Civil Society
Digital Transformation Agenda
&
Digital Inclusion Guidelines

ECAS Brussels, November 2022

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ecas
European Citizen Action Service

Civil Society

Digital Transformation Agenda

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Digital Inclusion Guidelines

Deriving from the analysis of 5 Digital Transformation Policy Co-creation events:

- ✓ Ireland: 4 May 2022, 10.30 AM-12.30 PM GMT
  (Online – Due to COVID-19 restrictions)
- ✓ Portugal: June 21st, 2022, 15.00 AM-17.00 PM WEST
  (Hybrid, Location: Rua Viriato, 13 – Picoas Plaza, Núcleo 6-E, 1st)
- ✓ Latvia: 18 October 2022, 10.00-13.00 (EEST)
  (Hybrid, National Library of Latvia, Level 11 and 12, Riga, Mukusalas iela 3)
- ✓ Belgium: 8 November 2022, 13.00-14.30 (CET)
  (Hybrid, BeCentral Cantersteen 12, Brussels, Belgium)
- ✓ Luxemburg: Scheduled for 8 December 2022, 12:00-14:00
  (Hybrid)

November 2022

Work Package	Title
3	European Democracy
Deliverable	**Title**
3.3	Draft civil society digital transformation agenda and digital inclusion guidelines.

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CONTENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

As technology continues to constitute turning points in modern history, affecting the way we live, work and evolve, Europe has important decisions to take in shaping its digital future and strengthening its capacities in new technologies. Although digital policies have been one of the cornerstones of EU legislation since many years, the main and most important challenge today is to achieve a digital transformation that works for all, without further deepening the existing digital divide or creating new inequalities. Civil society organisations in Europe are raising concerns regarding privacy issues, the surveillance of people, racism in Artificial Intelligence and algorithms, and biometric mass surveillance technologies, as well as lack of accessibility of new technologies. It is crucial to put human rights first and allow for a digital transformation in Europe that is shaped by the people for the people.

In an effort to raise awareness and give the opportunity to local stakeholders to contribute to the discussion, ECAS, and some of its Member Organisations active at the national level, organised interactive training and co-creation events focusing on five policy areas: *Digital Democracy, Digital Economy, Digital Safeguards, Digital Rights, and Digital Education*. Each event invited Civil Society representatives, national policymakers, digital transformation experts and citizens from a Member State. This resulted in hosting five events in five different Member States in 2022: Ireland, Portugal, Latvia, Belgium and Luxemburg. During the events, experts on digital policies presented the main challenges of digital transformation towards inclusion at the EU level and showcased the recommendations advocated -up until then- by civil society organisations all across Europe. The participants then proposed their own recommendations and ensured that citizens' interests, and mainly the interests of vulnerable groups, are included in the development of the EU's ongoing and future Digital Transformation strategy.

With this report and preliminary guidelines, we attempt to present a concise set of policy recommendations that will support policymakers in ensuring inclusive processes in the Digital Transformation of societal structures and procedures. The report starts with an outline of our approach and the methodology of our data collection phase. For each policy area being discussed, we present a comparative analysis between the recommendations we received from the four Member States.[1] From this comparative analysis, we conclude with recommendations that function as a guide for policymakers striving to safeguard the interests of vulnerable and diverse groups in the process of Digital Transformation.

[1] Our fifth event for 2022 will take place at Luxemburg on December 8th. At the moment this report is being drafted we only have data from four countries at our disposal: Ireland, Portugal, Latvia and Belgium. Our initial Programme had Estonia as the fourth country (instead of Belgium). However, due to the constraints of our partners in Estonia, we have scheduled the event in Estonia for January 2023. The results from the countries that are not included in this report, will be analysed in the corresponding Guidelines of 2023.

Co-funded by the European Union

2. METHODOLOGY

In 2021, ECAS joined the Civil Society Convention on the Conference of the Future of Europe, a network of more than 80 organisations all over Europe. The Convention was structured around 5 thematic clusters and actively engaged in observing the democratic functioning of the Conference and ensuring genuine involvement of citizens and NGOs in this process.

