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RightsCon

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OUTCOMES REPORT

CELEBRATING

10
YEARS



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rightscon.org



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Celebrating 10 years of RightsCon

Access Now hosted the 10th anniversary of RightsCon entirely online from Monday, June 7 to Friday, June 11, 2021. A record-breaking summit across the board and our second hosted online, we welcomed 9,212 participants from 164 countries, a 20% increase to our community from 2020.

Across five days, the global RightsCon community demonstrated its strength, solidarity, and resilience in the face of continuous disruption to our civic spaces. The 2021 Outcomes Report illustrates the tangible power of convening, detailing the discussions, connections, and outcomes that have refueled our movement for the work ahead – over the next year and decade.

9,212
PARTICIPANTS

164
COUNTRIES

579
SESSIONS

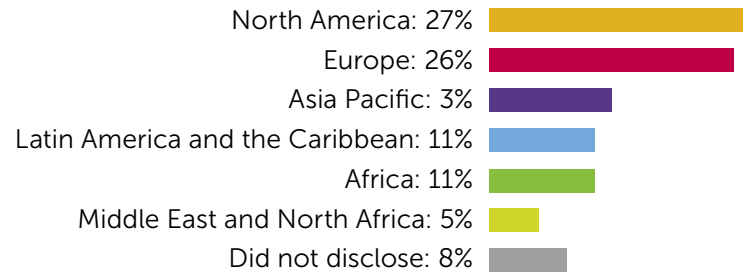
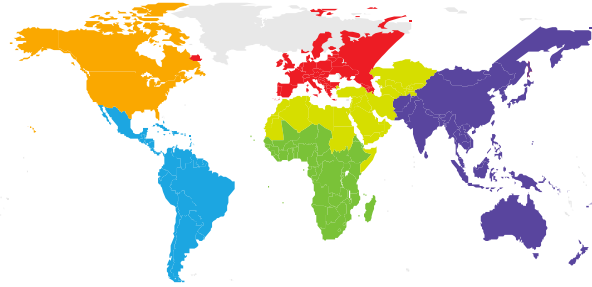
1,320
HOURS OF CONTENT

53%
of participants identified as
women and
59%
of sessions
were organized
by women

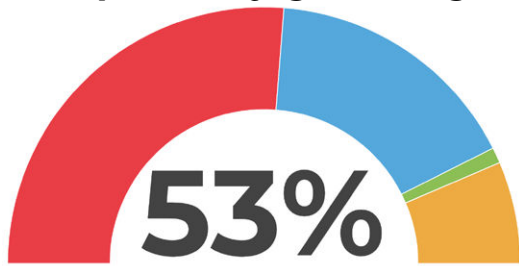
88%
of surveyed participants rated
their RightsCon experience
as Excellent or Good

73%
of surveyed participants
highly agreed or agreed that
RightsCon substantively
advanced their work

Participants by region



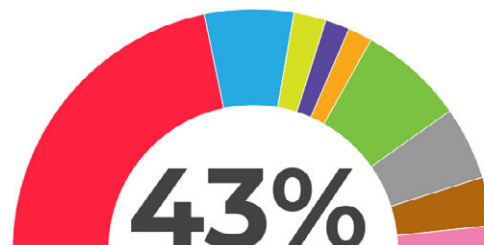
Participants by gender group



IDENTIFYING AS WOMEN

- Woman: 52.5%
- Man: 32.6%
- Non-binary: 2%
- Third gender (inclusive of bigender, agender, genderfluid and gender nonconforming): 0.01%
- Self-identified and preferred not to disclose: 12.8%

Participants by stakeholder group



CIVIL SOCIETY

- Civil society: 43.5%
- Private sector: 11.9%
- Government: 4.3%
- Philanthropic sector: 3.2%
- Intergovernmental institution: 3.2%
- Academia: 14.1%
- Other: 9.8%
- Media: 6.5%
- Creative: 3.2%

The participant experience



Replying to @rightscon

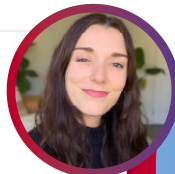
"As a feminist human rights activist working on democracy and justice, #RightsCon has been a great way to learn from and connect with activists who are doing similar work in the tech space and related fields."
@MirtePostema



Our @rightscon session today was ultra inspiring and energizing! ❤️ Thanks to everyone for participating and sharing their experience in exploring learning with fun and empathy using visuals and drawing to explain technical concepts. One hour felt much too short!

