



Bread&Net 2025

**Qualitative
outcomes
report**

Outcome 1: Knowledge & Awareness

Participants demonstrated increased understanding of key digital rights issues and emerging technological and policy trends shaping civic space in the MENA region.

Bread&Net 2025 opened with a question that ran through the entire conference: what does it mean to defend digital rights in a region shaped by war, surveillance, and shrinking civic space?

Sessions examined AI, surveillance, and platform governance. Speakers unpacked how digital infrastructures are embedded in political realities. And one panelist noted during the legal accountability session:

“We are aware that the law is not a silver bullet, but it must act as a baseline for protection.”

This framing—law as imperfect but necessary—shifted the conversation from technological fatalism to structured legal and policy engagement.

In discussions on accountability for digital harms, speakers drew a direct line between online content, particularly disinformation, and real-world violence. During the session on accountability for digital harms, Mai El-Sadany stated:

“In some of the most difficult moments, people have come together to breathe light into international mechanisms.”

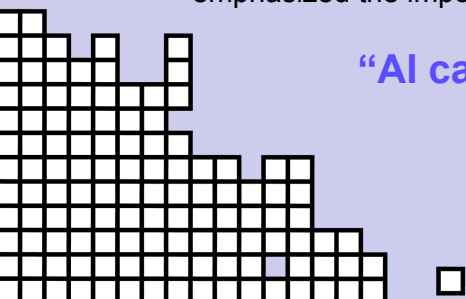
Rather than treating international law as obsolete or outdated, the session framed it as a space worth fighting for, even if it is imperfect.

The same pattern appeared in discussions on platform responsibility. In the Digital Rights 101 session, Marwa Fatafta highlighted the difficulty of proving platform responsibility in contexts of mass harm:

“It is hard to link the content with the consequences on the ground.”

Proving that a platform’s decision caused real harm is technically and legally difficult. But naming that difficulty has opened space to discuss what accountability could really look like. Sessions on AI and algorithmic bias also expanded awareness of technological power asymmetries. During the “How AI Addresses Toxicity Online” session, the facilitator emphasized the importance of contextual design:

“AI can teach kindness if we train it that way.”



Participants examined how automated moderation systems fail speakers of Arabic, Hindi, Nepali, and other languages because it often fails to detect culturally specific hate speech. The discussion that followed was practical: who controls the training data, who decides what counts as harmful, and how can regional organizations push for better outcomes?

In the session on digital sovereignty and liberation tech, the biggest question was asked:

“What would it mean if technology were owned and shaped by Arab communities?”

This question encapsulated a broader intellectual shift throughout the conference: technology is not infrastructure, it is political terrain. This reoriented the conversation from compliance and risk toward agency and possibility.

Participants also engaged critically with corporate influence and regulatory fragmentation. Discussions referenced Section 230 in the United States, EU regulatory models, and the uneven enforcement of export controls on spyware. These conversations demonstrated applied policy literacy rather than surface-level exposure.

By the end of the first day, the questions participants were asking had shifted. Not "what is digital rights?" but "who benefits from the current system?" and "where can we intervene and make it more equitable? And through the sessions, they had the answers and connections to act.

Outcome 2: Skills & Practice

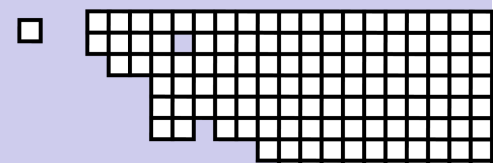
Participants strengthened their practical capacities to analyze, discuss, and apply digital rights frameworks, tools, and approaches within their own advocacy, research, and organizational contexts.

Bread&Net 2025 equipped participants with tools they had tested, frameworks they had practiced, and concrete ideas for what to do next.

Across multiple sessions, sessions were hands-on by design. People installed apps, ran through scenarios, mapped threats on shared boards, and asked the kinds of questions you only ask when you are thinking about actually using something. One of the most practical sessions introduced BitPart, an open-source tool built on top of Signal. The premise was simple: activists already use Signal, so instead of building something new, why not extend what people trust? As one speaker explained:

“We didn’t want to reinvent Signal, we wanted to extend it.”