Under this context, ECAS's Programme Director for European Democracy, Elisa Lironi, was leading the Digital Transformation cluster, which aimed at bringing proposals that could feed into the EU's priority of *"A Europe fit for the digital age".* The ambition of this priority was to strengthen the EU's digital sovereignty and set standards on data, technology, and infrastructure – with a clear focus on education, ethics, fundamental rights and European values. To achieve that, the cluster operated an intense crowdsourcing process receiving recommendations from Civil Society Organisations across Europe on how to ensure inclusive policies on five broad Digital Transformation Categories: Digital Democracy, Digital Economy, Digital Education, Digital Safeguards and Digital Rights. This crowdsourcing exercise received 216 ideas and recommendations from about 1200 CSOs across Europe.

The five Policy co-creation events build on ECAS's past work as the leading organisation of the Digital Transformation Cluster under the Civil Society Convention on the Conference of the Future of Europe. Since ensuring inclusion in the digital transformation policies of Europe is of strategic significance to the EU priorities, ECAS has taken up the challenge of seeking advice from as many possible stakeholders in a variety of local contexts. The contribution of participants across Europe is a step towards ensuring that the policies being developed will fit and reflect the experience of the national level and especially the experiences of vulnerable groups.

As the events aimed at tackling several focus areas of Digital Transformation, it was important to get participants up to speed with the latest developments in each policy area before the policy co-creation process of each focus area. At the same time, the structure of the event had to ensure a fine balance between this initial info-session and the co-creation session.

With that in mind, the structure of the events was the following:

The local co-organiser – one of ECAS' Member organisations – welcomed participants and introduced a national Digital Transformation expert. The expert would present several digital initiatives at the local level and describe the relevant developments, challenges towards inclusion, and the local state of play.

ECAS would outline the aim of the co-creation events, the role of ECAS at the Civil Society Convention and the methodology of the crowdsourcing process to reassure participants of the validity of our content.

Then we would enter into a more detailed discussion of each focus area. For each focus area, we presented shortly the main terms, challenges towards inclusion, and some exemplary recommendations we received during the crowdsourcing process. These short presentations would set the groundwork so that participants could reflect upon the current developments and start ideating their own recommendations. Then, we used slido.com with pre-structured questionnaires. For each focus area, the

questionnaire combined closed and open-ended questions. To ensure everyone had a voice, the questions did not require vast expertise in the field of Digital transformation, but were based on people's personal experience with digital technologies and policies.

The structure was kept the same amongst all the co-creation events to ensure a sound comparative analysis between the results of the different member states. Another factor that makes the data among Member States easily comparable is the similar variance of participants' expertise in the field of Digital Transformation – as it was reported. In all Member States, more than half of them stated at the beginning of the event to have some basic knowledge of Digital Transformation processes. Few to none of the participants considered themselves experts. While the rest would be almost equally divided between having some solid background in the field or having no previous background.

How familiar are you with the topic of Digital Transformation in the EU?

