

IAB SA campaigns for all South Africans to have free access to the internet

A campaign launched by the IAB SA strives to allow all South Africans free basic access to the internet. As the right to information is one of our constitutional rights, it follows that South Africans should have the ability to access this information freely.



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Chris Borain, chair of the IAB SA, says, “We believe in fostering digital equality among all citizens. While Icasa is taking great strides to address the high cost of data, a basic level of free internet access is a separate issue that requires as much attention. All South Africans, especially vulnerable groups and those without access to mobile phones, have the right to access information online, from government services, employment opportunities or online education resources.”



The internet will be free one day

Alan Knott-Craig 1 Feb 2018



The IAB SA is already partnering with other media stakeholders to justify the case for free basic internet access and stimulate dialogue on the matter.

A tool of economic development

The IAB SA in partnership with the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef), Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Applied Law and Technology (altadvisory.africa) have published a research paper on the topic: Perspectives on Universal Access to Online Information in South Africa: Free Public Wi-Fi and Zero-Rated Content, which is publically available.

The paper was launched last year on the International Day for Universal Access to Information at the Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica) conference. In her address to the Forum, the then outgoing chair of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa and current South African Information Regulator, Adv Pansy Tlakula acknowledged the issues raised in the paper and commended the efforts of all involved.



Internet access is your basic right, here's why

Duduzile Mkhwanazi 9 Oct 2017



At its December 2017 National Conference at Nasrec, the ANC resolved to “encourage efforts by Government and the private sector to deploy broadband infrastructure and services and also ensure accessibility of free Wi-Fi as a tool of economic development, including access in rural areas, metros, public schools, clinics and libraries.

An online industry and media delegation led by the IAB earlier this year met with the South African Human Rights Commission to discuss ways in which a basic level of free internet access for all citizens can be achieved over time.

Seven-point action plan

We proposed a seven-point action plan to roll out free internet rights in South Africa:

1. The implementation of free access to the internet at government sites such as schools, libraries, health facilities, etc. This is already government policy, but government should commit to a fixed roll-out schedule, which should be monitored with adequate oversight and promotion of this service.
2. Zero-rated access to government websites and data, as envisaged in the e-government policies.
3. Following on several pilot projects in a number of cities and towns, free Wi-Fi access should forthwith be regarded as a basic municipal service and run as a public utility (alongside water, electricity and other municipal services), and government should set up plans and targets for the progressive realisation of such services. This could be done via public/private partnerships, such as making it a requirement for commercial operators like telecoms and fibre companies to provide free Wi-Fi in poor areas for the right to provide commercial services in business and affluent areas.
4. Setting minimum standards for the provision of free internet access, including for all commercial offerings: a minimum data allocation per person per day; and standards for privacy, security, access quality and fair access to information in the public interest.
5. The introduction of the concept of My Internet Rights (or My i-Right): that every citizen should be entitled to a daily tranche of free internet access (e.g. 500MB per day, which is already the standard for many free Wi-Fi schemes), to exercise their access to information rights.
6. The introduction of digital literacy programmes in education curricula and as part of free internet schemes, especially aimed at children and those unfamiliar with risks and opportunities related to the internet.
7. The need for the SAHRC and other oversight bodies to monitor and report on the progressive realisation of internet access rights, and in particular the adoption and implementation of legislation, regulation and policies governing free access to the internet as a basic human right. In response, the COO of the SAHRC, Chantal Kissoon indicated that the commission will consider incorporating monitoring of government's internet access plans for inclusion in national,

regional and international reports on human rights issues; look into the possibility of convening a conference of experts and stakeholders to explore the proposed action plan; and to raise the free internet access issues in outreach and stakeholder engagements.

Anriette Esterhuysen, the APC's director of global policy and strategy, says that with South Africa's internet policies, ICT infrastructure, community networks and free internet pilot projects already underway, the country is well placed to become an example of how the developing world can bridge the digital divide, including the gender digital divide. "What is necessary now is for the public sector, business and civil society to take practical steps towards the goal to give every South African a basic level of free access to the internet."

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