I have to say the Private Sector Social Hour was the best networking event I've been to virtually (and better than most I've had in person) ... I really valued the opportunity to talk directly with advocates, researchers, and human rights defenders about their experiences and recommendations for our policy and product.

Savannah Badalich, Policy Director, Discord.



Connectivity Fund supported over

151
participants for
a more diverse and
inclusive RightsCon, a

93%
increase from
last year

81%
of surveyed
participants who
had attended **Open
Spaces sessions**,
indicated that they
enjoyed them and
wished there were
more of them

The speakers



What you are seeing is governments and others taking back control often at the cost of activists and people in markets, what we are going to see is a push to decentralisation. Centralisation is not meeting the needs of different voices...We [Twitter] want to enable this.

Vijaya Gadde, Legal, Public Policy & Trust and Safety Lead, Twitter

We would not have managed to remain an integrated human rights community over COVID19 without the internet...We need to keep it on particularly in situations where governments want to keep it off.

Agnes Callamard, Secretary General, Amnesty International



I hope #RightsCon can continue to be the place that civil society feels at home.

Brett Solomon, Executive Director, Access Now; Founder, RightsCon

Social media can be regulated if they want to, it's lawless because they chose it to be this way....For people who are safe, using it abroad, what I want to tell you is your voice really counts.

Lina Al-hathloul, Saudi Activist



I seek hope in the fact that there is constant creation and innovation at the sites of the most marginalization and oppression. There's always resistance...wherever people are facing oppression, people are also creating solutions.

Sasha Costanza-Chock, Steering Committee, designjustice.org

Select outcomes

For the third consecutive year, **nine United Nations Special Rapporteurs** (the most RightsCon has welcomed) released a joint statement emphasizing digital rights as a "top priority" to rebuilding civic space in pandemic recovery.

In the face of hundreds of reports of content takedowns in the past several weeks, **17 organizations and more than 50 artists, journalists, and human rights defenders** came together to call on Facebook to Stop Silencing Palestine.

Over 110 human rights defenders connected with experts from CiviCERT help desks, including the Access Now Helpline, to strengthen their digital security.

Reflecting on a decade of convening

Since 2011, RightsCon has brought together participants from around the world to advance human rights in the digital age. From 498 participants at the inaugural RightsCon, to 9,212 at this year's 10th anniversary summit, our network is a diverse, global community of business leaders, activists, technologists, policymakers, journalists, philanthropists, researchers, and more. In fact, collectively over the years, tens of thousands of experts have joined us to develop new norms, set standards, celebrate victories, and push back against shrinking civic spaces.



RightsCon Online 2021



RightsCon Toronto 2018



RightsCon Tunis 2019



RightsCon Brussels 2017

RightsCon Silicon Valley 2016



RightsCon Manila 2015



Inaugural Silicon Valley Human Rights Conference 2011

Highlights from 10 years of shaping human rights in the digital age

2011 - Setting the Silicon Valley Standard

At the first RightsCon in 2011, we ushered in a [set of 15 principles](#) to protect human rights in the ICT sector, which has been the foundation of the evolving positions and priorities of our community.

2015 - Regulating online platforms with the Manila Principles

The Manila Principles, a [civil society initiative](#) established at RightsCon Manila, set out guidelines on internet intermediary liability.

2016 - #KeepItOn Coalition Against Internet Shutdowns

The [#KeepItOn coalition](#), a network of more than 220 organizations from 99 countries, was formed at RightsCon Silicon Valley. The summit also marked the first international consensus on the definition of an internet shutdown.

2018 - Toronto Declaration on AI

At RightsCon Toronto, Access Now and Amnesty International [launched a landmark declaration](#) on the right to equality and nondiscrimination in machine learning, addressing the risk of human rights harms associated with artificial intelligence technology.

2020 - Global Call to Action Amidst Covid-19

Six U.N. Special Rapporteurs [released a joint statement](#) at RightsCon Online, warning of closing of digital spaces amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and embracing their commitment to continue documenting technology's impact on human rights.

2021 - Banning Biometric Surveillance

Between Opening and Closing Ceremonies, 25 new civil society organizations, and over 500 individuals, joined the [#BanBS global coalition](#), a powerful new network working together to ban biometric surveillance. The coalition had evolved from a Solve My Problem session at RightsCon Online 2020.

10
YEARS

The RightsCon Program

Highlights



This year, we received 1052 proposals from 105 countries. The community-sourced RightsCon program tells a story of adaptation and transformation, as organizations, companies, and governments around the world adjust and respond to the impact of COVID-19.

