The Digital-Democracy-Development Nexus:

How to effectively advance the EU's Digital Policy abroad

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EUROPEAN
PARTNERSHIP FOR
DEMOCRACY

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Contents

Executive summary

Never before have the priorities for EU external action been so intricately linked to its own internal objectives, as the bloc's transformation to a digital and greener economy is heavily dependent on global trends that will determine the future of the entire planet. In light of this, the EU and EU Delegations are confronted with a challenging mission. Promoting development through digitalisation can come at the expense of democracy and human rights given that the fastest path towards that goal can often deepen already existing divides in society. Contrary to China or Russia, the EU can neither afford a Wild West approach to digital development nor an attitude of no-questions-asked towards its credits and loans, as the effectiveness of its own rules and standards depends on their adoption by the widest number of "like-minded" allies. To put it simply, this time the means are going to be even more important than the ends.

In such an unequal race for influence, EU Delegations are going to play a crucial role in shaping digitalisation. Through their support to partner countries, they have the opportunity to promote a just transition to digital economies that do not reproduce and enhance already existing inequalities, as well as digital societies where citizens are empowered through technology and civic space is not reduced even further. This is not an easy task given the heavy reliance of most developing countries on foreign digital tools, not to speak of the temptation for some governments to use technology to cement their power. But it can be achieved by adopting a consistent approach towards programming that targets digitalisation, development and democracy simultaneously, or what we call the 3D Nexus.

The paper looks at 6 areas where the EU can tackle digitalisation while strengthening development and democracy at the same time. These are: automated decision-making in public administration; data protection; internet access; accountability and control of tech; a free information environment, and; the digital divide. Four broad conclusions emerge from the analysis:

- The global nature of digitalisation, combined with the local impact of its consequences, places all the challenges and possible responses outlined above in a sort of operational middle-ground, a policy arena where **the multilateral and the bilateral must converge to deliver results** that do not undermine each other. Arguably, this is what will ultimately determine the success or failure of 'geographisation': the capacity of EU Delegations to develop fruitful partnerships with partner countries to jointly tackle the most pressing global challenges – not only digitalisation, but also climate change, migration or inequalities – while responding to the most urgent needs of their populations.

- Policy dialogue is going to play a crucial role in aligning the EU's own interests with those of its like-minded allies and in shaping the EU's support to digital transformation in ways that contribute to development without undermining democracy. To this end, **digital policy dialogue** needs to be truly inclusive and participatory, moving beyond the usual bilateral negotiations with counterparts within line ministries to include civil society, social agents and the private sector. Adopting a multistakeholder approach may appear at first sight more complicated, lengthier and messier, but it is hard to see how issues as complex and all-encompassing can be tackled exclusively by dealing with partner

governments. Moreover, when policy dialogue is framed as a process it delivers outcomes not just at its end but all along the way, setting up coordination mechanisms and fostering synergies among the three types of actors – public, private and organised citizens – that need to evolve together for a successful and just transition to digital and green economies.

- The growing importance of **innovative financing** in the EU's portfolio presents a timely opportunity to engage the private sector in line with the public sector reforms that are being supported through **budget support.** These two means of implementation can be seen as twin tools adapted to the needs of each type of actor, but in order to be fully effective they need to be steered through a joint process (for example, as in the dialogue mentioned above). Following the "Policy First" principle, all EU interventions must be based on clear policy objectives to be agreed on by domestic stakeholders. These should be made explicit in the form of roadmaps or action plans for digital transformation that outline the roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved and build on EU financial assistance to unleash local potential and mobilise domestic resources. In such a setting, the full-fledged involvement of actors beyond state officials (civil society, trade unions, business etc) in policy-making and in the monitoring of EU funding, whether in the form of innovative financing or of budget support, is of the utmost importance to define the democratic vision and civic principles upon which the digital future is to be founded.

- Given the rapid pace of digital transformation and its tendency to broaden already existing gaps, EU Delegations will have to double their efforts in providing **capacity development** and **technical assistance** to all the actors involved, including civil society, policy-makers, public oversight institutions, media, women and underrepresented groups, political parties and parliaments. EU Delegations will have to be very selective and strategic in their transfer of knowledge, targeting those groups that can act as catalysts and investing in capacity-building actions on the basis of their outreach. More importantly, they will need to follow an integrated approach to ensure that strengthening some actors (e.g. private operators, start-ups, developers, etc.) or pursuing certain lines of action (e.g. AI in public administration) do not come at the expense of digital rights (e.g. privacy or data ownership) and include robust mechanisms for citizen oversight (e.g. civic tech initiatives, parliamentary scrutiny, etc.).

The 3D Nexus should be seen as a first filter that the EU and EU Delegations could apply in order for programmes focused on digitalisation to have long-term positive outcomes for society. EU Delegations must be extremely careful and strategic if they do not want to undermine the EU's foreign digital policy on the multilateral front. Given the speed of the digital transformation, it is not a matter of discussing if democracy or development come first: either they come hand in hand as part of the digital revolution, or digitalisation will further entrench inequalities and facilitate a further restriction of fundamental freedoms by greater state and non-state controls.

Introduction

The prominence of digitalisation among the new EU priorities for external action is logical, especially given the light that COVID-19 has shone on the world's digital divide.[1] Nevertheless, some EU Delegations will understandably have difficulties integrating this new priority as local realities of partner countries may be calling for more urgent action in other areas. EU Delegations are challenged to identify ways in which to support the digital transformation in partner countries while ensuring a just transition towards greener and more inclusive economies.

The new EU external single instrument, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the administrative reform labelled as 'geographisation' have brought new flexibilities for EU Delegations. However, EU staff cannot be asked to square a circle that still remains widely open in Europe. What is the room for maneuver in the digital sphere when the biggest players are foreign? What is the point of regulation if there is no means to ensure its enforcement? What happens in countries in which civil society relies on social media companies for activities such as fundraising or communication with supporters? How can developing economies attempt to counter the influence of the hi-tech heavyweights?

Against such an uncertain global background, EU Delegations are expected to turn digitalisation into a force for good. However, ten years after the wave of digital optimism brought by the Arab Spring, there is an increasing awareness of the dark side of technology, not only in political terms – polarisation, surveillance, echo chambers, hate-speech – but also when it comes to the economy, as the digital transformation risks cementing existing differences and reinforcing existing inequalities.

The external action priorities of digitalisation and democratic governance are thus closely interconnected. To help turn these interrelated priorities into action at the country level, this paper aims at exploring the links between democracy, development and digitalisation from a normative perspective that seeks to advance EU values in the digital sphere. If the EU wants to become a "global digital leader" and help other like-minded countries to prosper and thrive, it must succeed in supporting digitalisation processes that are conducive to democracy and respectful of human rights, helping partner governments to resist the siren's call of a development model that is threatening the very foundations of the EU.

To avoid such unintended effects, this paper puts forward the 3D Nexus, a conceptual approach that seeks to ensure that its three Ds – Digitalisation, Development and Democracy – do not undermine each other and are promoted in complementary and mutually reinforcing ways. In many aspects, the advent of digitalisation and its intrinsically global nature have suddenly outdated the longstanding dilemma about what should come first, development or democracy. If something seems clear in an otherwise uncertain and hyper technological future is that both need to advance hand in hand, placing people and citizens at the heart of progress and ensuring that no one is left behind.

