

GISWatch  
10th anniversary

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

*National and Regional Internet  
Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

# Global Information Society Watch

**2017**



Global Information Society Watch 2017  
National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

**Coordinating committee**

Karen Banks (APC)  
Valeria Betancourt (APC)  
Deborah Brown (APC)  
Anriette Esterhuysen (APC)  
Flavia Fascendini (APC)  
Emilar Gandhi (Facebook)  
Jac sm Kee (APC)

**Project coordinator**

Roxana Bassi (APC)

**Editor**

Alan Finlay

**Assistant editor, publication production**

Lori Nordstrom (APC)

**Proofreading**

Valerie Dee  
Lynn Welburn

**Graphic design**

Monocromo  
info@monocromo.com.uy  
Phone: +598 2400 1685

**Cover illustration**

Matías Bervejillo

Financial support provided by



APC would like to thank the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for its support for Global Information Society Watch 2017.



Published by APC

2017

Printed in USA

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Some rights reserved.

Global Information Society Watch 2017 web and e-book

ISBN: 978-92-95102-84-2

APC-201711-CIPP-R-EN-PDF-274

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the introduction, thematic, regional and national reports of GISWatch are not necessarily the views of APC or of its members.

A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published as a companion edition to the 2017 GISWatch annual report. It looks at the history, challenges and achievements of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at <https://www.giswatch.org>



## Alternatives

Arij Riahi, Stéphane Couture and Michel Lambert  
<https://www.alternatives.ca>

## Introduction

There has been a definite shift in internet governance in Canada in the past two years. With the arrival of the Liberal Party at the head of the federal government, ending a decade of Conservative rule, reforms at the Canadian telecommunications and broadcasting authority – the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)<sup>1</sup> – and increasing momentum on issues related to cyber security and cyber surveillance, there is a renewed interest in the development of a nationwide digital policy. In parallel, discourses in civil society show increasing concerns over Canada's digital divide and lack of connectivity in remote and rural communities, after broadband access was declared a basic telecommunication service. Yet, while most stakeholders are engaged in the conversation to fix the digital divide, it appears that the process has left out one important stakeholder: the Inuit, Métis and First Nations communities in Canada – broadly referred to as the indigenous communities – who are disproportionately impacted by the problem.

## The Canadian Internet Forum: An unsteady beginning to internet governance

Canada has never held a national Internet Governance Forum (IGF). A 2009 review of the mandate of the global IGF made by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, a Canadian non-profit organisation, stated that there was no evidence of the IGF having any impact on domestic debate in the country, and described as “narrow” Canada's engagement with the IGF.<sup>2</sup>

While Canada has not had a national IGF, since 2009 it has held an annual Canadian Internet Forum (CIF).<sup>3</sup> This event is organised by the

Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA), a 1,000-member organisation managing the .ca domain and open to anyone holding such a domain. Even though “internet governance” did not appear in the name of the CIF, the forum was presented as a space to discuss internet-related issues of public policy following a multistakeholder approach.

The 2015 edition of the CIF featured general, almost theoretical conversations about internet governance and multistakeholderism, but appeared to lack conversations on specific domestic challenges such as access to broadband infrastructures, digital surveillance, and intellectual property. For instance, while the event report mentions that the meaning of internet governance is “broad and often confusing”<sup>4</sup> for participants, very little is said about what Canada's approach to internet governance should be, on the national or global level.

## The internet declared a basic service

In October 2015, Canada ended the decade-long reign of the Conservatives when the Liberal Party, led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, won the federal election. Sweeping, numerous and broad legislative changes punctuated the Conservatives' rule. Concerns over cyber misogyny, cyber surveillance and online privacy grew to enter mainstream discourse in Canada.<sup>5</sup> In parallel, controversial bills, such as the Anti-terrorism Act,<sup>6</sup> the Protecting Children from Internet Predators Act<sup>7</sup> and Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act<sup>8</sup> were introduced in Parliament and significantly increased the state's capacity to invade privacy, specifically in relation to broadened police powers.

