

International Civic Forum 2024

Digital trends (re)shaping civic space: Challenges and opportunities

Date	31 October – 1 November 2024
Time	Day 1: 14.00 – 17.30 + dinner Day 2: 10.00 – 15.30
Location	Johannesburg, South Africa

Concept Note

Introduction

Since 2016, the [International Civic Forum \(ICF\)](#) convenes leaders from civil society and other sectors who are at the forefront of protecting and advancing civic space around the globe. It is the annual platform for discussing key civic space issues, forging connections, and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

The ICF 2024 will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 31 October and 1 November. It will build synergies with the [Civic Tech Innovation Forum \(CTIF\)](#), an annual conference organised by the [Civic Tech Innovation Network \(CTIN\)](#), taking place at the same location from 29 to 31 October. The CTIF's theme, #UnderTheHood, invites the civic tech community and ecosystem actors to explore the hidden layers of technology, community, and self. The event will delve into the tech "black box", harness local creativity, and explore talents to drive innovation and empowerment in the civic tech ecosystem.

The ICF 2024 will be held immediately following the CTIF, fostering connections between the two events and allowing participants to engage in both. The ICF will bring civil society at the forefront and focus on the intersection of civic space and technology. Under the title "**Digital trends (re)shaping civic space: Challenges and opportunities**" we will delve into how digital technology is transforming civic space – for better or worse – and explore the implications of digital advancement for civic and civil society operating space.

ICF framing

Digital technology and its rapid pace of change are reshaping civic space and significantly impacting how civil society organisations (CSOs) operate and advocate for change. While digital advancements bring significant opportunities for CSOs to enhance their impact and effectiveness, they also pose considerable challenges. Technology offers CSOs enhanced outreach and engagement through online platforms and social media, enabling them to amplify their voices and mobilise support more effectively. Digital tools facilitate data collection, foster evidence-based advocacy, and improve collaboration and networking, while also enabling greater community participation. However, they also bring risks of digital surveillance, cyberattacks and data privacy



breaches, online harassment, and spread of disinformation which can undermine CSOs' credibility and efforts and put vulnerable communities at risk.

The ICF 2024 will focus on digital trends impacting civic space, such as digital authoritarianism, disinformation or tech ethics and regulation, and how civil society can address them – harnessing opportunities and mitigating challenges. We aim to showcase examples and innovative approaches and enable learning from concrete case studies and good practices. We will take a closer look at the interplay of technology and civic space during this year of elections – when almost half of the world's population has gone to polls in 2024 – and what lessons we can take from it going forward, looking at how civil society can leverage technology to enhance democratic participation while safeguarding against its potential risks. We will further take a deeper dive into the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in shaping civic space. With a rapid evolution of technology, we can't only react to current status quo but need to anticipate future opportunities and risks that technology might bring for civic space. We'll experiment with futures thinking tools on how to stay ahead of the curve.

Objectives

- Explore digital trends: Discuss key trends and emerging signals (re)shaping civic space
- Learn from examples and good practice: Discover how civil society uses technology to protect and expand civic space
- Share and network: Exchange insights and connect with fellow professionals
- Prepare for possible futures: Anticipate future challenges and opportunities through a foresight exercise

Format

The ICF will be a closed in-person event providing a safe space for exchange. We will alternate between different formats to enable rich and outcome-oriented discussions. Formats will include panel discussions as well as exchanges in small groups and workshops.

Draft outline

Day 1: 31 October (14.00 – 17.30 + group dinner)

- Welcome and introduction
- Keynote: Why must civil society improve its understanding and handling of technology?
- Panel discussion & exchange: What are the current opportunities and challenges that technology presents to civic space? How are different organisations experiencing these trends?
- Food-for-thought conversation: What solutions and strategies should civil society adopt to effectively navigate the digital landscape? How can we collectively tackle the challenges posed by technology for civic space?
- Group dinner



Day 2: 1 November (10.00 – 15.30)

- Spotlight conversation: The year of elections - What have we learned about the impact of technology on civic space during recent elections? What lessons can guide civil society in the future?
- Sharing circle: How are civil society organisations successfully utilising technology or overcoming its challenges? What can we learn from their innovative solutions and best practices?
- Focus on AI: What are the implications of AI for civic space? How can AI be harnessed responsibly to benefit civic space? What are the potential risks?
- Futures thinking workshop: How can we anticipate and prepare for possible future scenarios involving tech in civic space? What strategies can we employ to maximise opportunities and minimise risks?
- Closing

Participation

The ICF 2024 is a closed invitation-only event that aims to bring together around 50 civil society representatives. We invite senior ICSSO and CSO professionals and representatives from civil society networks, philanthropy, academia, and media working at the global, regional or national level who are interested in exploring the issue, strengthening their capacities, and exchanging with peers. We believe that the event will be particularly relevant for those working on civic space and issues related to civil society operating space. They might already focus on the nexus with digital technology or be interested in exploring it.

Our partnership with [CTIN](#) will enable the ICF participants to attend the [Civic Tech Innovation Forum \(CTIF\)](#) as well. We invite the participants to dedicate a week to delve into digital themes and attend the CTIF (29–31 October) as well as the ICF (31 October – 1 November). Participation in both the ICF and CTIF is free of charge. Participants are asked to specify during registration whether they wish to attend only the ICF or both events.

Logistics

The International Civic Forum (ICF) as well as the Civic Tech Innovation Forum (CTIF) will take place at Tshimologong Digital Innovation Precinct (41 Juta Str, Braamfontein) in Johannesburg, South Africa.

If you need hotel recommendations for your stay in Johannesburg or any additional logistical information to plan your trip, please reach out to Alexandra Schlegel, Programme and Events Officer at aschlegel@icscentre.org. A detailed logistical sheet will be shared in due time.

Contact

For further information on the content or ideas for the ICF 2024, please contact Eva Gondor, Senior Project Manager at egondor@icscentre.org.