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1   United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2020): The COVID-19 crisis: accentuating the need to bridge digital divides. Available [here](#).

1. EU Digital Policy: Local versus global

In her first State of the European Union speech, the current President of the European Commission announced Europe's Digital Decade.[2] This call represents the peak of a period defined by an increasing focus on digital matters, especially in relation to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital markets, increased investment, and a more robust application of competition rules to digital platforms. The blueprint of this Digital Decade is the European Digital Strategy,[3] released in February 2020, resting upon four pillars: (1) Technology that works for people; (2) A fair and competitive digital economy; (3) An open, democratic and sustainable digital society and (4) Europe as a global digital player. The Digital Decade will be shaped by the way these themes will be translated into concrete action, backed up by [roughly 20%](#) of the whole EU budget and a significant share of the Recovery Fund, which similarly counts on digitalisation as the way to build back better.

The Digital Strategy has a strong external dimension. To complement the fourth pillar of the Digital Strategy – "Europe as a global digital player" –, a fact sheet[4] released by the Commission refines this goal, identifying the three key actions that the EU will have to take in order to become a global digital leader:

1. *Become a global role model for the digital economy;*
2. *Support developing economies in going digital; and*
3. *Develop digital standards and promote them internationally.*

The EU is well aware of the importance of exporting its own governance model across the world while supporting developing economies in going digital. This political objective is further reinforced by the EU's Joint Communication on the need for a rules-based multilateralism[5], as well as several goals expressed in various documents which are part of the Digital Strategy, such as the White Paper on AI, where the Commission expressly states that "the EU will continue to cooperate with like-minded countries, but also with global players, on AI, based on an approach based on EU rules and values (e.g. supporting upward regulatory convergence, accessing key resources including data, creating a level playing field)."[6]

We therefore argue that the European model must be centered around the concept of a **"Digital-Democracy-Development Nexus"** (hereafter: the 3D Nexus) and actively seek to balance the political, economic and social dimensions of the current process of transformation. Practically speaking, this means focusing on actions that tick all three boxes. Only by doing so can the EU become a global digital leader along with China, which has set itself the same aim in AI, and the United States, which is currently the de facto leader thanks to Silicon Valley and its tech giants. In a hearing in the European Parliament, the Commissioner for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age, Margrethe Vestager, argued that despite the US having the money, and China the data, what the EU has is vision

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2   State of the Union 2020 - President von der Leyen's speech, available [here](#).

3   European Commission, The European Digital Strategy, available [here.](#)

4   European Commission, Factsheet, Shaping Europe's digital future, available [here.](#)

5   Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism. Brussels, 17.2.2021 JOIN(2021) 3 final, available [here.](#)

6   European Commission (2020), White Paper On Artificial Intelligence - A European approach to excellence and trust, Brussels, 19.2.2020, COM(2020) 65 final, available [here.](#)

and determination.[7]

Such vision and determination clearly depend on the EU's capacity to export a governance model based on its values and standards. Or, in other words, to make use of its soft power, which is heavily dependent on both its trade and development policies. The EU cannot limit itself to supporting the economies of partner countries in going digital. It must do so in ways that simultaneously reinforce democracy and human rights, not only setting standards but ensuring compliance through appropriate conditionality. Only by sticking to its own values will the EU be able to lead the type of concerted action at global level that underpins its forthcoming Global Digital Cooperation Strategy, to be released in 2021, and truly export its governance model.

However, this is where EU Delegations are likely to find themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place. In order to avoid partner countries from missing the digital revolution, EU Delegations are expected to support economies in going digital. But focusing on fostering development without taking into consideration the potential impact of such transformations on democracy would be outright self-destructive for the EU. For example, tools that promise increased public security - like facial recognition - and efficiency of public service - like automated decision-making - can undermine democratic oversight and freedoms even in democratic regimes.

The recently adopted European Democracy Action Plan underlines the importance of democracy in the digital sphere in Europe and outside.[8] EU Delegations are therefore going to play a crucial role in this policy push. Providing Delegations with extra funding through "geographisation" is not going to make much difference in this regard; on the contrary, it may place an extra

burden on their shoulders in terms of workload and higher pressure to deliver development results. While the Digital4Development approach - as detailed in a Commission Staff Working Document - gives some indication of how digitalisation can spur human and economic development, it does not take into account the role of digitalisation in both advancing and repressing democratic development.[9] What EU Delegations are going to need is, on the one hand, enough leeway and political backing to truly ensure the coherence of policies and, on the other hand, clarity of purpose when it comes to advancing EU values through digitalisation, including the use of a rights-based approach.[10]

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7 European Parliament (2019), Hearing of Executive Vice President-designate Margrethe Vestager, Verbatim Report. Available here.

8 European Commission (2020): European Democracy Action Plan. Available here.

9 European Commission (2017): Digital4Development: mainstreaming digital technologies and services into EU Development Policy. Commission Staff Working Document. Available here.

10 European Commission (2014): A Rights-Based Approach, Encompassing All Human Rights in EU Development Cooperation. Available here.

2. The 3D Nexus explained

The Digital-Democracy-Development Nexus provides this clarity, especially upon close analysis of tools and policies that are already in use. The 3D Nexus is a shorthand for the interplay between democracy, digital and development issues, all considered as highly complementary priorities when devising tools or policies. Some examples of where this interplay can be found are the use of big data for citizen engagement in waste management, the use of civic tech for improving the accessibility of policy documents, the use of digital applications in electoral processes or the extension of broadband internet access and digital literacy to marginalised communities.

What these examples have in common is their conceptual structure based on the three dimensions that make up the 3D Nexus. They use digital tools in order to strengthen society as a whole or a specific sector or industry, while at the same time enhancing democracy rather than undermining it. At the opposite end of the spectrum is a technology such as biometric surveillance, which can use digital tools to improve the efficiency of state action – protecting citizens and fighting crime – but that is highly damaging to privacy rights and opens up the possibilities of covert surveillance. Advancing the Digital-Democracy-Development Nexus means addressing these three dimensions together, so that the EU and EU Delegations can help to trigger a virtuous circle of inclusion, empowerment and participation that characterises successful development processes.