The RightsCon 2021 program was our largest to date, with over 500 sessions cutting across 16 tracks and 10 intersecting themes. It reflected issues that were at the core of RightsCon when it started – privacy and transparency – and newer, critical contributions from movements for health equity, racial justice, climate action, and LGBTQ+ and women’s rights.

Most popular sessions at RightsCon

The challenges of authoritarianism: keeping investigative journalism alive with the Global Investigative Journalism Network.

Protecting digital civic space: the role of technology in supporting democracy, a Fireside Chat featuring the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs and experts from Facebook, Harvard, Reddit, Pollicy, and Access Now.

Taking stock of the Facebook Oversight Board’s first year, which offered assessments from Electronic Frontier Foundation, Internet Sans Frontieres, the Association for Progressive Communications, and others.

Ending internet shutdowns: a path forward with the Office of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clement Voulé.

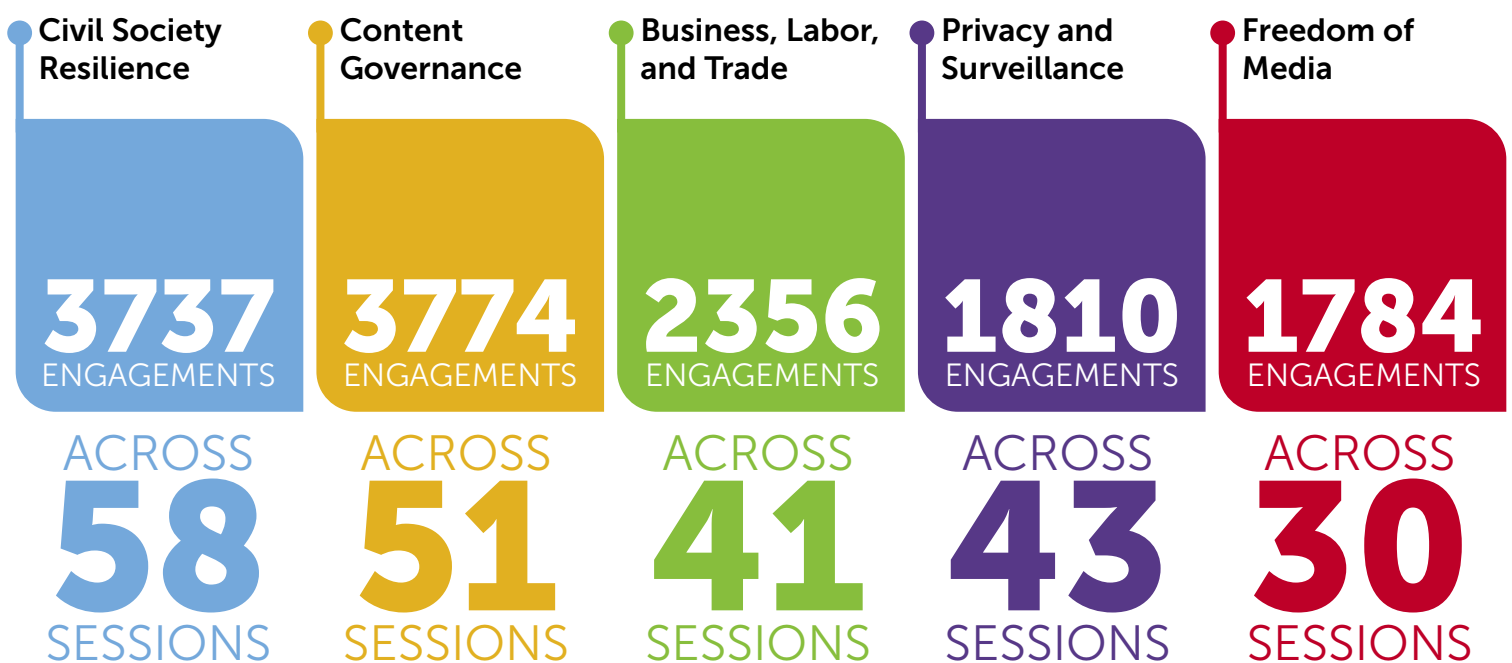
Creating space to process trauma in human rights organizations and collectives with Videre est Credere; University of California, Berkeley, Human Rights Center; Physicians for Human Rights; New York University, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice Center.

Tracks

In order to provide a navigable experience for participants, the RightsCon program is divided into issue-based tracks. See a full breakdown of this year's 16 program tracks below and read on for spotlights and quotes from featured sessions.