In April 2016, the CRTC started public hearings on basic telecommunications services in the National Capital Region. The last review of what should

1 [www.crtc.gc.ca](http://www.crtc.gc.ca)

2 Creech, H. et al. (2009). *Review of the Mandate of the Internet Governance Forum*. Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development. [https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/igf\\_mandate\\_review.pdf](https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/igf_mandate_review.pdf)

3 <https://cira.ca/canadian-internet-forum>

4 Canadian Internet Registration Authority. (2015). *Canadian Internet Forum: Vision and Leadership for a Canadian Internet*. [https://cira.ca/sites/default/files/public/canadian-internet-forum-report-2015\\_o.pdf](https://cira.ca/sites/default/files/public/canadian-internet-forum-report-2015_o.pdf)

5 See our contribution to the 2014 edition of GISWatch: <https://www.giswatch.org/es/node/2052>

6 <https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/BillDetails.aspx?billId=6842344&Language=E&Mode=1>

7 <https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?billId=5375610&Language=E>

8 <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/41-2/bill/C-13/third-reading/page-27#1>

constitute basic telecommunications services in Canada was held in 2011 and was limited to local landline service, long-distance rates, dial-up internet access, voice messaging relay service, and the free delivery of printed copies of local phone books.<sup>9</sup>

Following the 2016 hearings, the CRTC ultimately declared broadband internet access a basic service throughout the country and created new speed targets.<sup>10</sup> Users should now be able to access at least 50 megabits per second for downloads and 10 megabits per second for uploads, representing a tenfold increase from previous speed targets. The CRTC also stated that mobile wireless networks should be accessible in Canadian households and businesses as well as along major transportation roads.

To achieve those goals, the CRTC set up a fund expected to gather CAD 750 million in the next five years to improve high-speed internet infrastructure where it is lacking or unavailable. OpenMedia, a non-profit advocacy group based in Vancouver, launched a campaign to encourage the CRTC to fund community-driven initiatives instead of telecommunications corporations.<sup>11</sup>

The CRTC ruling, often described as historic, decisively shifted the regulatory focus from wireline voice service to broadband internet access services. It also came in a few days after the 2016 Liberal government announcement of a CAD 500-million investment to improve high-speed internet infrastructure in rural and remote communities by 2021.

A few months later, the 2016 CIF, titled “Broadband and the Modern Technology Economy”, focused on broadband access, delivery and technology, and stressed the importance of developing an “overarching federal broadband strategy to carry Canada into the future.”<sup>12</sup>

A year later, in September 2017, Canada’s francophone province held its first Quebec IGF,<sup>13</sup> organised by the Quebec chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC),<sup>14</sup> and with a significant participation of civil society. The event painted a comprehensive picture of the current realities and issues related

to the internet in the predominantly francophone province. The local event traced its genesis to the international IGF model and sought to create a network among multiple stakeholders. It gathered participants from industry, including small or emerging businesses, academia and journalists. It also included participants from the cultural and legal sectors working on new technological platforms for existing services. The resulting report<sup>15</sup> features over 40 recommendations on open data, connectivity, blockchain technologies, and digital inclusion.

## A digital divide in a connected country

Canada remains one of the most connected countries in the world, but a great digital divide exists within its borders. Many actors in civil society hope that the recent CRTC decision on basic telecommunications services will provide the stability required to develop a long-overdue national broadband strategy that will go beyond current federal financial incentives to drive market forces to disconnected areas and will address issues of affordability, content and technical literacy at the root of the digital divide. Other actors from the industry and market forces believe that the CRTC’s speed targets are already obsolete compared to what is offered on the market, but agree with the importance of bringing infrastructure to remote or rural areas to ensure internet accessibility.

In 2001, a National Broadband Task Force was created to ensure access to broadband services in all households, businesses and public institutions in Canada by 2004. Its report identified as a priority the connectivity of First Nations, Inuit, rural and remote communities and insisted that the rates offered to those communities be comparable to those offered in more densely populated areas.<sup>16</sup> Fifteen years later, 100% of Canadians living in urban areas have access to broadband while only 85% of those in rural or remote areas have access.<sup>17</sup> More importantly, Canada has been consistently ranked in the bottom third of broadband subscriptions for years according to reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>18</sup>

9 Jackson, E. (2016, 19 December). CRTC’s ‘cornerstone’ ruling on basic telecom service expected to have repercussions for telcos. *Financial Post*. [business.financialpost.com/technology/crtcs-cornerstone-ruling-on-basic-telecom-service-expected-to-have-repercussions-for-telcos](https://business.financialpost.com/technology/crtcs-cornerstone-ruling-on-basic-telecom-service-expected-to-have-repercussions-for-telcos)

10 [www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm](http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm)