In what follows, we will analyse those issues that sit at the intersection of digital, development and democracy. These are areas on which EU Delegations, together with Member States, can focus their support in order to prevent unintended effects and deliver results that reinforce each other. Still, as with any means of analysis, there are also pitfalls to watch out for. The application of digital technologies can be a boon for development and rights or
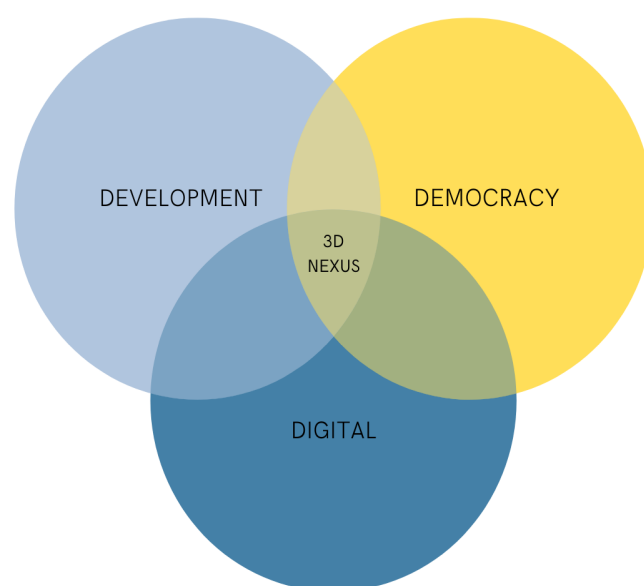
a major threat: it all depends on how they are used and, crucially, who controls those technologies.

The section below provides an overview of the challenges and potential responses at country level, as well as references to those EU support tools that can be mobilised throughout the programming, formulation and implementation stages of EU-funded operations.

3. From planning to practice

As the digital world evolves, it brings more opportunities and challenges for citizens, businesses and policy-makers. The global nature of digitalisation, combined with the local impact of its consequences, places digitalisation support in an operational middle-ground, a policy arena where the multilateral and the bilateral must converge to deliver results that do not undermine each other. Arguably, this is what will ultimately decide the success or failure of "geographisation": the capacity of EU Delegations to develop fruitful partnerships with partner countries to jointly tackle the most pressing global challenges – not only digitalisation, but also climate change, migration or inequalities – while responding to the most urgent needs of their population.

To this end, and following the "policy-first" principle[11], EU Delegations can choose to deploy different means of implementation depending on the actual needs of the policy that they seek to support. With regards to digitalisation, it is easy to imagine EU Delegations making use of the whole toolkit at different stages of their operations and according to different policy objectives. Many EU Delegations have already engaged in policy dialogue with partner countries on data protection or access to information. In the previous programming period some launched budget support programmes with clear links to digitalisation policy through other sectors of support[12], while EU blending operations (combining public grants with loans or equity) are financing key digital infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives on digital skills are proliferating.

The following sections provide an introduction of concrete issues where the Digital-Democracy-Development Nexus comes into play and where EU Delegations could use digitalisation to advance both development and democracy. These issues are:

1. **Automated decision-making in public administration**
2. **Data protection**
3. **Internet access**
4. **Accountability and control of tech**
5. **A free information environment, and**
6. **The digital divide.**

All six of these issues fall squarely in the intersection between digitalisation, development and democracy, i.e.: the 3D Nexus. But the list is by no means exhaustive, as there are certainly other issues that sit in the 3D Nexus where there are clear opportunities for positive impact. For each of these issues, the paper looks at how the Digital-Democracy-Development Nexus can inform EU action, with some practical ideas and best practices.

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11   As the NDICI guidelines to EU Delegations clearly state: "The NDICI has been designed to reinforce the policy-driven approach to EU cooperation and international partnerships". More specifically, "according to the policy-first principle, priority areas should embrace wide domains for engagement and should be informed by the strategic objectives identified during the pre- programming phase." "To apply the policy first principle, Delegations and Headquarters services should ensure that cooperation with partner countries is guided by EU strategic policy objectives, as notably identified in the preparatory work to the programming. Programming should be anchored in strong partnerships established through a multi-stakeholder dialogue and reflecting shared interests and priorities."

12   For a full list of budget support projects, see the Budget Support Trends & Results report.

3.1. Automated decision-making in public administration

The idea behind using big data and automated decision-making in public administration is to improve and accelerate decision-making. As a result, machine learning – one among the many applications of artificial intelligence (AI) – is becoming increasingly popular, and a number of governments, such as the UK, the Netherlands or France, have already started using it in multiple different policy areas. In machine learning, data is fed into algorithms, which learn from it for the purposes of reaching decisions. While this process is digital, it has crucial real-world implications for government and citizens.

The use of AI and big data is going to be crucial to economic development, similar to the revolution brought by the availability of statistics. High technologies can improve the types of evidence-based policy making that the EU has been promoting with partner countries in the last two decades. Better informed and faster decision-making could have the potential of improving developmental processes and spurring economic growth, with gains in efficiency as well as the identification of new opportunities. Nevertheless, politicians and analysts have expressed concerns on the impact of AI on employment. While AI can create new jobs, it can also lead to the elimination of existing jobs within government and outside, fundamentally altering the job market. In countries with high unemployment the risks are therefore significant in the short-run.

At the same time, there is also a significant risk of seeing existing societal biases reproduced and discrimination reinforced through the use of machine learning. Like humans, algorithms can take decisions which are biased by discriminatory considerations with worrying implications for equality, particularly as this has already occurred in justice, welfare and immigration systems in Europe. If this happens where democratic oversight is relatively strong, it poses significant questions in countries without appropriate checks and balances and opens the door to politically motivated decisions cloaked in the neutrality of machine learning.

For both EU Delegations and the European Commission, the key to turning AI into a force of good will be to promote algorithmic accountability and transparency in regulation and practice, both within and outside the Union. The European Commission proposed the first ever legal framework on AI in April 2021. This Artificial Intelligence Act focuses on restricting 'high-risk' uses of AI, protecting fundamental rights and helping set the stage for the EU to be a global leader on AI regulation. As a similar challenge lies ahead for EU partner countries, EU delegations can play a critical role in advancing accountable AI regulation and practices, by ensuring oversight actors can understand how decisions are made. To this end, EU Delegations will be best placed to provide pivotal support to public administrations and institutional oversight actors, as well as civil society oversight and participation.

Recommendations & Best Practices

Use of AI for evidence-based policy-making and rapid response	
Making use of AI could lead not only to discover issues in a timely manner but also to find the best ways to address them in areas such as human rights, waste management, agriculture or transport - thus contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	Peoples Intelligence (PI) automates the collection of relevant humanitarian and human rights data from hard-to-access areas and verifies it using crowd-sourcing and mobile phones. EU Delegations could also draw on the work of the Council of Europe on promoting trustworthy AI in Council of Europe partner countries.

Automation of public services	
EU delegations can support the digitalisation of public administration and services, while simultaneously encouraging human oversight and transparency.	In India, the eGov's DIGIT platform enables the digitisation of service delivery and automation of internal urban processes, namely record-keeping of property issues.

Twinning and software transfer on e-Governance	
Considering the importance of digital tools in the Public Administrations of most EU Member States, Twinning projects (now possible beyond the Neighbourhood) can be used to provide technical support to Public Administration Management Systems.	Already existing Twinning projects focusing on e-governance can serve as inspiration for other EUDs, such as "Strengthening of e-Governance in Georgia" (phases 1 and 2), which has been instrumental in advancing the knowledge base of the Georgian Data Exchange Agency's (DEA) and amending Georgia's e-governance related laws according to EU legislation.

Civil society oversight over AI	
EU Delegations can support civil society in building capacity to highlight and address the challenges of an increasingly AI-driven world, such as assessing the biases of datasets, auditing algorithms and monitoring the impact of AI in public administration and on human rights.	In the UK, there have been experiments with citizen deliberation over AI explainability. Two citizens' juries explored whether automated decisions that affect people should require an explanation, even if that impacts AI performance.

