



# REPORT

INTERNET GOVERNANCE SCHOOL 2025

“UNDERSTANDING THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF CENTRAL ASIA”

TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN | MAY 21-22, 2025

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## I. Executive Summary

The Internet Governance School — “Understanding the Digital Future of Central Asia” — was held over two days in Tashkent as a high-level preparatory platform leading into the Central Asian Internet Governance Forum (CA IGF 2025). Designed as a multi-stakeholder, regional capacity-building program, the School successfully convened 30 emerging and mid-career professionals from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Participants represented government, civil society, academia, media, and the private sector.

The event deepened participants' understanding of core IGF thematic pillars such as AI regulation, data governance, digital resilience, and connectivity infrastructure. It also equipped them with negotiation skills, ethical reasoning frameworks, and an institutional understanding of global and regional Internet governance systems. Fellows concluded the program by producing policy-focused outputs in the form of “IGF Messages” and Strategic Mini-Plans, fostering long-term regional engagement.

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## II. Objectives

- **Build regional fluency** in key Internet governance themes and stakeholder dynamics.
  - **Prepare stakeholders** from Central Asia for meaningful participation in CA IGF 2025 and global IGF venues.
  - **Support regional multistakeholderism** and cross-border cooperation through structured interaction and practical policy exercises.
  - **Enable future leadership** in digital policymaking and governance via hands-on, regionally contextual learning.
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## III. Structure and Methodology

The two-day program followed a thematic design:

- **Day 1: Global Foundations & Principles**
- **Day 2: Regional Priorities & Strategic Readiness**

Each day combined:

- Interactive lectures
- Expert panels and Q&A
- Case-based discussions

A total of **7 core sessions** were delivered, supported by regional and international experts including those affiliated with RIPE NCC, ICANN, Internet Society, civil society advocates, cybersecurity experts, and digital rights lawyers.

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#### **IV. Thematic Highlights by Session**

The Internet Governance School unfolded over two intensive days, providing participants with a structured yet dynamic immersion into the theory and practice of Internet governance. The carefully curated agenda followed a logical progression: from foundational knowledge and global frameworks on Day 1 to regionally anchored policy challenges and stakeholder dialogues on Day 2. Each session was designed not only to transmit knowledge but to stimulate critical thinking, collaboration, and practical application.

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#### **Day 1: Foundations and the Global Internet Governance Ecosystem**

##### **Opening and Keynote: “*Why Internet Governance Matters for Central Asia*”**

Delivered by Asomiddin Atoev (Tajikistan), the keynote set a compelling tone by framing Internet governance as not merely a technical or regulatory field, but as a strategic domain of sovereignty, development, and security. Drawing on demographic data and regional connectivity statistics, Atoev emphasized Central Asia’s growing role as a digital bridge and the need for its stakeholders to shape — not just consume — the global Internet agenda.

Participants responded with thought-provoking questions. One fellow from Kazakhstan asked:

“If our countries don’t yet have the technical capacity or political space to fully engage in multistakeholder dialogue, what should be our first priority — digital infrastructure or institutional openness?”

This prompted a discussion on sequencing and prioritization, with suggestions to build both in tandem, starting with data governance and open consultations.

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##### **Session: *Internet Governance 101***

Presented by Vahan Hovsepyan (RIPE NCC), this foundational session introduced participants to the history, principles, and institutions of global Internet governance. Concepts like the multistakeholder model, the WSIS framework, and the roles of ICANN, ISOC, ITU, and national CERTs were unpacked in an accessible and interactive format.

The audience engaged with live mapping exercises of Internet governance actors and responded to poll questions like “Who should decide how the Internet is regulated?” Responses

revealed a diversity of opinion — from government-centered to distributed models — prompting a reflective conversation on legitimacy and accountability.

A participant from Tajikistan shared:

“In my country, many still think the Internet is just a service. How do we explain to policymakers that governance is a shared responsibility?”

The speaker encouraged contextual storytelling using cybersecurity and access as entry points, referencing CA-CERT and national spectrum policy debates.

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### **Expert Panel: *AI Governance – Ethics, Risks, Regulation***

Led by Alexander Partin (Privacy Advocates), this session examined the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and the complex ethical and legal questions it raises. The speaker compared different global models of AI regulation — from the detailed EU AI Act to the decentralized U.S. approach — and discussed regional regulatory drafts in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Discussions focused on fairness, explainability, and legal clarity. One civil society representative from Kyrgyzstan raised a concern:

“Many public-sector algorithms are being procured with little public debate. How do we ensure algorithmic transparency at the municipal level?”

This sparked dialogue on procurement standards, access to training datasets, and the need to align local practice with principles such as those in the UNESCO AI Ethics Declaration.

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### **Lecture: *Connectivity Infrastructure & Access Policy***

Mikhail Anisimov (ICANN) presented a strategic overview of regional infrastructure — from submarine cables to satellite constellations — and explained the implications of centralized Internet exchange points and the emergence of low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellite networks such as Starlink.

The audience engaged actively. A fellow from Uzbekistan inquired:

“Given that most of our traffic routes through Moscow or Frankfurt, what are the real options for building regional IXPs in Central Asia?”