Access, Inclusion and Education 40 SESSIONS	Artificial Intelligence 30 SESSIONS	Business, Labor and Trade 41 SESSIONS	Civil Society Resilience 58 SESSIONS
Content Governance 51 SESSIONS	Data Protection 34 SESSIONS	Digital Security for Communities 29 SESSIONS	Freedom of Media 30 SESSIONS
Futures, Fictions and Frontiers 23 SESSIONS	Governance and Elections 34 SESSIONS	Human Rights-Centered Design 26 SESSIONS	Internet Shutdowns and Interruptions 21 SESSIONS
Online Hate and Violence 28 SESSIONS	Peace, Conflict and Justice 36 SESSIONS	Privacy and Surveillance 43 SESSIONS	States in Cyberspace 12 SESSIONS

Top tracks and engagements



*Engagements refers to clicks to join session by program track

Civil Society Resilience

From Hong Kong to Belarus to Nigeria, strong and resilient civil society networks – both online and off – are driving local movements and protesting for change. At RightsCon, advocates came together to share, connect, and build momentum.



SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- Belarus 2020: the incredible story of public-private activism for democratic change (**Freedom House**)
- Standing up for youth rights: civil society in solidarity (**Accountability Lab; Global Fund for Children; World Organization of the Scout Movement; Soka Gakkai International Office for UN Affairs; Jóvenes por el Cambio**)
- Building strategies to diversify funds: stories from organizations in the internet freedom community on developing different fundraising strategies (**The Tor Project**)
- Building coalitions across borders: incorporating lessons learned into future impactful collective action (**Digital Action; Global Project Against Hate and Extremism; "Never Again" (Nigdy Więcej) Association**)
- Creating space to process trauma in human rights organizations and collectives (**Videre est Credere; University of California, Berkeley, Human Rights Center; Physicians for Human Rights; New York University, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice Center**)

“

This is an enormous movement of solidarity that we have not seen before. Before, human rights defenders were seen as marginalized people. This year, we see many people from different areas, IT sector, business, actors, managers, and footballers. Everybody has understood and decided to join this big campaign, where we are all together. In this great movement of citizens, people understand that they are not just people here in Belarus; they are citizens, they are Belarusian and they have to deal with that and do something for their country and their rights.

Alexey Leonchik,
Co-Founder, BY_HELP



Content Governance

This track explored how platforms, policymakers, and activists work together to uphold freedom of expression and opinion online, and strike a balance between content moderation and censorship.



“

I think the business model cannot be fixed even by regulation. I think that the biggest contribution to dismantling this business model can only come from the market. When I say the market, I mean a mix of users and alternatives available to Facebook. That is really the space from which this change can come.

Gayatri Khandhadai,
Lawyer, Association for Progressive
Communications

SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- Taking stock of the Facebook Oversight Board's first year (**Independent organiser**)
- Content moderation, accountability, and transparency: experiences across the internet stack (**Internet Society; TikTok**)
- High-profile figures, disintermediation, and responsibilities of online platforms (**Forum on Information & Democracy**)
- Translating human rights into content moderation rules: the role of private companies, international organizations, and civil society (**Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información**)
- Alternative frameworks for sexual content moderation (**Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society; Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, Queensland University of Technology**)



Human Rights-Centered Design

Human rights-centered design leads to more inclusive, accessible tech. From exploring open source tools and community-based innovation, to user education and experience, this track expanded our understanding of the potential of human rights-centered design.



SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- Web accessibility 101: enhancing user experience of open source tools for people with disabilities (**Internews; Accessibility Lab; DALAT; World Wide Web Consortium**)
- How to combat dark patterns and advancing human rights through design (**Access Now; Electronic Frontier Foundation; Convocation Design + Research**)
- Smash the borders, build bridges: synthesizing strategies to center human rights in digital rights tech development (**EngageMedia**)
- Build better: rethinking gender-responsive tech design (**IT for Change**)
- Strategic foresight: programmers as human rights workers and civil society's role in technical standards development (**The IO Foundation; Human First Tech**)

For me, accessibility is something really personal. I think that you have to start addressing people around you, addressing the different diversities and start to connect with that, and start to talk with people. And if you don't have these kinds of diversities around you, ask yourself why...Always prioritize people, you have to connect with users that actually live with these disabilities and try to make them use the product and let you know what are the needs they have

Susana Pallero,
Accessibility Specialist and
co-founder, DALAT, Latin American
Accessible Development



Intersecting themes

For the second year, the RightsCon program featured intersecting themes that cut across one or more program tracks and provide an alternate lens through which the issues we cover can be explored. See a full breakdown of this year's 10 intersecting themes below and read on for spotlights and quotes from featured sessions.