Use of blockchain technology to increase public confidence	
Thanks to its built-in mechanism dedicated to record-keeping, transparency, and auditability, blockchain technology, if well-implemented, can provide governments with an efficient means of guaranteeing public titles, conducting safe transactions and public procurement.	The National Agency of Public Registry (NAPR) of the Republic of Georgia uses blockchain technology to provide its citizens with a digital certificate of their land title. It does so by adding the cryptographical proof that the transaction is published on the Bitcoin blockchain.

3.2. Data and privacy

One of the key characteristics of AI development is its need for data. The more data available, the more an algorithm can learn. Better learning leads, in turn, to quicker and better automated decision-making. The race for AI development is therefore also a race for data. The EU has cemented its position as a global leader in support of data protection through the adoption of the GDPR.[1] Its work on this topic has been continued with the publication of the Data Governance Act,[2] in November 2020, which is based around ideas such as the re-use of protected data by public sector authorities, data sharing services, and data altruism. All of these are centered around the idea of how data can best be used, where it is appropriate to share it and where it must be protected.

Recent years have seen a tremendous growth of data-driven technology companies, many of whom consistently breach data protection rules. Yet data-driven technologies do not have to disrespect privacy - new technologies that build-in privacy by design are greatly contributing to innovation and growth. For policy-makers around the world, it is a challenge to strike the right balance between privacy on the one hand, and limited data protection rules to stimulate unhampered economic innovation on the other hand. For this reason, the EU has a two-dimensional approach, setting up strong protective barriers between personal data and non-personal data. This bidimensional approach therefore aims to ensure the development of the digital sector and the growth of the digital economy without endangering privacy.

The protection of personal data is important for democracy. Consumer and citizen profiling and tracking through data poses serious concerns for privacy, intimacy and ownership over the data trail that every technology user leaves behind. The same can be said for voter profiling in electoral campaigns. Indeed, many big digital platforms that are widely used by consumers around the world are running on a "service-for-data" business model which 'charges' users through the collection of large amounts of data. While some users may not be concerned about data collection by private companies, such data can be used for political manipulation and extreme repression of freedoms in the hands of autocratic regimes or companies. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown how the very idea of 'privacy' can be reshaped and redrawn[3] even if the right to privacy is enshrined in international law.[4]

The approach of the EU, focused on both personal data protection and non-personal data sharing for growth, provides a relevant blueprint in EU engagement on data around the world - both in terms of support to local policy-processes and data protection authorities, and for the exchange of data with partner countries. At the same time, making policy discussions on data protection as inclusive and participatory as possible, EU Delegations can open new spaces – or strengthen existing ones – to facilitate domestic debate on data ownership and privacy.

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1   Available here.

2   European Commission (2020), Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on European data governance (Data Governance Act) COM/2020/767 final. Available here.

3   See for example Ventrella E (2020), "Privacy in emergency circumstances: data protection and the COVID-19 pandemic", ERA Forum Vol. 21, 379-393, available here.

4   International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Available here.

Recommendations & Best Practices

Policy Dialogue on Digital Rights - encouraging policy co-creation through hubs	
Hubs are a popular idea, often used in the digital sector. They bring together people working in various environments for the purposes of coming up with creative and robust solutions for existing problems by making the most out of available data.	One such example is the i4Policy movement managed by the i4Policy Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation created in 2016 to support the emergence of policy reforms driven by local communities of "policy users" (the people affected by public policy) in Africa.

Technical Assistance on Data Protection Regulation	
Technical assistance programmes can support data protection authorities, parliamentary research services, civil society groups and policy development units within political parties in a multiparty non-partisan manner, to improve skills and knowledge of data and privacy. This can help to ensure that new legislation on data protection and privacy adheres to human rights standards and promote broader awareness raising and lesson sharing.	The Council of Europe (CoE) currently implements a series of projects on data protection that are aimed at providing legal and technical assistance to different state bodies. This technical assistance supports the implementation of CoE standards in Morocco, Tunisia and Georgia.

Budget support to Data Protection Bodies	
In the same vein, to engage in this type of work, Data Protection Bodies need appropriate resources, without which the challenges they are due to meet could well prove insurmountable. Direct funding to these bodies can give them the initial resources needed to set clear standards in a rapidly developing field - the principles of data protection should be a fundamental element of discussions in preparation for any support.	EU budget support has thus far not focused on digitalisation specifically, with digitalisation considered as a tool to advance other objectives. We recommend the EU to set a global example for this, for instance through budget support to data protection authorities.

Collaborative Research	
The complexity and relative volatility of this area makes it a constant subject of research, which is needed to tie in the data collected with the potential positive impact that it can have if applied appropriately.	Open Cities Lab is a non-profit open and non-partisan organisation in South Africa that combines the use of research, co-design, data science, and technology with civic engagement. It aims to empower citizens by helping them to better understand their rights.

3.3. Connectivity and access to a free internet

Uninhibited access to an open internet is increasingly becoming essential for citizens to exercise their fundamental freedoms and participate in democratic debate, as well as for productivity and learning in the digital economy. Internet access itself is increasingly considered a fundamental human right.[1] This is why the European Commission sees connectivity as a "fundamental building block of the digital transformation and the enabler of a sustainable future" and seeks to support and catalyse investments in digital connectivity infrastructures of common interest both within Europe and in partner countries.

Unfortunately, a stable connection and open access cannot be taken for granted. In many countries around the world, the necessary framework and infrastructure for broadband and mobile access is either partial or missing, with limited investments. Moreover, in recent years governments have turned to internet shutdowns to restrict access to the internet at specifically important political moments. A report by Human Rights Watch shows that in 2020 at least ten countries experienced general or regional shutdowns dictated by the state in an attempt to stifle critics. Internet shutdowns also have an important toll on the economy: a study concluded that in 2019 there were a total of 18,000 hours of internet shutdowns, costing the global economy over eight billion U.S. dollars.[2]

Even more important than this estimated economic effect is the impact of shutdowns in civic rights now that a considerable part of political life unfolds in the digital realm, as the Covid-19 crisis has dramatically revealed. Secure internet access provides a lifeline to many activists, who use online tools for mobilising, fundraising and organising in repressive contexts. In addition to internet shutdowns, other methods like firewalls or mobile phone packages or outright censorship negatively impact how much of the internet an individual in a specific locality can actually access. Moreover, a lack of net neutrality regulation can hamper free information exchange and innovation. These inequalities, which often reproduce previously existing gaps, risk being perpetuated if the precondition to partake in the digital economy keeps being denied to some people for economic or political reasons.

At a time of debates about whether a 'right to the internet' should be recognised, the EU can raise the issue of internet shutdowns or disruptions in its political and human rights dialogues, and support initiatives which seek to ensure continuous and uninterrupted access or monitor internet shutdowns. Moreover, through innovative financing the EU can mobilise funding and attract investments that ensure the development of digital infrastructures across partner countries, compensating the market-driven approach of private operators with economic incentives to avoid the kind of disequilibrium that would end up undermining territorial and social cohesion. In this way, the EU can contribute to a connectivity that brings economic and political opportunities for everyone.

