

REPORT LACIGF13

Session Title: Internet and Pandemic – Opportunities and Impacts on Human Rights

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Summary of the session: The second panel of the Latin American Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF) took place on September 8, at 14:00 BRT and discussed the topic 'Internet and Pandemic – Opportunities and Impacts on Human Rights'. The panel was divided into two stages of discussion, both mediated by Maria Paz Canales, dealing with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) during the pandemic, and actions to combat the pandemic, especially data collection.

The six panelists who spoke on the panel emphasized that the use of cyberspace grew during the period of social isolation and that the Internet became more of a protagonist than ever before. However, they also pointed out that this new moment creates a fragility that can be exploited by companies, organizations, and governments to violate the right to privacy. In addition, they discussed another theme of consensus: that digital inclusion is still a major challenge, especially in developing countries, as in the cases of Latin Americans and Caribbean countries.

Laura MCGorman of Data for Good Facebook was the first panelist to speak. She presented the project in which she works, which uses the collection of data of public interest for social impact. These data are granted for public use. In this publicization, according to the panelist, there is a search for the protection of people's rights, with transparency processes in the collection of information. She stressed that, in any data collection and use initiative, privacy must be a priority. For this reason, she also highlighted other practices adopted by Data for Good in the quest to guarantee privacy.

Then, Rafael Zanatta from the NGO Data Privacy Brasil spoke. Rafael pointed out that, during the quarantine, the organization aimed to analyze how the country is being impacted by political choices made in relation to the pandemic. Another point of analysis was the questioning about the respect from governments in relation to the use of data collected from the population. From the surveys made by the NGO, the panelist showed concern about the number of applications and initiatives that may compromise basic principles, but that have great social appeal in times of COVID-19.

An example of a popular tool that raises problems is Contact Tracing. Despite the benefits it can bring to public health decision-making in pandemic contexts, the speaker highlighted the possibility of dangers such as leaks of personal data for third-party use. He also recommended that alignment with international entities and the medical community is needed. He also recommended a document prepared by his organization entitled "Data and Viruses", which seeks to propose ethical steps for the use of personal data in the struggle against the pandemic.

After the first block, the administrator of the National Authority for Government Innovation of Panama, Luis Ricardo Oliva, described the actions taken by the government against the pandemic. Among them was the "Panama Solidarity" program, an action whose target audience had been defined by the government after a database analysis held by

government organizations About 1.3 million people did not work and were not beneficiaries of other social assistance programs, according to the findings.

After identification, citizens in a state of social vulnerability could meet their needs. The panelist highlighted how the program worked in favor of privacy and the good use of data.

Another action highlighted by him was guaranteeing Internet access for Panamanians. Another program adopted by the government, according to the panelist, was the increase in broadband capacity for those who already had access to the network; and free availability of this access to citizens without the financial conditions of having it.

There was also a presentation by Edison Lanza from the Organization of American States (OAS). The panelist highlighted the human rights issues involved in the use of data in the face of the pandemic. According to him, the right to privacy is what can be threatened the most. Edison also highlighted the people who have already had or are contaminated with the virus, which are even more vulnerable to the indiscriminate use of their personal data.

According to him, the use of ICTs to combat Covid-19 must be based on guaranteeing benefits to society and not just social experimentation - which could endanger human rights in the region. Thus, at the end of his presentation, he recommended that information collected during pandemic times be used exclusively for public health strategies. To ensure this, monitoring by public and private bodies is necessary, as well as guaranteeing users' autonomy.

Then, Maria José Calderon of the National Electoral Council of Ecuador addressed the preparation for elections in the country and the impacts of the pandemic in this process. At first, she emphasizes the pandemic numbers in the country and affirmed how the situation generated distrust among voters, especially in relation to the security of voting by digital means. According to her, however, the objectives of holding elections in this way are to safeguard people's health and sustain Ecuador's democratic system.

Maria José explained that the country discusses the use of blockchain-based voting systems, which consist of decentralized data storage, ensuring security, and hindering fraud and corruption to information. She also addressed how the pandemic affected not only the elections but also the political campaigns: they stopped being "face-to-face" and became more present through social networks, which caused candidates to have to readapt the speech. To this end, the panelist showed a table that demonstrated how WhatsApp, Facebook, and Zoom have led the number of downloads in the country since March when the coronavirus pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The representative of the Inter-American Association of Telecommunications Companies (Asiet), Maryleana Méndez made her presentation. She initially showed the impact of the pandemic on poverty rates in the region. After this introduction, she suggested that the most digitized economies and societies were those that felt less of an economic impact. She emphasized, then, that telecommunications networks would represent the basis for this digitization.

Maryleana argued that one of the problems that the pandemic brought was to reveal the difficulty that many people have in accessing the Internet. According to her, this was due to reports of instability in the service due to the high rates of use - increased by about 30 to 40% in her country, according to the panelist. To meet this demand, she said it was necessary to produce, in telecommunications companies, a strengthening of the

infrastructure that guarantees access to the Internet. This effort was still needed to ensure that no one would 'stay behind', which should be the basis for any decision made in this period.

She also pointed out that the non-connected are the ones who suffer the most from crises and presented what would be Realistic Cross Digital Agenda (a concept of legal certainty in technological infrastructure) as well as the productive use of telecommunications for the digital maturation of other sectors. In the end, Maryleana said that public sector cooperation with the private sector is needed so that there are positive reforms for the entire ecosystem, without impositions and political decisions disconnected from technical bases. For her, the process of joint reflection only comes to help plug the digital hole and, more than that, allow everyone to enjoy the same benefits. "We should not leave the pandemic the same way we enter it," she said. In conclusion, she stated that these are new times, requiring new technologies, new perspectives, and the technical balance to seek the growth of connectivity.