11 <https://act.openmedia.org/communityBBfirst>; see also the Community Broadband Initiative, hosted by OpenMedia and funded by CIRA: <https://community-broadband.ca>

12 Canadian Internet Registration Authority. (2016). *Canadian Internet Forum: Broadband and the Modern Digital Economy*. <https://cira.ca/sites/default/files/public/Canadian-Internet-Forum-2016-Report-EN.pdf>

13 <https://isoc.quebec/en/projects/fgi-quebec-en>

14 <https://isoc.quebec/en/home>

15 Internet Society of Quebec. (2017). *Forum sur la Gouvernance de l’Internet au Québec: Rapport de synthèse*. <https://isoc.quebec/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/RapportFGIQuebec2017.pdf>

16 National Broadband Task Force. (2001). *The new national dream: Networking the nation for broadband access*. [ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/ist/docs/ka4/mb\\_broadbandcanada.pdf](ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/ist/docs/ka4/mb_broadbandcanada.pdf)

17 <https://cira.ca/factbook/2015/the-canadian-internet.html>

18 [www.oecd.org/sti/broadband/oecd-broadband-portal.htm](http://www.oecd.org/sti/broadband/oecd-broadband-portal.htm); Geist, M. (2014, 23 July). OECD Releases New Broadband Data: Canada Ranks in Bottom Third on Mobile Broadband Subscriptions. *Michael Geist*. [www.michaelgeist.ca/2014/07/canada-ranks-bottom-third-oecd-countries-wireless-broadband](http://www.michaelgeist.ca/2014/07/canada-ranks-bottom-third-oecd-countries-wireless-broadband)

Yet a governmental disinterest in building broadband infrastructure is hardly the culprit. The past few years witnessed continuing efforts from the federal government to ensure universal broadband access through financial investment. In 2014, the Connecting Canadians programme launched as part of Digital Canada 150 – a Canadian digital strategy leading to the end of 2017, the 150th anniversary of the founding of Canada – pledged internet access to 280,000 Canadians by 2017 through a CAD 305-million investment.<sup>19</sup> Since then, the revised target date was pushed to March 2019.<sup>20</sup>

One key problem is the market logic of connecting the unconnected. Connectivity problems in Canada disproportionately affect indigenous communities, many of which are considered to be located in “remote or rural” areas of the country.<sup>21</sup> The federal government does encourage the development of broadband infrastructure through financial investment, but leaves that development to market forces. Yet, in line with the market logic, the provision of telecommunication services to remote or rural communities is considered unprofitable because of high entry costs and low population densities. A 2010 report found that on average, households from the 537 First Nations communities in Canada pay more for broadband services and receive less access to broadband services than urban households.<sup>22</sup>

Some critics argue that the federal government’s approach is inherently flawed. Michael Geist, a law professor at the University of Ottawa and Canada Research Chair in Internet and E-Commerce Law, described the process of developing maps to identify disconnected communities and set up tailored programmes to improve their connectivity as a guarantee that “Canada would fall short.” Despite marginal improved access rates, the approach, he stressed, fails to set cohesive national goals and only serves to “avoid the embarrassment that might arise by failing to meet the broadband targets.”<sup>23</sup>

## Community connection

In this context, several indigenous communities have developed their own private broadband services, operated by and within the community. Examples include the Kuhkenah Network (K-Net),<sup>24</sup> a First Nations-owned and operated initiative based in the town of Sioux Lookout, Ontario, that caters to communities in northwestern Ontario; the Ktunaxa Nation Network,<sup>25</sup> an internet service provider in the Kootenay region of British Columbia; the Métis Connectivity initiative in Alberta; and Qiniq<sup>26</sup> in Nunavut. These initiatives are documented by the First Mile Connectivity Consortium,<sup>27</sup> a non-profit organisation that provides information on the challenges faced by remote and rural indigenous communities and is developing evidence-based policies. In a nutshell, the “First Mile” approach refers to the idea of an indigenous community controlling its local broadband system by applying the First Nations OCAP (ownership, control, access and possession) principles<sup>28</sup> to telecommunications.

These initiatives help to ensure broadband access in certain areas in Canada, but cannot, as community-driven organisations, provide a cohesive national solution to the indigenous digital divide in Canada; a digital divide which further accentuates the marginalisation of First Nations communities in Canada. In other words, the effect of the digital divide goes beyond the simple fact of not being connected to the internet and excludes indigenous people from education, social services and employment opportunities.