Public Health

SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- Leveraging social work and health practices to combat violent extremism online (**Government of Canada, Canada Centre for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence**)
- Normalizing surveillance to promote public health: contact tracing and vaccine apps in the US (**Surveillance Technology Oversight Project**)
- The day ransomware almost killed a patient: hospitals under cyberattack (**Digital Peace Now**)
- Digital ID: what is it good for? Lessons from our research on Uganda's identity system and access to social services (**Unwanted Witness; New York University Law School, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice Center; Initiative for Social and Economic Rights**)



In conversations with others studying digital ID, we were surprised to hear that actually Uganda was being put out there by proponents of digital ID as a successful story, as a successful case study of how helpful digital IDs were, and yet we were encountering more and more cases of exclusion on the ground.

Salima Namusobya,
Executive Director, Initiative for
Social and Economic Rights



Disability Rights

SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- Amplifying the human impact of internet shutdowns: why it matters (**Access Now; Women of Uganda Network**)
- People-centered care: exploring human rights integration in digital health product and service design (**Global Network of People Living with HIV**)
- Upholding the rights of students with disabilities: using learnings from the pandemic to rethink inclusive education globally (**Benetech**)
- Acceso a la información digital desde la perspectiva de una persona ciega (**El Rinconcito Inclusivo**)
- XR for everyone: questions, challenges, and solutions in support of accessible XR (**Future of Privacy Forum**)

Racial Justice

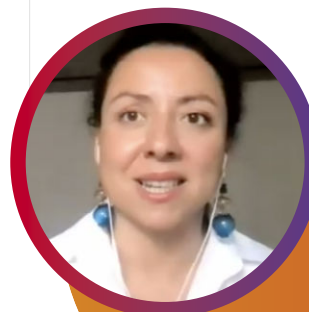
SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- Police misconduct: from data to accountability (**Human Rights Data Analysis Group**)
- Race and technology: a shared vision for a better future (**Stanford University, Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity**)
- Disinformation, social movements, and big tech in the United States (**Friends of the Earth; MediaJustice**)
- Co-creating Afrofeminist data futures (**Stanford University, Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity**)
- Decolonizing AI: centering Black innovation in the Global South (**Portulans Institute; Global Black Youth**)



We know that we have a problem in the sector, we know that this problem is permeating each and every company and initiative designing technology, but it is also going beyond that, it is not an issue that will only be solved by engineers, it is not an issue that will be solved by laws only.

Renata Avila, Race and Technology Fellow, Stanford University



Indigenous Rights

SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- Enfoques de alta y baja tecnología para la participación ciudadana de comunidades marginalizadas, rurales e indígenas (**International Republican Institute**)
- Harassment of Indigenous rights activists: the digital front (**International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs; Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact**)
- OpenSpeaks: building an open toolkit to document Indigenous languages (**O Foundation**)
- Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK): our savior from environmental catastrophe (**Open Development Initiative; Colegio de Postgraduados**)
- We keep us safe: an Indigenized guide to reproductive justice and cyber safety (**Indigenous Women Rising**)

With increased use of digital spaces, the exposure of indigenous activists to certain vulnerabilities and threats online have also increased.

Guangchunliu Gangmei, Human Rights Campaign and Policy Advocacy, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact



Gender Justice

SESSION SPOTLIGHT

- The coding of risk: from sex work to sanctions (**Hacking//Hustling**)
- Are girls free to be online? When social media giants listen to girls themselves (**Plan International**)
- Deadly omissions: why your threat modeling needs to include survivors of gender-based violence (**Chayn; Sexual Violence Law Center; University of Washington; University of Oxford**)
- Reflections from South Asia on digital gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19 (**Point of View**)
- Invisible or absent: is AI in Africa inclusive of nonbinary gender identities? (**Research ICT Africa**)

Survivors of gender-based violence face many similar threats to targets of state surveillance, the kind of traditional community that RightsCon was developed to serve. Things like constant surveillance, using intimidation to threaten, or coerce or discredit someone, needing to keep up to date with evolving technologies like spyware, constantly changing platform privacy policies, these are all things that survivors of gender-based violence might face.

Julia Slupska, PhD Researcher, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford



A strengthened and transparent private program

Over the years, RightsCon has supported a small private program, including meetings and strategic Solve My Problem sessions. These spaces have been important for advancing outcomes around sensitive, emerging, or evolving topics. In recognition of their importance, we took steps this year to strengthen the structure and processes around private programming by:

- Offering facilitation training to all private meeting and Solve My Problem session organizers.
- Creating a detailed guide for organizers to consult as they planned.
- Building a new, integrated private program session feature within the RightsCon platform.
- Committing to publicly communicating about private programming in our event reporting.

