

GISWatch  
10th Edition

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2016

*Economic, social and cultural rights  
and the internet*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)  
AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC)

# Global Information Society Watch

## 2016



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More information at: <https://www.apc.org/en/projects/internet-rights-are-economic-social-cultural-rights>



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# Preface

Lea Shaver

*The internet has widely been hailed as a force for advancing freedom of expression. This dominant narrative understates the importance of communication and connectivity for the full range of human rights. This year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) highlights socioeconomic human rights. Among the connections explored here are the rights to work, livelihood, health, education, social security and culture, among others.*

*The contributions that follow paint a diverse picture of the interactions between internet technologies and socioeconomic rights. Collectively, they persuasively make the case for internet access as a human right, grounded not only in the value of freedom of expression and cultural participation, but as a gateway to the realisation of other rights.*

*As a human rights scholar focusing especially on the right to science and culture, I have often tried to make the point that technology and culture are not two separate worlds, but rather two sides of the same coin. Cultural life and technology are increasingly tied. The stories of national experiences within this volume make the point more eloquently than I ever could.*

*One significant theme that emerges from the contributions is the use of communications technologies to demand socioeconomic rights accountability. Leveraging social media, information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) has proven itself to be not only about accessing information and services, but about empowering public scrutiny and criticism, especially for popular and marginalised voices.*

*The advantages of the digital over the physical are also being realised in a variety of ways. Groups who face threats to their physical or economic security if they organise to claim rights can leverage virtual organisation to shield their persons and identities. Technologies that make distance irrelevant are empowering communities limited by geography.*

*Unlike freedom of expression, socioeconomic rights have a shorter history of recognition, and even their basic understanding remains considerably in flux. What degree of socioeconomic opportunity and justice is owed to every person by virtue of their humanity is still an evolving question. The success of civil society efforts to leverage the internet for socioeconomic rights will determine the extent to which popular participation helps to answer this question.*

# Economic, social and cultural rights and the internet

The 45 country reports gathered here illustrate the link between the internet and economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). Some of the topics will be familiar to information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) activists: the right to health, education and culture; the socioeconomic empowerment of women using the internet; the inclusion of rural and indigenous communities in the information society; and the use of ICT to combat the marginalisation of local languages. Others deal with relatively new areas of exploration, such as using 3D printing technology to preserve cultural heritage, creating participatory community networks to capture an “inventory of things” that enables socioeconomic rights, crowdfunding rights, or the negative impact of algorithms on calculating social benefits. Workers’ rights receive some attention, as does the use of the internet during natural disasters.

Ten thematic reports frame the country reports. These deal both with overarching concerns when it comes to ESCRs and the internet – such as institutional frameworks and policy considerations – as well as more specific issues that impact on our rights: the legal justification for online education resources, the plight of migrant domestic workers, the use of digital databases to protect traditional knowledge from biopiracy, digital archiving, and the impact of multilateral trade deals on the international human rights framework.

The reports highlight the institutional and country-level possibilities and challenges that civil society faces in using the internet to enable ESCRs. They also suggest that in a number of instances, individuals, groups and communities are using the internet to enact their socioeconomic and cultural rights in the face of disinterest, inaction or censure by the state.

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