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1   European Parliament President David Sassoli has, for instance, written a letter calling for internet access to be considered a universal human right. Available here.

2   Freedom House (2019), Freedom on the Net, available here.

Recommendations & Best Practices

Policy dialogue & coalition-building	
Participatory policy dialogue on internet infrastructure investments, regulatory reform for internet access, and programmes for increasing access for vulnerable groups can go a long way to bridging the inequalities resulting from unequal access to the internet and tech tools. Coalitions that bring in national and local government, community organisers, national civil society and the private sector can pave the way to such inclusive reform.	The Alliance for Affordable Internet is a global coalition working to drive down the cost of internet access in low- and middle-income countries through policy and regulatory reform. It works on the ground in countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America & the Caribbean to build national coalitions comprising representatives from the public, private, and civil society sectors to lead local efforts to advance affordable internet access. Every year, it releases an "Affordability Report", outlining its work. Similarly, the EQUALS Access Coalition works on the issue of access to the internet, with a particular focus on the discrepancies resulting from the gender gap in access to the internet between men and women.
Civil society support against internet shutdowns	
The economic cost of internet shutdowns is often disregarded. Furthermore, shutdowns have a variety of negative impacts, depending on the context in which they appear, their length and severity. Campaigns raising awareness about them are essential in defining the problem and finding the best ways to address it. In addition, EU Delegations can send a strong political message by supporting such campaigns.	The 'Keep it On' campaign by Access Now addresses internet shutdowns by keeping track of them and raising awareness about their negative impact. ARTICLE 19 similarly monitors internet shutdowns and engages in in-depth research on the impact of internet shutdowns in specific countries, like Iran.
Blending for infrastructure investment	
Blending can incentivise private sector investments into the expansion of technological infrastructure - such as internet broadband for instance - to rural and marginalised communities. Through the External Investment Plan, the EU can support the creation of regional connectivity infrastructure in a way that mitigates risk. It is essential that the European Commission includes clauses in these grant contracts that prohibit internet shutdowns, and requires investors to consult the affected communities.	The AfricaConnect3 project - co-financed by the European Commission - has created UbuntuNet, a high-capacity regional data network for research and education in Eastern and Southern Africa, in order to improve the volume and reliability of connectivity to the global research and education community. With the BELLA project, the EU used blended finance methods for funding the construction of the 6,000km undersea cable connecting data centres from Portugal to Brazil.

3.4. Accountability, transparency and control over tech

DIGITALISATION

Due to its complexity, technologies such as AI are highly inaccessible for the regular citizens. AI is defined by its 'opacity', meaning that its functioning is sometimes unknown even by its programmers. Similarly, many other digital technologies are also marked by a lack of transparency in the collection and processing of data. Not all technologies lack transparency, however, with open-source technologies setting an important example of ways to build transparent and accountable technologies.[1] This situation raises a number of issues in relation to how these systems can be regulated and who is responsible when things go wrong.

DEVELOPMENT

As high technologies are particularly resource intensive to develop and produce, most of the leading tech companies are large US- or China-based companies that operate globally. This makes it particularly hard for smaller and developing economies to tax, oversee and control these companies - despite their major economic, social and political role in these societies. As a result, many emerging economies are not profiting from the digital revolution as much as they could. Local taxation for these borderless digital technologies is of the essence as is investment in research and innovation within emerging economies.

DEMOCRACY

In addition, there is a large knowledge imbalance between tech companies, and institutional and non-governmental oversight actors, who have very little opportunities to scrutinise technological black boxes. Technologies' reliance on data means that a solid data protection framework is a prerequisite, making regulation all the more challenging. In this regard, the EU's approach to regulating AI prioritises 'explainability', and the Digital Services Act proposal promotes transparency and accountability for big digital platforms through audits, transparency measures, risk assessments and codes of conduct. [2] [3] As our lives take place as much virtually as offline, the regulation of digital tech companies is both necessary for democracy and risky for fundamental freedoms.

3D NEXUS

Given the global reach and economic power of tech giants, digitalisation without democratic oversight risks increasing global inequalities and raising profits for digital tech companies without economic growth and innovation for developing economies. In order for citizens to reap the benefits of digitalisation, the EU's partner countries will need strong regulation, new skills, and a vibrant civil society. To this end, EU Delegations can support national oversight institutions and policy reform, to update or develop legislation to regulate digital tech companies. EU Delegations can also bring to the digital sphere the 'traditional' accountability mechanisms such as the strengthening of civil society. Building bridges between traditional and new CSOs, which are more tech oriented but less politically savvy, could be a good start in reversing the trend towards shrinking space.

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1   In this context, the EU is working to promote interoperable solutions for public service, administration and citizens, as well as an investment tool specifically for open-source projects.

2   European Commission (2019), Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI, available here.

3   European Commission (2020), Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC, available here.

Recommendations & Best Practices

Capacity-building for civil society, policy-makers and politicians	
Given the novelty and complexity of digital tech issues, both legislators and oversight actors require new skills and knowledge to adequately regulate digital tech in a rights-respecting manner and to oversee the implementation of regulation. Capacity-building on digital technologies and their impact on human rights and democracy are critical for policy-makers, parliaments, political parties and civil society.	Through their digital programme, ARTICLE 19 provides technical expertise on human rights in internet infrastructure, battling governance surveillance, strengthening data protection, and capacity-building on digital security. Democracy Reporting International has developed the Digital Democracy Knowledge Hub with an interactive database on 27 EU member states' approaches to tackling disinformation and hate speech online.

Supporting accountability and participation technologies	
Civic technologies are emerging in most developing countries and have a great potential for development, both in economic and democratic terms. Based on a different paradigm, that of cooperation instead of competition, they tend to fall out of the usual financing circuits. EU support at the country level could act as a catalyst for these homegrown initiatives and provide them with access (to funds, to relevant experiences, to decision-makers…) and outreach (facilitating their networking with similar projects in Europe, assessing their replicability, promoting the pooling of resources, etc.). In addition, EU Delegations can invest in open source technologies.	EU Delegations can draw inspiration from the wide array of Civic Tech initiatives that were identified by the EC's facility Supporting Democracy. The MyCountry portal, developed by the ePanstwo Foundation, is a set of applications to track and influence state administration activity, with easy access to laws and court rulings. The Mzalendo interactive online platform in Kenya makes information on parliamentary activities easy to access, collates citizens' views on parliamentary activities and shares this feedback with Parliament.

Developing regional digital rights frameworks	
In order to safeguard human rights in the digital sphere, universal human rights legislation needs to be interpreted and clarified in the context of the digital space. The EU itself is considering a Charter for Digital Rights, and can provide its advice and learn from similar initiatives globally.	Successful examples so far include the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms, a Pan-African initiative to promote human rights standards and principles of openness in Internet policy formulation and implementation on the continent. Indela (Initiative for digital rights in Latin America) is an organisation which funds and supports organisations that work to advance digital rights in Latin America.

