

Dynamic Coalition on Gender and Internet Governance 2021 Annual Report

The Dynamic Coalition on Gender and Internet Governance (DC-Gender) aims to ensure gender perspective is included in the key debates around internet governance issues, such as privacy, access, freedom of expression, content regulation, among others. Among others, the DC wants to promote women and other marginalised genders' visibility at the IGF and related fora, and to promote more effective linkages between local, regional and global initiatives on gender and information society.

Work undertaken in 2021

Within the IGF

DC-Gender's session at the IGF was strongly intertwined with a question that was integral to IGF 2021: How can we understand and address the links between digital inequality and social and economic inequality in the context of the COVID pandemic to strengthen gender-equal, rights-affirming digital policies and internet governance? The session explored these social inequalities through the lens and lived experiences of gender, surfacing gender inequality as a key driver that results in digital inequality and vice versa. Through country-specific examples, civil society speakers from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America delved into multiple aspects of this issue: from privacy and increased surveillance due to contact tracing apps, online education and gender, how digital tools mainstreamed gender, and the ongoing shadow pandemic of online violence.

Beyond the IGF

DC-Gender prioritised 'gender, social and digital inequalities during the pandemic' in our work which was one of the primary IGF themes in 2021. We conducted literacy, skills and capacity building workshops with grassroots communities of women and queer persons in India to help build their digital resilience. These communities are among those who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and have deeply felt the stark digital divide including inaccess to digital devices, lack of skills to navigate digital spaces, lack of digital knowledge, and lack of safety online. These issues are further exacerbated by patriarchal gender norms that restrict women and LGBTQ+ people's use of digital devices and online spaces.

We conducted a series of virtual workshops with women domestic workers who live in low-income urban slums and settlements of Kolkata. The domestic workers learned a range of skills including using basic smartphone features, conducting online meetings, using WhatsApp, using maps and navigation, making online payments, identifying fake news and misinformation. The curriculum also included trainings on digital privacy and security related to passwords, keeping online wallets secure, phone sharing, location settings, etc. Enhanced digital resilience

also meant enhanced financial resilience for the women as they could now meaningfully access and use online payments and digital wallets. Thus, they now had more autonomy over their earnings and were able to carry out transactions and receive salaries from their employers independently, as online payments became the norm during COVID. These primary participants then became community trainers in their own standing and shared the knowledge they built in these workshops with many more women and girls in their communities.

We recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that access to online spaces are a necessity, not a luxury, and digital safety, security, education, well-being, capacity and resilience are essential if LGBTQI people are to not just participate in, but shape, online spaces. We did virtual workshops with queer activists, including transmasculine people and lesbian women, most of whom are informal workers in Gujarat, on a broad spectrum of digital rights, digital security, and digital literacy issues, including privacy and security, safety and sexual expression online, and the creation of resilient and safe digital support networks. These ‘community digital trainers’ then trained other LGBTQI activists and community members in local languages. This peer learning approach to digital literacy equipped LGBTQI activists to deal with issues like violence, surveillance and privacy-concerns they face individually and while organising online.

Update on internal processes

This year, we will be bringing more structure to our work as DC-Gender. Currently, there are no dedicated team members doing this work - it’s shared among various team members. We will be setting out clear roles and responsibilities, or hiring consultants for our work as DC-Gender.

Priorities for 2022

We will continue our work at the intersections of gender and technology, taking into account the changing needs and realities of women and other marginalised genders in the context of the ongoing pandemic. We aim to reach many more women, girls and queer persons from diverse demographics across the country, amplify their voices in national, regional and global internet rights spaces, and improve gender equality and inclusion within internet governance spaces and dialogues.