2019	YOU th DIG Messages	Nadia Tjahja	Netherlands	Netherlands

Year	Role	Name	Country of Origin	Country of Residence
2020	Coordinator	Elisabeth Schauer mann	Austria	Germany
2020	Programme Committee	Debora Barletta	Italy	Italy
2020	Programme Committee	Giorgi Aladashvili	Georgia	Georgia
2020	Programme Committee	Jana Misic	Serbia	Serbia
2020	Programme Committee	Meri Baghdasaryan	Armenia	America
2020	YOU th DIG Messages	Nadia Tjahja	Netherlands	Netherlands
2021	Coordinator	Elisabeth Schauer mann	Austria	Germany
2021	Programme Committee	Alessia Sposini	Italy	Italy
2021	Programme Committee	Debora Barletta	Italy	Italy
2021	Programme Committee	Kris Shrishak	India	Germany
2021	Programme Committee	Meri Baghdasaryan	Armenia	America
2021	Programme Committee	Riccardo Nanni	Italy	Italy
2021	Programme Committee	Veronica Birindelli	Italy	Italy
2021	YOU th DIG Messages	Nadia Tjahja	Netherlands	Belgium
2022	Coordinator	Nadia Tjahja	Netherlands	Belgium
2022	YOU th DIG Org Team	Daphne Stevens	Netherlands	Netherlands
2022	YOU th DIG Org Team	Stanislav Mahula	Ukraine	Belgium
2022	YOU th DIG Org Team	Veronica Piccolo	Italy	Italy
2022	YOU th DIG Org Team	Vladislav Ivanets	Russia	Russia
2022	YOU th DIG Messages	Nadia Tjahja	Netherlands	Belgium

How AI transcribed YOUthDIG and EuroDIG during interviews for this study

YOU th DIG	EuroDIG	Other organisations	IGF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You **** - You thick - Your thick - Youth pick - Youth take - You've take - Your steak - You've dig - You taking tea - Yahoo dig - Yahoo jig - Yadig - Use stick - Utica 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your addict - You're added - Your deck - You're a dig - You're * **** - Your attic - Erratic - Heretic - Periodic - Eric - Churro Edition - Urdu 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISOC - Ice hockey - Yosemite - ice hot - ice off - I talked <p>EURid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you read <p>SEEDIG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cedric <p>Council of Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Console of Europe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Icide Jeff - Night Jeff - Are Jeff there - I dea of - Edge

Annotations

- ¹ https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf
- ² https://www.diplomacy.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IGCBP_Research-Project-Summaries-for-EuroDIG-2011.pdf
- ³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL>
- ⁴ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/news/new-eurobarometer-survey-shows-growing-youth-engagement>
- ⁵ In 2019, Nadia represented YCIG. In subsequent years, however, she was still a member of the Org team, but no longer represented YCIG.
- ⁶ Due to a change in voting procedures in 2021, the YCIG representatives are only announced after YOUthDIG has already commenced.
- ⁷ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S026323739600028X>
- ⁸ https://eurodigwiki.org/wiki/Main_Page
- ⁹ [https://www.coe.int/en/web/bioethics/principles-for-meaningful-participation#{%22236157983%22:\[0\]}](https://www.coe.int/en/web/bioethics/principles-for-meaningful-participation#{%22236157983%22:[0]})

About the Author

Nadia Tjahja is a PhD Fellow and Co-Coordinator of the Digital Governance Cluster at the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) working on Global and Regional Multistakeholder Institutions (GREMLIN project), where she is researching the legitimacy of multistakeholderism in Internet Governance. She is a member of the EuroDIG Secretariat as the youth coordinator of the Youth Dialogue on Internet Governance (YOUthDIG) since 2022, and was member of the YOUthDIG Organising Team and Lead Facilitator of the YOUthDIG messages since 2019, having attended YOUthDIG herself in 2018. She is also the Global Internet Governance Academic Network (GigaNet) Communications Chair, youth committee member of

EURid (the registry manager of the .eu domain name) and a member of the IGF Youth Track Multistakeholder Working Group. From 2017 – 2020, Nadia was the co-founder and CEO of Sunium, an organisation which facilitates multistakeholder discussions in the field of Internet Governance, Sustainability, and Peace and Security. During this time, Nadia was a member of the Steering Committee of the Youth Coalition on Internet Governance (YCIG) representing the Western European and Others Group. Nadia speaks internationally about Internet governance, multistakeholderism and youth participation within digital processes, and sits on advisory boards hosted by the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

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