Support coalitions for policy reform	
Coalitions for change can be powerful drivers of policy reform by either making the most of existing windows for change or creating those windows themselves. These reforms can be supported by bringing together traditional CSOs, parliamentarians, civic tech leaders, businesses and political parties.	In Morocco, the 'Information & Integrity' initiative aims to strengthen the role of civil society in promoting transparency through a combination of policy dialogue and civic technology, thereby contributing to enhanced government accountability as well as trust between citizens and public officials.

3.5. Pluralist and free information environment

DIGITALISATION

Citizens today increasingly get their news and information through a small number of social media platforms, which have increasingly become gatekeepers of the information environment. This has greatly facilitated the speed of information sharing, but it has also come with a cost for quality news media. As social media platforms have overtaken the advertising revenue that would have traditionally gone to publishers such as newspapers, media actors have been facing major financial losses and instability. Social media algorithms reward sensationalist news reporting, rather than nuance and well-researched investigative journalism, thereby limiting the spread of quality news reporting and disincentivising its production more generally.

DEVELOPMENT

A free and pluralistic media environment is an essential cornerstone for economic and human development.[1] Free media expose corruption and keep public policy in check, which are important factors for attracting foreign investments and fostering economic growth. Media can help markets work better, by facilitating trade and spreading innovation across borders. Media likewise have an important role in human development, spreading health and education information to the least accessible spaces. The digitalisation of the media landscape and advent of social media platforms have greatly deteriorated the financial sustainability of traditional media actors, particularly in small national media markets, despite their essential role for economic and human development and democracy.

DEMOCRACY

While the new opportunities for citizen reporting, online mobilisation and free expression cannot be understated, particularly in repressive contexts, traditional quality media remains a prerequisite for the functioning of democracy. While traditional quality media platforms struggle to sustain themselves, online platforms can deplatform people without appeal or amplify certain voices at the expense of others through their ads or the algorithmic prioritisation of sensationalist posts. This results in phenomena such as echo chambers, which deepen existing divides and polarisation, as well as the proliferation of hate speech and disinformation. Sustaining both online spaces of expression and democratic debate, and traditional media platforms and actors, is thus of the essence for sustaining democratic deliberation.

3D NEXUS

EU support for independent media is nothing new. Capacity-building, training on investigative journalism, and subgranting mechanisms to support relevant media outlets are already part of most EUDs' portfolios, but more substantial amounts should be invested (through blending and other innovative financing) to help the development of quality journalism. As with CSOs, the reliance on external funding sources hinders the long-term sustainability of these independent media voices. Support should thus also focus on helping media outlets adapt to the digital information environment - both in terms of digitalising their content and developing sustainable income sources on the digital format. Fact-checking mechanisms, self-regulation initiatives, media literacy to combat disinformation and the promotion of citizen journalism are other lines of work that EUDs could promote through cooperation with local CSOs and international partners.

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1 World Bank Institute (2002): The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development. Available here.

Recommendations & Best Practices

Promoting investigative journalism and independent media	
Independent media can provide a critical platform for accountability in restrictive environments. Journalistic investigations into tech companies will likewise be essential for safeguarding human rights in the digital sphere. EU Delegations can support these actors with direct funding, and capacity building on digital security, digital policy issues, and digital investigative methods.	As part of the Digital Strategy, the Commission has launched a EUR 3.9 million fund for investigative journalism. The IJ4EU fund supports cross-border investigations of public interest in Europe. In 2021, IJ4EU will provide €1.1 million in grant funding to watchdog journalism, along with practical, editorial and legal support.

Supporting fact-checking and quality media	
Through capacity-building and direct grants to media and fact-checking organisations, donors can support the dissemination of truthful information and thereby counter online disinformation.	Some examples include PesaCheck (active in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) and Dubawa (working in Nigeria). Africa Check is the continent's first independent fact-checking organisation.

Policy dialogue on internet platforms and media pluralism	
Media outlets' financial sustainability and reporting quality has suffered from the growth of internet platforms and shrinking space. By supporting inclusive policy dialogue, donors can contribute towards policy that regulates internet platforms in a way that safeguards freedoms, and advances media pluralism and quality news media.	The International Institute for Sustainable Development has developed a toolkit specifically for policy dialogue on internet policy. At European level, AlgorithmWatch led a policy dialogue on data access to online platforms.

Innovative financing and blending	
With innovative financing and funding tools like blending, donors can stimulate the growth of digital media and the digitalisation of traditional media. This is necessary particularly in smaller media markets.	The Media Development Investment Fund combines private equity, debt and hybrid funds, to provide financing to independent media in countries where access to free and independent information is under threat.

Media literacy, hate speech and disinformation	
Digital and media literacy are essential for navigating the digital economy, which impact both job security, political opinion formation and social cohesion. Education and awareness raising - through the formal education system or through civil society - is essential to this end.	The EU-funded Building Resistance in Youth in Central Asia project includes an online game to raise awareness and resistance against hate speech and disinformation online. Democracy Reporting International has developed an online toolkit for monitoring social media, and exposing the risks of democratic discourse manipulation on social media in their own countries.

3.6. Digital divide

DIGITALISATION

Inequalities that exist in society replicate themselves in the digital realm, giving way to what has become known as the digital divide - the growing inequality in access to digital technologies, infrastructures and software and the different ways in which the digital transformation is leaving the most vulnerable behind. One of the most urgent aspects of this divide is certainly the digital gender gap, which refers to the differences in access to digital devices as well as differences in digital literacy and proficiency between men and women.[1] On top of that, women, minorities, and persons from racialised, poor and marginalised communities are also underrepresented in the development of new technologies, which in turns leads to further bias and discrimination entrenched in the functioning of the technologies themselves.[2] Going further, the digital divide also has an urban-rural dimension, as well an age-based dimension.

DEVELOPMENT

The gains of digitalisation will only boost economic and human development if these gains are shared equitably among all people in society.[3] The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically showcased that a lack of access to internet and digital tools can mean a lack of education and health information. Moreover, the digital divide causes large shares of human capital to be missed in the digital economy, leading to missed opportunities in the real economy. Lastly, the digital divide risks further deepening existing inequalities. The digital gender gap, for instance, risks undermining the socio-economic progress made by women in other areas. Similarly, the difference between 'smart' cities and rural areas is increasing at a great pace, reproducing the same divide that has emerged globally between developed and developing economies.

DEMOCRACY

From a democratic standpoint, citizens should have equal access to information and an equal ability to engage in agenda setting. In the digital age, this is not possible without access to digital technologies and sufficient digital literacy. Many political actors use social media to connect with their electorate, for instance, thereby missing large parts of the population in their online consultations and campaigning. Bridging the digital divide requires inclusive political decision-making processes that takes into consideration the obstacles to connectivity and the digital skills of all people in society, especially those underrepresented and marginalised populations.