BitPart allows organisations to run anonymous tip lines, broadcast channels, helpdesk bots, and VPN distribution, all within Signal's encrypted environment. Participants pushed beyond the demonstration with specific questions: does it work on low bandwidth? Can it be



localised into Arabic? Could it be integrated into election monitoring or journalist hotlines? Those questions signal that people were thinking about deployment not just pondering.

Similarly, in the workshop on **Tella**, participants installed the app and tested it. Tella is designed for human rights documentarians working in high-risk environments. Its key features include encrypted media capture, quick-delete and camouflage mode that makes the app look like something innocuous on a seized device.

The session worked through real scenarios: checkpoint inspections, device confiscation, and what happens if you are arrested with footage on your phone. Connecting a tool's features to the specific moment you might need them is what makes training stick.

Sessions on **AI and online toxicity** introduced hands-on tools like Voice Valor and Bunk with Kindness, designed to help users detect hate speech and practice empathetic responding without escalation. The guiding principle of the session was, as the facilitator said:

“Nothing about us without us.”

Participants explored how localized data can improve fairness in AI moderation and how behavioral science models can reinforce constructive dialogue rather than confrontation.

The **Mapping Narratives for Digital Rights** workshop taught a skill that is deceptively challenging: distinguishing between context and subtext in media framing, meaning unpacking what a story is saying on the surface versus what it is actually doing. Participants worked through examples, including the claim that “it all started on October 7.” Participants practiced how counter-narratives succeed through empathy rather than opposition. The session gave participants a replicable method they can take back to their advocacy and communications work.

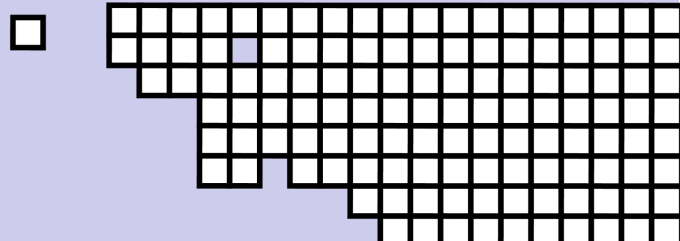
Legal-focused sessions strengthened participants’ ability to analyze accountability pathways. To think about international law not as a distant, slow-moving institution but as a flexible tool. One speaker challenged the room:

“We need to be creative and look into domestic law; areas not usually considered first.”

Discussions covered universal jurisdiction, strategic litigation, and corporate complicity. The practical question running through the session was: given what is available, what can we actually do? Workshops on digital sovereignty and public-interest infrastructure further strengthened applied thinking. Participants collaboratively mapped threats on Miro boards, proposed coalition models, and identified regionally rooted digital commons such as Wikipedia and OpenStreetMap. The emphasis was on adaptation: how to use, modify, and contextualize tools within specific national realities.

Across sessions, capacity strengthening was observable through:

- Operational questions about deployment and localization



- Requests for integration into training programs
- Discussion of applying frameworks to specific country contexts
- Interest in piloting tools within organizations
- Expanding digital literacy and AI awareness trainings

The shift was toward informed application. Participants left with clearer frameworks, tested tools, and concrete ideas for how to integrate digital rights approaches into advocacy, research, journalism, and community organizing.

Outcome 3: Narrative & Discourse Shifts

Discussions during Bread&Net 2025 reflected emerging shifts in how participants frame digital rights challenges, moving toward more holistic, intersectional, and regionally grounded narratives.

Language matters in advocacy. The words we use to describe a problem shape what solutions seem possible. One of the more significant things that happened at Bread&Net 2025 was a shift in language — across sessions, across topics, across communities represented in the room.

Language evolved from narrow, issue-based discussions (censorship, privacy, funding) toward broader structural conversations about power dynamics, the colonial perspective of tech companies, gender, war, and economic dependency.

One of the clearest examples came during the session on funding scarcity. Participants pushed back on the framing of the problem itself. The issue, they argued, was not simply that there is not enough money — it was that civil society organisations in the region have become dependent on external donors in ways that limit their independence and shape their priorities.