## Regional ramifications

It is unclear what the level of interest in indigenous connection is within existing initiatives like the CIF and the Quebec IGF. Both events identify the digital divide as a local and national issue, but do not address it with indigenous actors and communities. In parallel, indigenous communities are increasingly involved in grassroots initiatives to address the digital divide and provide broadband access to their members. It is also clear that these issues are relevant throughout North America, and not limited to remote Canadian communities. Indeed, an Indigenous Connectivity Summit<sup>29</sup> will be held in November 2017 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where

19 <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/028.nsf/eng/home>

20 Chung, E. (2015, 30 January). FCC’s new broadband internet leaves Canada behind. *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/fcc-5-new-broadband-internet-target-leaves-canada-behind-1.2938440>; Digital Canada 150. (2015). FAQs for ISPs. <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/028.nsf/eng/50009.html>

21 Fiser, A. (2010). A map of broadband availability in Canada’s Indigenous and northern communities: Access, management models, and digital divides. *Communication, Politics and Culture*, 43(1). [adamfiser.com/sites/default/files/Fiser2010.PDF](http://adamfiser.com/sites/default/files/Fiser2010.PDF)

22 Ibid.

23 Geist, M. (2015, 19 May). Why is Canada So Slow to Provide Affordable Web Access? *The Yee*. <https://theyee.ca/Mediacheck/2015/05/19/Canada-Slow-Web-Access>

24 [knet.ca/node/2](http://knet.ca/node/2)

25 [firstmile.ca/ktunaxa-nation-network](http://firstmile.ca/ktunaxa-nation-network)

26 <https://www.qiniq.com>

27 [firstmile.ca](http://firstmile.ca)

28 A set of standards that establish how First Nations data should be collected, protected, used or shared.

29 <https://www.internetsociety.org/events/indigenous-connectivity-summit>

indigenous communities throughout North America will gather to address the issue of affordable, accessible and high-speed internet as a support for social and economic development. Organised by the New Mexico chapter of ISOC<sup>30</sup> and the First Mile Connectivity Consortium, the upcoming (at the time of writing) event seeks to gather community network managers and operators, providers of indigenous-owned internet services, indigenous leaders and community members.

## Conclusion

It seems then that Canada is more interested in digital policy than internet governance. Nevertheless, the recent momentum around internet issues and renewed interest in a cohesive national broadband strategy both point to a clear shift in dominant discourse in the country. Bridging the digital divide appears to be a priority for all stakeholders from the government level, civil society and industry. It appears crucial to keep monitoring those conversations about geographical access to broadband to see how they develop.

In this context, the lack of a truly multistakeholder internet governance approach shows up the pitfalls of deploying an effective national digital policy while the digital divide remains unsolved. A broadband strategy, where the voices of indigenous groups are not heard, is likely to perpetuate the

gaps despite the financial engagement of the federal government and agreement of stakeholders as to the magnitude of the problem. Another problem is the fact that conversations about the digital divide in Canada focus on broadband access, but only address affordability of broadband access on its periphery. This repeats a pattern that further isolates indigenous communities by putting the onus of developing infrastructure on market forces.

## Action steps

The following steps are suggested for civil society in Canada:

- Advocate for the prioritisation of funding to community-driven initiatives to develop broadband access for First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities throughout Canada.
- Take leadership or at least an active part in organising a Canadian IGF that truly adopts a multistakeholder approach by connecting with academics and grassroots organisations.
- Proactively secure the participation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.
- Monitor recommendations and plans of action that come out of the Indigenous Connectivity Summit in November 2017.
- Develop and update data related to underserved and unserved communities throughout Canada.

---

<sup>30</sup> [www.internetsocietynm.org](http://www.internetsocietynm.org)

# National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) are now widely recognised as a vital element of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process. In fact, they are seen to be the key to the sustainability and ongoing evolution of collaborative, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches to internet policy development and implementation.

A total of 54 reports on NRIs are gathered in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch). These include 40 country reports from contexts as diverse as the United States, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Colombia.

The country reports are rich in approach and style and highlight several challenges faced by activists organising and participating in national IGFs, including broadening stakeholder participation, capacity building, the unsettled role of governments, and impact.

Seven regional reports analyse the impact of regional IGFs, their evolution and challenges, and the risks they still need to take to shift governance to the next level, while seven thematic reports offer critical perspectives on NRIs as well as mapping initiatives globally.

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

2017 Report

<https://www.GISWatch.org>