3D NEXUS

As part of its response to the digital divide internally, the EU has supported investments and activities related to digital skills, as well as a recent Digital Education Action Plan with commitments to ensure that basic digital skills and competences are acquired at an early stage. Externally, the Gender Action Plan III[4] commits to focus on bridging the digital gender divide, amongst others by promoting digital literacy, improving access to affordable, accessible, safe and secure digital connectivity, and supporting women digital innovators and entrepreneurs. With a combination of sectoral support, capacity building, and blended finance and investments, EU delegations can help break down the structural barriers of the digital divide and thereby help advance the economic and political opportunities of the digital transformation for women, girls, minorities, racialised groups, rural communities and vulnerable populations. Civil society could also be involved in impact assessments for budget support and innovative financing, to ensure inclusiveness.[5]

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1   According to ITU (here), in 2019 the internet gender gap in the least developed countries was 42.8%.

2   See, for example, Agarwal, P. (2020), "Gender Bias In STEM: Women In Tech Still Facing Discrimination", Forbes, available here.

3   World Bank (2016), "World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends". Available here.

4   Available here.

5   See for example this programme in South Africa.

Recommendations & Best Practices

Sectoral policy reform and budget support	
In order to ensure the digital transition is just and inclusive, "sector policies" and budgeting on education, health, transport and other sectors will need to take into account inequalities in access to technologies and digital skills. Inclusive policy dialogue and oversight over sectoral budget support will be essential for ensuring all government programmes, investments and policy reform will advance the access and opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups.	The Women's Rights Online network (WRO) - formed in 2015, by CSOs across 14 low- and middle-income countries - strives to bridge the gender gap and drive women's empowerment, by focusing on policy reform towards connectivity, skills and opportunities to participate in the digital revolution.
Capacity-building for digital skills	
To reap the full economic gains from digitalisation, everybody's digital skills will need to improve, including women, rural populations, disadvantaged and marginalised groups and minorities. EU Delegations can support digital skills programmes building on local initiatives and entry points, in addition to working with the public education sector to increase the focus on digital skills and literacy.	The European Commission has already organised hackathons. For instance, last year the European Big Data Hackathon gathered teams from all over Europe. Participants competed for the best data product combining official statistics and big data to support policy makers in one pressing policy question or statistical challenge facing Europe.
Investment in women entrepreneurs and tech leaders	
Investment in combination with training and mentoring of women tech entrepreneurs and tech community leaders can both advance gender sensitive technology development and help advance women's position in policy-making.	Some local CSOs are turning into hubs that aim at strengthening digital skills of vulnerable women and provide them with co-working spaces to develop their start-ups. One of them is Lisungi Fablab, supported by Orange and l'Agence universitaire de la Francophonie.

The EU monitors women's participation in the digital sector in Europe through the Women in Digital (WID) Scoreboard. |
| **Awareness raising and digital skills** | |
| Raising awareness of digital tools, skills and human rights online is essential for making the digital revolution more inclusive. This can be done through civil society support, training centres and campaigns, amongst others. | Hollaback! has created HeartMob, a web platform that provides real-time support to individuals experiencing online harassment and empowers bystanders to act, including extensive assistance to those suffering from harassment. |

4. EU Delegation toolkit on the 3D Nexus

As articulated throughout the paper, the 3D Nexus is an operational approach that should allow EU Delegations to make the most of their resources to support the digital transformation in partner countries without undermining the EU's Digital policy at global level, i.e. ensuring that democratic concerns and digital rights don't become just an afterthought.

To this end, the table in the next page offers an overview of the ways in which EUDs could mobilise their main means of implementation to address the six priority areas analysed in this paper. While these example initiatives are presented in clear "boxes", none of them are truly isolated. Potential links and overlaps will have to be identified in order to ensure a proper balance among the many diverse elements that conform the digital landscape.

The main instrument at the disposal of EUDs is dialogue on policies, understood as an inclusive process bringing together the key stakeholders from the partner country to jointly agree on the main principles that should drive digital transformation and those priority areas in which they could benefit from EU support. Such 'Policy Dialogue' can be held on each of the priority areas, but for the sake of consistency it is advisable to frame it more generally so as to ensure that the many interconnections are being taken on board.

	Budget Support	Technical Assistance and Institution Building	Innovative financing	Capacity development
Big data and automated decision-making in public administration	Use of Big Data for evidence-based policy-making in Sector Policies / Adaptation of Statistical systems to Big Data	Technical support to Public Administration Management Systems (Knowledge and Software Transfer)	Use of AI modeling for Impact Assessments of blending projects	Promotion of digital skills among Public Administration / Digital revamping of MPs and policy-makers
Data protection, Privacy and Beyond	Support to Data Protection Authorities	T.A. on Data Protection Regulation + Institution Building for Data Protection Authorities	Investments in Blockchain privacy systems (e.g. healthcare records)	Data awareness raising campaigns / Digital literacy training schemes (ToT)
Connectivity and access to a free internet	Access points in remote areas / Support to Local Authorities in the provision of free internet	Supporting decentralization through I.T. systems / Prevention of blackouts	Access to finance for local operators / Infrastructure in the regions	Multi-stakeholder Hubs based on participatory governance
Accountability, Transparency and Control over tech	Digital oversight and citizen engagement	T.A. and Twinning on mechanisms for transparency and accountability	Incubators and accelerators of civic tech initiatives and social economy	Generational divide + Digital Gap: Partnering up between old-school and new civil society organizations
Pluralist and Free Information Environment	Justice reform to integrate digital rights / Support to enforcement mechanisms	T.A. on fact-checking / T.A. on negotiation in multilateral fora	Financial leverage and business plans for local media actors	Media Literacy / CD of independent media outlets
Digital Divide (gender, rural & global)	Support to inclusive digitalisation plans and strategies	Technical support	Investments in infrastructure, (to provide access to the most vulnerable)	Trainings and ToT schemes for rural populations

Annex: Civil society organisations working on digitalisation

ARTICLE 19	A UK-based organisation working on freedom of expression, independent media and digital rights globally.
ePanstwo Foundation	ePaństwo Foundation's aim is to develop democracy, open and transparent authorities and civic engagement. They take various types of public data and, using the power of Internet and new technologies, present it to citizens free of charge. They give citizens the knowledge and the tools to make their country better.
Code for All	Code for All is an international network of organisations supporting each other to empower citizens to meaningfully engage in the public sphere and have a positive impact on their communities, while also working on helping civic institutions to be more open, democratic, and equitable in the services they provide to the public through digital technology.
Democracy Reporting International	A Berlin-based organisation working on supporting democratic principles
Privacy International	Privacy International is a UK-based registered charity that defends and promotes the right to privacy across the world.
Electronic Frontier Foundation	The Electronic Frontier Foundation is an international non-profit digital rights group based in San Francisco, California.
Access Now	Access Now is a non-profit founded in 2009 with a mission to defend and extend the digital civil rights of people around the world. Access Now supports several programs including an annual conference on Human Rights, an index of internet shutdowns, and providing exit nodes for Tor network.
Civic Tech Guide	The Civic Tech Field Guide is a crowdsourced, global collection of tech for good tools and projects. Thousands of civic tech practitioners from over 100 countries around the world have contributed to this living resource. It catalogues tools, conferences, funders, awards, design principles and playbooks.
Digital Defenders Partnership	The Digital Defenders Partnership offers support to human rights defenders under digital threat, and works to strengthen local rapid response networks.
Principles for Digital Development	With the advent of accessible digital technology more than a decade ago, international development organisations began seeking new ways of including digital tools in their programming for improved outcomes. The 9 Digital Principles were developed to help practitioners succeed in applying digital technologies to development programs.