Private meetings allowed for cross-sector coordination around a policy, project, or phenomenon, and for securing commitments from a certain set of actors.

19
PRIVATE
MEETINGS

PRIVATE MEETINGS SPOTLIGHT

- 5th annual General Counsels meeting
- Resistance and resilience of civil society in Tunisia
- 7th annual digital rights Executive Directors meeting
- Asia-Pacific civil society and academia digital rights forum
- Southeast, South and East Asia rapid response meet-up
- Filling the gaps in transparency reporting: Ten years in, where are we headed?
- Breakout for open internet
- Virtual roundtable on digital human rights
- The state of digital rights in the Caribbean
- A discussion on empowering local actors to scale digital good governance initiatives
- Dilemmas and tensions in civil society and academic engagement with big tech outreach
- Part I and II: Human rights due diligence in the surveillance technology sector
- Developing best practices for coordination between civil society incident response help desks and tech platforms

2
SOLVE MY
PROBLEM
SESSIONS

Solve my problem sessions centered around developing a strategy or building a coalition to resolve a stated problem at the intersection of technology and human rights. 2021 marked three years of hosting SMP sessions at RightsCon. This year, for the first time, organizers were encouraged to produce a “paired” public session to increase awareness of the problem or receive community feedback on the proposed solution(s).

SOLVE MY PROBLEM SPOTLIGHT

- Mainstreaming internet freedom into democracy, rights, and governance assistance
- Terms of service, cookie pop-ups, and hidden account settings: how to combat dark patterns and advance human rights through design feature within the RightsCon platform
- Committing to publicly communicating about private programming in our event reporting

Introducing Open Spaces

Highlights

51 OPEN SPACE SESSIONS

16 SOCIAL HOURS

13 FREE PLAY SESSIONS

6 AFTER DARK PERFORMANCES

41%
of surveyed participants
attended at least one
Open Space session

81%
of surveyed participants
who attended a Social
Hour session rated them
as Excellent or Good

The idea for Open Spaces originated from feedback that we received from our first online summit, RightsCon 2020. Participants wanted more opportunities for networking and spaces to make “hallway” connections, socialize, and unwind, as we would in an in-person setting. We hosted three formats as part of our Open Spaces programming, emphasizing building networks of trust within the RightsCon community – and, importantly, offering an opportunity to have a little fun and relax.

Social hour

Hosted in an integrated platform, Social Hours provided a flexible, informal space for meeting other participants, funders, and private sector representatives. Organizers and facilitators also highlighted that the format was well suited to connect informally, showcase different organizations’ work, exchange contact information, and have a relaxed time in an intimate atmosphere.

“

I absolutely LOVED the Social Hour. The format, the online “digital tables”, how it only holds 6 people at once... it was all so brilliant, and was the closest thing to a staffed table IRL.

Wafa Ben-Hassine,
Principal, Omidyar Network



Free Play

These sessions centered on games, wellness, and culture. They provided participants with an opportunity to step back, take a breath and leave recharged through activities like Yoga with Anna Johns, which was one of the most popular sessions.



Anna Johns

90%

of surveyed participants who attended an After Dark session, rated their experience as Excellent or Good

After Dark

In tribute to the After Dark events that bring celebration and solidarity to RightsCon in-person, this year's program featured virtual performances and film screenings for participants to unwind, no matter what time of day it was for them. All the artists that joined us used their performances as a space to explore the connections between human rights and art, raising awareness about the issues that at-risk populations are facing around the globe.

“

It became essential to rewrite narratives in public spaces. If they could spill blood and they could spread hatred on roads, it was my duty to go out there and spread love and sing songs of resistance and tell poems of revolution in those very streets.

Sabika Abbas



Rebeca Lane



Evan Greer



LAM Sisterhood



Ramy Essam

- Music performances by Ramy Essam, Evan Greer and Rebeca Lane.
- Poetry by Sabika Abbas
- Film screening of A Thousand Cuts, a documentary that follows Maria Ressa, a renowned journalist who has become a top target of President Rodrigo Duterte's crackdown on the news media in the Philippines
- Stories of brazen African women by LAM Sisterhood

Inclusion and accessibility

In 2020, when we transitioned RightsCon online for the first time, despite the uncertain environment, we were excited about the opportunity to increase representation more than ever before. While our online platform provided means for people to participate and connect across regions (we welcomed 7,681 participants), we also learned from this experience about the tech, language, and literacy barriers it created. During our planning process for this year, inclusion and accessibility remained integral areas of focus.