There became a shift in language—from “funding” to “resource mobilization”, a term used to describe building self-sustaining, community-rooted economic models instead of waiting for the next grant cycle. . That reframing changed what the room started talking about.

Discussions on digital sovereignty shifted from the usual frame — which government controls which data — toward a different question entirely. One speaker asked:

“What would it mean if technology were owned and shaped by Arab communities?”

This question reoriented the conversation from compliance and risk towards hope: digital sovereignty as a lived autonomy over data, tools, and narratives.

In sessions on AI and surveillance, participants moved beyond framing technology as innovation or risk, and instead described it as political infrastructure. AI was discussed in terms of militarization, data extraction, labor exploitation, and colonial asymmetry — not just efficiency or bias. The framing became intersectional, linking algorithmic violence to gender-based harm, war documentation, and economic vulnerability.

The session on feminist digital sovereignty emphasized that:

“Data is an extension of the body.”

Privacy is not a technical setting you adjust on your phone. It is a question of who controls your body, your movements, your relationships, your safety. For women, activists, and people living under surveillance, that is not abstract.

Similarly, in the session on counter-visibility and digital witnessing, participants examined how online images from Gaza and South Lebanon function not as content moderation problems but as political acts. The central question posed was:

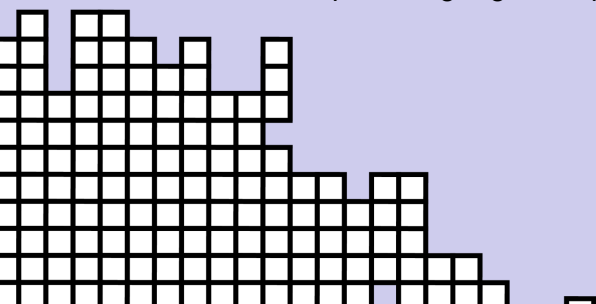
“How can we produce an image that the enemy did not produce before us?”

In this session, digital rights were discussed not only as questions of platform moderation, but as broader struggles over historical memory, dignity, and communities asserting the right to narrate their own experience before someone else does it for them.

Across multiple sessions, participants stopped describing social media platforms as neutral intermediaries that sometimes make mistakes. Instead, participants' language shifted to something harder: platforms as active political actors, making deliberate choices about whose speech is amplified, whose is suppressed, and whose humanity is recognised. That shift from "the algorithm got it wrong" to "the platform is complicit" has real implications for how organisations think about accountability and where they direct their advocacy.

Across sessions, emerging discursive patterns included:

- Moving from individual responsibility to structural accountability
- Connecting digital harms to offline violence
- Centering feminist and decolonial frameworks into data practices
- Treating infrastructure as political terrain
- Reframing youth in Tech from “beneficiaries” to “co-creators”
- Emphasizing regional specificity rather than importing Global North models



The overall discourse became more intersectional, more regionally rooted, and more structurally analytical. Rather than isolating digital rights from broader struggles, participants consistently embedded them within contexts of war, gender inequality, economic precarity, and geopolitical asymmetry.

These shifts were visible in the language participants used, the metaphors adopted, and the conceptual frameworks referenced across sessions.

Outcome 4: Intent to Act

Participants articulated intentions to apply insights from Bread&Net 2025 in their future work, including through advocacy initiatives, research agendas, organizational strategies, and continued collaboration with peers.

The most honest thing that can be said about a conference is what people did before they left the room. At Bread&Net 2025, that included signing up for working groups, agreeing to pilot tools, committing to localization efforts, and proposing coalitions with people they had just met.

In the session on internet infrastructure, participants filled out a follow-up form to join a regional working group aimed at protecting open knowledge and digital commons in the region. The session concluded with an agreement to create a shared communication channel and to schedule follow-up meetings to demonstrate immediate post-session mobilization.

Similarly, during discussions on funding scarcity, participants agreed to establish a joint channel to coordinate alternative financing strategies and explore different models of resource mobilization that are based on community-rooted sustainability. The shift from critique to planning marked a clear intention to experiment with new organizational approaches.