Anisimov discussed both technical and geopolitical barriers, referencing regional efforts to build sovereign routing policies and cooperative IXPs, but also emphasized the importance of open peering policies and transparent telecom regulation.

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## **Day 2: Regional Priorities and Strategic Readiness**

### **Case-Based Panel: *Data Governance & Cross-Border Ecosystems***

Nikolay Dmitrik opened with an in-depth presentation on data localization trends, regulatory divergence among CA countries, and emerging frameworks for trust-based cross-border data exchange. He emphasized the limitations of applying 1990s-era laws to contemporary cloud-native architectures.

An engaging case discussion followed. A participant from Kyrgyzstan questioned:

“If each country adopts its own localization rules, how can regional fintech or e-health platforms operate legally across borders?”

Dmitrik encouraged development of “data trust anchors” — referencing the UNCITRAL model law — and stressed that regional solutions must be interoperable, not identical.

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### **Panel: *Digital Resilience & Emergency Preparedness***

This session applied a cyber-resilience framework based on “PPT+E” — People, Processes, Technologies, Data, and Environment — and mapped it to international standards such as ISO 27001, NIS2, and DORA. Panelists included regional cybersecurity specialists who discussed incidents like the 2023 Turkish earthquake’s impact on Internet access and the 2024 attacks on regional domain registries.

Participants asked how to adapt business continuity planning (BCP) in resource-constrained public agencies. A speaker from Kazakhstan replied:

“Start with inventory and dependencies. Even mapping out your data and who controls it is a huge leap forward.”

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### **Case Discussion: *Multistakeholder Ethics and Conflict of Interest***

Aizharkyn Kozhobekova (UCA) led an interactive session using real-world examples — from the Rogun Dam’s ecological and social impact to the EU’s Digital Services Act consultations — to dissect ethical dilemmas in policymaking.

One of the most heated discussions occurred when a fellow from Tajikistan asked:

“How do we distinguish real multistakeholderism from co-opted processes where only elites speak?”

Participants explored concepts like stakeholder mapping, RACI models, and the importance of independent moderation and transparency. The facilitator emphasized that ethical multistakeholderism requires not just formal participation, but meaningful engagement at every policy stage.

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## V. Impact and Recommendations

AREA	KEY OUTCOMES
MULTISTAKEHOLDER INCLUSION	Diverse participation across sectors and countries
REGIONAL OWNERSHIP	Local experts led core sessions, ensuring contextual relevance
STRATEGIC CAPACITY BUILDING	Participants demonstrated policy articulation, coalition mapping, and advocacy
GLOBAL-REGIONAL BRIDGING	All sessions linked IGF-level discussions with regional governance realities

### Recommendations for CA IGF Secretariat:

- Institutionalize the School as a **pre-Forum annual track**
- Launch a **mentorship program** for alumni ahead of CA IGF 2025
- Formalize **integration of “IGF Messages”** into CA IGF agenda tracks
- Support **alumni microgrants** for local policy projects

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## VI. Conclusion

The Internet Governance School — “Understanding the Digital Future of Central Asia” — held in Tashkent on May 21–22, 2025, proved to be a timely and highly relevant initiative that significantly contributed to the regional capacity-building agenda. Designed as a preparatory platform for meaningful engagement in the Central Asian Internet Governance Forum (CA IGF 2025), the School not only fulfilled its original objectives but exceeded expectations in fostering dialogue, stakeholder interaction, and applied learning across national and sectoral lines.

Over the course of two days, 7 participants representing government bodies, 12 civil society organizations, 2 academia, 6 private sector entities, and 3 media institutions from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan engaged in a curated sequence of sessions. These included foundational lectures, thematic expert panels, policy laboratories, and collaborative workshops. The structure allowed for both vertical learning — from global frameworks to national realities — and horizontal exchange between peers from different countries and backgrounds.

Thematically, the School covered key areas that align with the current and future agenda of the CA IGF, including:

- Global and regional models of Internet governance
- Artificial intelligence ethics and regulation
- Infrastructure access and satellite connectivity
- Cross-border data governance and interoperability
- Digital resilience and cybersecurity policy
- Multistakeholder ethics and conflict management

Each session was led by distinguished experts from both the region and international organizations such as RIPE NCC, ICANN, and the Internet Society, ensuring conceptual clarity and institutional depth. Real-world case studies, regional policy comparisons, and interactive group work helped translate complex governance topics into actionable insights.

Importantly, the School served as a bridge between knowledge and agency. It provided not only information but also a structured pathway for participants to engage in Internet governance processes at national and regional levels. Many fellows expressed a commitment to take part in the upcoming CA IGF 2025 in Tashkent, while others pledged to initiate consultations or working groups within their institutions.

From an organizational standpoint, the School demonstrated a scalable and replicable model for regional digital policy training. Its hybrid learning methods — blending global theory with local case work — and its emphasis on output-oriented participation made it particularly effective for diverse and mid-level professional audiences.

The School has laid the groundwork for a more connected, informed, and empowered Internet governance community in Central Asia. Institutionalizing such efforts as a regular part of the CA IGF ecosystem, alongside mechanisms for alumni support and follow-up action, will be critical for sustaining momentum and deepening the region's contribution to the global Internet governance discourse.