Our approach to registration remained the same as previous years, to ensure that RightsCon remains accessible to everyone. To reduce any barriers, our ticket policy offered both free and paid ticket options available to every participant.

90%
of RightsCon
tickets were
given free of
charge

Meeting the needs of a growing and diverse community requires consistent and ongoing efforts, we are constantly learning, evaluating, and adapting our practices. We are sharing the initiatives we undertook this year, but we know there is more work to be done.

When asked to rate the RightsCon programming for being provocative, timely, relevant, and diverse, 90% of surveyed participants responded with Excellent or Good.

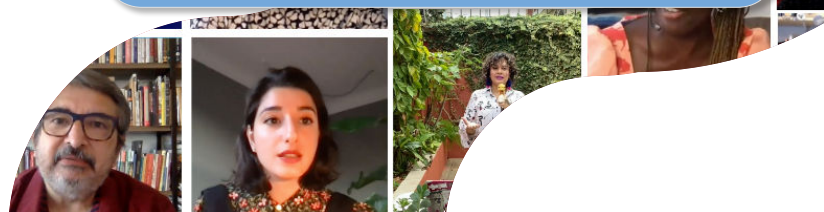


What does inclusion and accessibility mean at RightsCon?

When we talk about inclusion, we're referring to our commitment to ensure people from diverse backgrounds can actively participate, contribute to discussions, and have equitable opportunities in the RightsCon community. Increasing accessibility refers to designing our online spaces centered around the various needs, abilities, and priorities of participants and providing corresponding avenues for engagement during the summit.

Sessions focusing on disability rights and accessibility.

This year, in response to targeted outreach, we saw greater representation of topics that focused on disability rights and accessibility in the program than ever before. With a total of 14 sessions focused on disability rights, we were able to explore diverse subjects such as open data, extended reality, voice interfaces, immersive inclusion, web accessibility, internet shutdowns, education, algorithmic diversity, and more.



Connectivity fund

Launched in 2020, the fund is an initiative intended to provide direct financial support to session organizers, speakers, and civil society participants for additional bandwidth, increased connectivity or support in other ways that facilitate their full engagement. For RightsCon 2021, we refined our process, and expanded the initiative by doubling the number of participants supported from 78 to 151. Funding was provided to participants from 32 different countries with the majority of it or 87% going to the African region, in particular to Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya.



As a Ph.D. research student with an interest in digital rights and internet governance, the connectivity fund provided the resource for more to follow the conversations through the RightsCon 2021 meetings, especially when I am off-campus. Consequently, I understand the issues and I know how to engage in them. Next RightsCon, I hope to be a speaker.



Benjamin Akinmoyeje,
Research student,
Namibia University of
Science and Technology

Diversity audit

The Diversity Working Group – an internal Access Now team that works on integrating diversity into the organization's policies, programs, and culture – reviewed every session to ensure all perspectives that are integral to the conversation were represented.

The Diversity Working Group

- Identified 5 “manels” which were against our code of conduct. We worked with the organisers to make sure they met the requirement of ensuring the participation of women and third-gender speakers/facilitators in their respective sessions.
- Identified 53 sessions where regional diversity was not assured, for instance where all speakers came from the Global North and also sessions where all the speakers came from a specific country in a particular region. In most cases, the session organizers made changes to their speaker or facilitator lineup to ensure regional diversity

Language, translation, and closed captioning

An external accessibility contractor performed an accessibility assessment of every page within the RightsCon platform based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (“WCAG”) 2.1 A & AA. The results from the report included actionable next steps and corrections to optimize and improve accessibility. TechChange – as our production partner who built and tailored the platform – reviewed these results and addressed the recommended changes to ensure an effective user experience.

Safety and security

This year, the RightsCon Security Working Group (SWG) – an internal committee operated by Access Now – had more time to reflect and prepare. The SWG undertook a comprehensive review of our safety and security documentation and processes, both internally, and with an external partner who is a trusted and experienced expert in community safety – online and off. We strengthened our approach and built an adaptive reporting and response process.

86%

of surveyed participants rated their experience with the RightsCon platform as Excellent or Good

78%

of surveyed participants felt that Code of Conduct was successful in creating a safe and respectful environment for the conference

Snapshot of outcomes and impact



Statements

- For the third consecutive year, nine – the most we’ve ever welcomed – United Nations Special Rapporteurs released a [joint statement](#) emphasizing digital rights as a “top priority” to rebuilding civic space in pandemic recovery.
- Civil society [called on the Malaysian government](#) to abandon all attempts to throttle and censor online free speech.