The AI and online toxicity session concluded with invitations to collaborate on regional data contributions and pilot testing of empathy-based moderation tools. Participants showed interest in adapting these tools for Arabic-speaking communities, signaling readiness to extend the work beyond the session itself.

Legal accountability discussions also reflected forward-looking commitment. Participants were encouraged to explore domestic litigation pathways and universal jurisdiction strategies.

Audience questions centered on how to operationalize these approaches in specific country contexts, suggesting applied interest rather than theoretical agreement.

In the digital sovereignty session, speakers emphasized incremental change:

“Liberation tech is incremental; we can start with imperfect infrastructures while pushing them toward more ethical behavior.”

Participants discussed engaging from within global tech companies, advocating for regulatory reform, and building community-rooted alternatives. These discussions reflected intention to act within constraints rather than waiting for ideal conditions.

Across sessions, articulated intentions included:

- Joining or forming regional working groups
- Piloting open-source tools
- Integrating narrative mapping into advocacy strategies
- Strengthening documentation of digital harms
- Exploring strategic litigation pathways

Importantly, these intentions were grounded in participants' own organizational contexts — not abstract aspirations. The language used frequently referenced “in my organization,” “in my country,” and “in our training programs,” indicating personal and institutional uptake.

Bread&Net 2025 did not claim implementation outcomes, but it successfully catalyzed articulated commitment across advocacy, research, technical experimentation, and coalition-building.

Outcome 5: Connections & Collaboration

Bread&Net 2025 contributed to strengthening relationships and networks among digital rights actors, fostering cross-country exchange, peer learning, and identifying potential areas for collaboration.

Bread&Net 2025 functioned not only as a knowledge space but as a connective infrastructure for the region's digital rights ecosystem.

Across sessions, participants consistently referenced collaboration not as an abstract value, but as a necessary strategy in the face of shrinking civic space, technological concentration, and regional political volatility.

Several sessions concluded with explicit commitments to maintain communication channels and establish working groups.

Technical sessions also generated collaborative momentum. In the BitPart workshop, speakers invited organizations to test and pilot the tool, contribute localization (including Arabic translation), and provide technical feedback via GitHub. The project's participatory design ethos was summarized by one speaker:

“We build with activists, not for them but with them.”

This approach encouraged shared ownership and ongoing engagement between technologists and civil society actors. The question was not whether to collaborate but how. Several sessions turned that question into action before they ended.

Speakers in various sessions invited MENA-based organizations to collaborate on localization and ethical data contributions, noting the need for regionally grounded datasets. Participants expressed interest in partnership models that would extend beyond the sessions themselves.

Legal accountability sessions emphasized coalition-building between lawyers, journalists, technologists, and documentarians. This underscored the importance of cross-sector alliances in sustaining international legal advocacy.

The digital sovereignty sessions similarly emphasized shared responsibility among governments, civil society, private sector actors, and youth networks. The framing of youth as “co-creators” rather than “beneficiaries” reinforced horizontal collaboration rather than hierarchical engagement.

Across sessions, collaboration manifested in several observable ways:

- Participants exchanging contact information and platform handles
- Invitations to join mailing lists, Signal groups, and working groups
- Commitments to share resources and toolkits post-conference
- Proposals for joint advocacy, regional coalitions, and follow-up meetings
- Cross-referencing of organizations (SMEX, Access Now, EFF, ARTICLE 19, 7amleh, Global Voices, Wikimedia, etc.)
- Requests for co-design, pilot testing, and regional adaptation

The hybrid format also facilitated cross-country exchange, with speakers joining from Copenhagen, London, Palestine, South Asia, and across the MENA region. This geographic diversity enriched discussions and reinforced transnational solidarity.

Bread&Net 2025 did not produce formalized partnerships or signed agreements, nor did it claim to. However, it demonstrably strengthened relational ties, surfaced potential areas for collaboration, and reinforced peer learning across the digital rights ecosystem.

The conference acted as a convening node, enabling actors who often work in isolation to see themselves as part of a broader regional network.