SMEX	SMEX is a registered Lebanese NGO that works to advance self-regulating information societies in the Middle East and North Africa. They engage in advocacy, civil society capacity-building, investigations and network building.
World Wide Web Foundation	The World Wide Web Foundation aims to advance the open web as a public good and a basic right. It is an independent, international organisation fighting for digital equality — a world where everyone can access the web and use it to improve their lives.
The Engine Room	The Engine Room is a non-profit organisation that helps activists, organisations, and other social change agents make the most of data and technology to increase their impact.
UNESCO	As part of its work on freedom of expression and information, this UN agency has engaged in work on internet freedom, AI and digital literacy.
Wikimedia Foundation	The non-profit Wikimedia Foundation provides the essential infrastructure for free knowledge. They host Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, created, edited, and verified by volunteers around the world, as well as many other vital community projects. Wikimedia further engages in research and advocacy.
Open Government Partnership	The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is an organisation of reformers inside and outside of government working to transform how government serves its citizens. 78 countries and 76 local governments — representing more than two billion people — along with thousands of civil society organisations are members of OGP. OGP works on transparent, inclusive and accountable digital policy, amongst other policy areas.
ACADEtools	A Venezuelan foundation dedicated to teaching, the generation and dissemination of educational content through digital technology.
Open Internet for Democracy	Open Internet for Democracy aims to build a network of open internet advocates who champion democratic values and principles that should guide the future development of the internet.
Data.Democracia	Data.democracia advances the capacity of communities and public agencies to regulate technology with an inclusive approach that improves public trust.
NetFreedom Pioneers	NetFreedom Pioneers is a technology non-profit committed to inspire and bring positive social change to the world. They harness the medium of innovative, digital technology to promote education, learning, and empowerment – the building blocks to lasting change. It puts the Digital Principles into practice through its policies, processes and activities.
Digital Democracy	Digital Democracy's mission is to empower marginalised communities to use technology to defend their rights. By using technology to bring more voices to the table, Digital Democracy helps its partners achieve transformative change and works toward a world where all people can participate in decisions that govern their lives.

Research ICT Africa	Research ICT Africa (RIA) is an African think tank that has operated for over a decade to fill a strategic gap in the development of a sustainable information society and network knowledge economy. It has done so by building the ICT policy and regulatory research capacity needed to inform effective ICT governance in Africa. It hosts an African network which extends across the continent and further collaborates and leverages its activities through national, regional and continental partnerships.
Derechos Digitales	Derechos Digitales is a Latin American, independent and non-profit organisation whose main objective is the development, defence and promotion of human rights in the digital environment. The organisation's work focuses on three fundamental axes: Freedom of expression; Privacy and personal data; and Copyright and access to knowledge.
Share Foundation (Serbia)	SHARE Foundation was established in 2012 to advance human rights and freedoms online and promote positive values of an open and decentralised Web, as well as free access to information, knowledge, and technology. SHARE Foundation's primary areas of activities are freedom of speech online, data privacy, digital security, and open access to knowledge and information.
Open Data Kosovo	Open Data Kosovo is a non-profit organisation that believes in using civic tech and digital humanitarianism to open government.
Metamorphosis Foundation (North Macedonia)	The Metamorphosis Foundation envisions a society in which engaged and aware citizens actively use innovative tools to exercise their civil rights and responsibilities, a society in which they are cautious about influencing and demanding accountability from the authorities, while ensuring democratic, accountable and prepared governance.
Human Constanta (Belarus)	Human Constanta works for the promotion of public interests and joint actions in response to modern challenges in the field of human rights in Belarus. It focuses on three areas: protection of the rights of foreign citizens and stateless persons, promotion of anti-discrimination, and digital freedoms and rights.
Code for Africa	Code for Africa (CfA) is the continent's largest network of civic technology and data journalism labs, with teams in 20 countries. CfA builds digital democracy solutions that give citizens unfettered access to actionable information that empowers them to make informed decisions, and which strengthens civic engagement for improved public governance and accountability.
Africtivistes	Africtivistes is a union of bloggers and web activists across the African continent, dedicated to promoting and defending democratic values, human rights and good governance through digital media.
Amnesty International	As part of its activities on human rights, Amnesty International produces research and advocacy on digital rights. It has also established the Algorithmic Accountability Lab to investigate the use by governments and private actors of social protection and assistance systems that are increasingly driven by automation and algorithmic decision-making.

AlgorithmWatch	AlgorithmWatch is a non-profit research and advocacy organisation that is committed to watch, unpack and analyse automated decision-making systems and their impact on society.
Internet Without Borders	Internet Without Borders is an international network of non-governmental organisations whose objective is to promote the free flow of information and knowledge, to defend digital rights and freedoms, and to fight against all forms of censorship online.
Internet Society	Internet Society believes that the Internet is for everyone. Their work centers on increasing the Internet's reach, reliability and resilience, as well as ensuring that the Internet remains open, globally connected, secure, and trustworthy.
mySociety	mySociety is a non-profit group pioneering the use of online technologies to empower citizens to take their first steps towards greater civic participation. They help people be active citizens with technology, research and data that individuals, journalists, and civil society can use, openly and for free.
Mozilla Foundation	The non-profit Mozilla Foundation supports online privacy and security, trustworthy artificial intelligence, and accountability for big tech corporations.
Reporters Without Borders	On top of their activities on the safety of journalists, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) defends the position, both at the national level and internationally, that the rights guaranteed offline should also be guaranteed online. RSF also lobbies international bodies in support of net neutrality and against surveillance and carries out specific projects such as Operation Collateral Freedom to unblock censored websites.
Digital Rights Foundation (Pakistan)	Digital Rights Foundation is an NGO focusing on ICTs to support human rights, democratic processes and digital governance.
Digital Freedom Fund	The Digital Freedom Fund (DFF) supports strategic litigation to advance digital rights in Europe. DFF provides financial support and seeks to catalyse collaboration between digital rights activists to enable people to exercise their human rights in digital and networked spaces.
African Internet Rights Alliance	The African Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA) is made up of nine civil society organisations whose work is rooted in accountability, transparency, integrity and good governance. AIRA undertakes collective interventions and executes strategic campaigns that engage the government, private sector, media and civil society to institute and safeguard digital rights.
Digital Literacy Initiative (Uganda)	Digital Literacy Initiative (DLI) is a non-profit that provides ICT awareness and works to ensure a safe digital space in Uganda and Africa as a whole.

Digital Rights Watch **(Malawi)**	Digital Rights Watch platform is a knowledge portal for digital rights that collects policies and advocates for digital rights and internet freedom in Southern Africa. The platform accommodates all players in the digital rights sector, enhancing visibility and hosting content to be used in activism across the region.
Fundación Karisma **(Colombia)**	Fundación Karisma is a civil society organisation leading several other Latin American groups, which seeks to respond to the threats and opportunities posed by "technology for development" to the exercise of human rights and gender and social equality.