

## IGF Building Technical Standards from the Margins

In this workshop, we will lay out the present-day importance of technical standard setting as a core part of technology governance and why ensuring the meaningful translation and implementation of human rights considerations from the onset of development of standards is vital. The written document of the technical standard sets out specifications, requirements, operations, or terminology for the technologies that impact our everyday lives, from connecting with loved ones to secure mobile access to money. Thus in a crucial time in our socio-political environment, with the vast expansion of emerging technologies and the evolution of existing technologies, we must ensure these standards can provide for meaningful human rights considerations in global contexts. In this workshop, we will explore how to translate human rights considerations into technical aspects of a technology, for the purposes of developing impact assessment frameworks that cover those most impacted by them, which can be used by technical communities when engaging in standardization, as well as other stages of the technology life cycle. To do so, we will use the [“Design From the Margins”](#) (DFM) framework as a tool for identifying the human rights impacts of a particular technology and translating these considerations into technical values.

Technical standardization is a critical aspect of technology governance. Standards are important because they signal that a technology is legitimate and worthy of adoption, give standards authors a competitive edge when rolling out their products and services to the market, and facilitate interoperability between heterogeneous technologies and systems. These technical standards have a fundamental impact on the way that the technologies are designed, developed, and deployed. In the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), members of the technical community are working on standards that would introduce greater security in the domain name system (DNS); in doing so, these standards will eventually help improve resilience against the DNS-based blocking and filtering methods that are most commonly used by censors. In the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), decisions regarding global spectrum management standards have implications for how well small or alternative network operators can provide connectivity to people and communities who are overlooked by incumbent or traditional operators. In the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), participants are working on addressing the privacy implications of the current web advertising business model. Clearly, technical standards are an important – but underappreciated – stage for civil society intervention to ensure that the technologies we use every day respect human rights from the outset.

In recent years, civil society advocates have called for normalizing the inclusion of human rights considerations as part of the technical standards development process. In the Internet Research Task Force, for example, the Human Rights Protocol Considerations Research Group are developing [Guidelines for Human Rights Protocol and Architecture Considerations](#), which seek to set out the major technical questions that IETF participants should ask themselves as they develop a draft standard to ensure that their standards enable human rights. While this

framework represents significant progress, there remains a need to develop similar guidelines that are applicable to other standards bodies and processes, and the technical communities that participate in them may not fully understand how to do so.

There is a need to have methods in translating human rights considerations into technical aspects of a technology without abstraction to provide for meaningful protections for those impacted by these human rights considerations. Often, in efforts of standard setting, protocol building, and even human rights impact assessments, many gaping holes can remain if the most “extreme” scenarios are not taken into consideration (here referring to the high-risk situations in, for example: internet access blocks, privacy intrusion or human rights abuses through tech). Systems and structures designed for the most high-risk and marginalized highlight the largest risk gaps and areas of improvement needed, and in turn can become standards that are more generalizable and provide a clear guideline of how the development processes can be better. Providing and implementing around these contexts also ensures that the standards we build are not failing those who they are looking to protect within their human rights considerations.

For example, if the DFM methodology is used to identify and define the issues, the highest stake advisories are understood and designed against. Here, privacy-preserving protocols which protect against high-risk harms and abuses can ensure that the system will also cover and protect against adversaries in other contexts. In an effort to create more protections for “decentered users”, the collateral byproduct is better privacy and human rights protections in general, something that is vital to be in-built in our governing standards. The argument here being that in all parts of these standard setting measures, focusing on the human rights considerations and potential harms faced by highly marginalized communities (referred to as the “decentered” communities, in DFM) we create more robust and protective standards, which are more standerisable and implementable.

In the workshop, the “Design From the Margins” framework will be laid out for purposes of developing impact assessments that can be used by technical communities when engaging in standardization, as well as other stages of the technology life cycle. We also push for this framework as a tool for identifying the human rights impacts of a particular technology and translating these considerations into technical values and implementations.

To move away from abstraction, in the workshop, we will also provide case studies of the implementation of DFM to existing technologies and show how this method is very important for the future imagined and needed in the standard setting bodies. We will discuss with our participants about methods to apply this at standards bodies, with attempts at formulating some standard building language, as well as some simulations about impacted communities whose experiences are vital for these standards building. Then, there will be Q&A: give people a chance to ask questions and test out the DFM framework for themselves