Coalitions

- Between Opening and Closing Ceremonies, 25 new civil society organizations, and over 500 individuals, joined the [#BanBS global coalition](#), a powerful new network working together to ban biometric surveillance.
- Over 110 human rights defenders, civil society workers, journalists and activists connected with the Digital Safety Clinic coordinated by the Access Now Digital Security Helpline in collaboration with trusted help desk handlers and rapid responders from the [CiviCERT](#) network.

- In the face of hundreds of reports of content takedowns in the past several weeks, 17 organizations and more than 50 artists, journalists, and human rights defenders came together to call on Facebook to [Stop Silencing Palestine](#).
- Over 10 civil society organizations from the Caribbean, including Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Dominica, Barbados, Saint Lucia, and Puerto Rico convened to strengthen connections and set the next steps on the protection of digital rights in the region, with a special interest in digital ID and digital gender violence.
- The Digital Rights Litigators Network — born at RightsCon 2016 — rallied around legal challenges to the Nigerian government’s order for Twitter to stop operating in the country, and began organizing a global intervention under the leadership of local groups.
- The Gulf Centre for Human Rights, Access Now, and 10 more organizations launched a coalition from across the MENA region to [combat the sale of surveillance technologies](#) to governments using them to violate human rights.



Launches

- The Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Danish Technology Ambassador formally launched the [Tech for Democracy](#) initiative.
- The COVID-19 Observatory by Al Sur released a [comprehensive new report](#) (ES) documenting technology-based responses to COVID-19 across Latin America and providing guidance on rights-respecting practices for adoption and implementation.



- Stakeholders across civil society, the UN, and the private sector contributed to new human rights due diligence guidance on UN procurement and use of digital technologies, while committing to engage with those most vulnerable and affected.
- The #KeepItOn coalition released a [robust new advocacy toolkit](#) and a [comprehensive resource library](#) to help empower human rights defenders fighting against internet shutdowns in their own communities.
- Digital Rights Watch announced the [Internet](#)

[Economy Project](#) to rebalance power online.

- UNESCO released a news article to accompany the session [“Advancing human rights and digital collaboration: UNESCO’s call for participation in the IGF Dynamic Coalition on Internet Universality Indicators \(IUIs\)”](#).

Meetings and partnerships

- At the 5th RightsCon General Counsels meeting gathering representatives from all across the tech sector — from social media platforms to telcos to VPN providers — companies agreed to increase information sharing on censorship orders, like content takedown requests from governments, and to partner with civil society on adopting new, more secure internet standards and protocols.
- The University of Southern California’s Shoah Foundation and Stanford University have partnered on [The Starling Lab](#), which will be dedicated to using decentralized tools based on cryptography and blockchain to advance the cause of human rights. The two organizations have a commitment for \$2 million in funding from Protocol Labs and the Filecoin Foundation for the Decentralized Web to make the [Starling Lab](#) into the first such center in the world. [The announcement was made during RightsCon, the world’s leading summit on human rights in the digital age.](#)
- To combat the worrying fashion of employing dark patterns in digital products, a collective of designers, researchers, policymakers, and academics came together to build a checklist of do’s and don’ts for how to design human-rights respecting user interfaces.
- Civil society and academia from Belarus, Hong Kong, and Iran identified key challenges and recommendations to deliver to Telegram to help make the platform safer and more effective for its users at risk.



Looking ahead

The last decade of RightsCon has demonstrated the power of convening and the growing importance of a global, cross-sector network in advancing human rights in the digital age. This 10th anniversary edition was an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come, but the work is far from finished. RightsCon will continue to be a space that adapts to the needs of the community.

61%

of surveyed participants have indicated they are ready to meet in person next year, though many still have concerns over travel restrictions and vaccinations

91.8%

of surveyed participants responded very likely or likely when asked how likely they are to participate in RightsCon 2022 if held again online

We know many in the community are keen to convene at RightsCon in-person again, though significant concerns about safety and travel restrictions remain. The benefit of RightsCon is the diversity of the community and our decision about where to convene is grounded in our commitment to ensuring the event remains as inclusive and accessible as possible.

**We'll be hosting 2022 online and look forward to sharing more details shortly.
We hope to see you there!**

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Access Now defends and extends the digital rights of users at risk around the world. By combining direct technical support, comprehensive policy engagement, global advocacy, grassroots grantmaking, and convenings such as RightsCon, we fight for human rights in the digital age.

CONTACT

For more information about RightsCon, contact the team at rightscon@accessnow.org

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