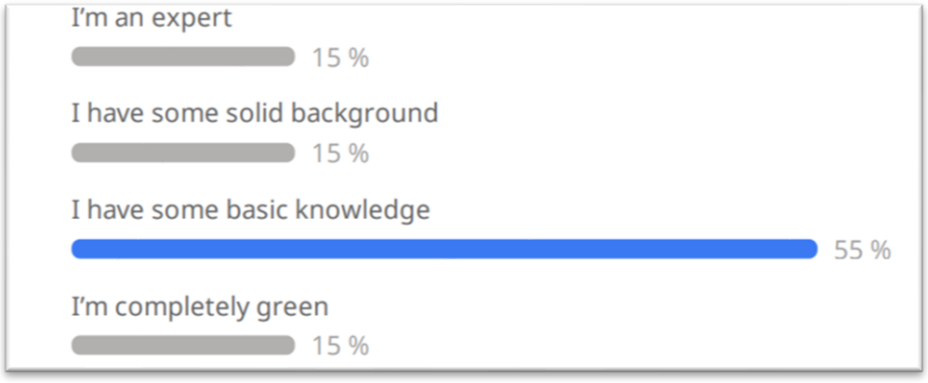

Figure 1. Portugal

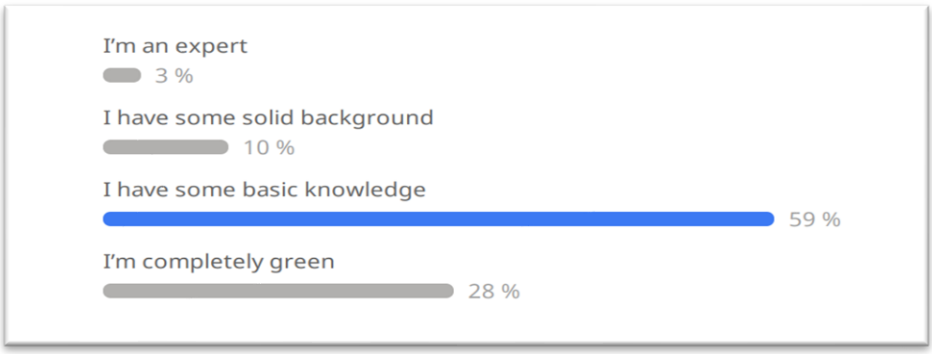

Figure 2. Ireland

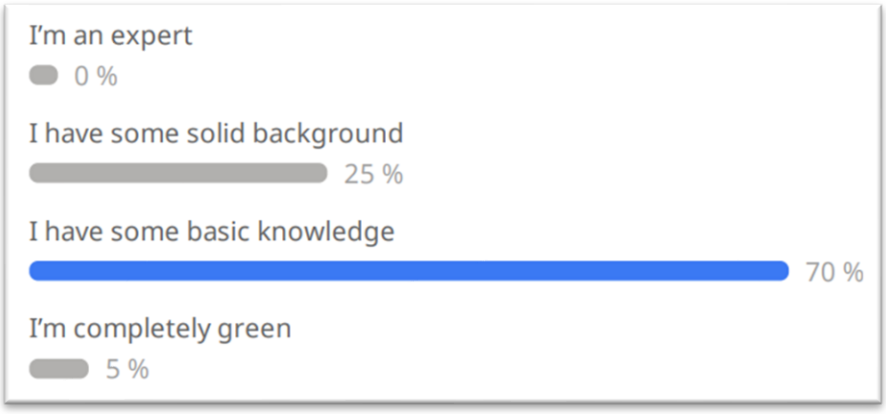

Figure 3. Latvia

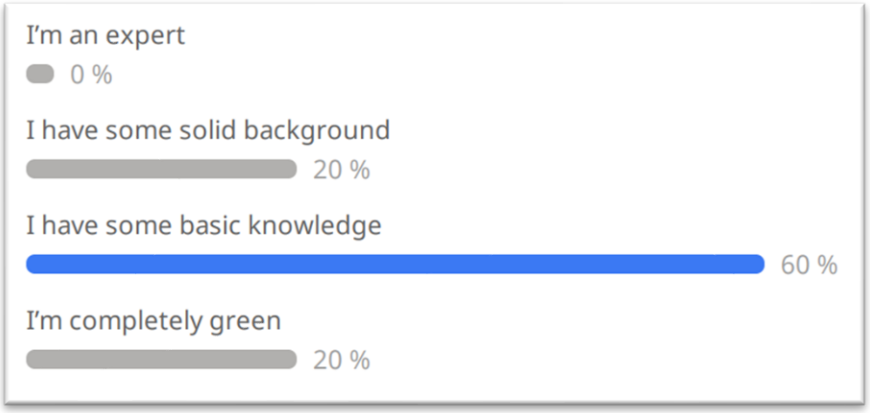

Figure 4. Belgium

In the next section is an analysis of the results per topic. First, we outline some main characteristics of Digital Transformation policies. Second, we present the commonalities and differences in the received recommendations from various Member States. Finally, we present the preliminary Digital Inclusion Guidelines that take into account the contributions received through the co-creation events and give horizontal recommendations on how our European society can adapt to the current and future Digital Transformation processes.

3. CIVIL SOCIETY GUIDELINES TO ENSURE DIGITAL INCLUSION IN EU

3.1 Digital Democracy

Setting the groundwork – Civil Society recommendations – 2022

Based on the Civil Society Convention Digital Transformation Report

Digital democracy involves the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in political and governance processes. Examples include:

1. **E-Government:** The use of ICT to enhance public administration or public services.
2. **E- Transparency:** The use of ICT to enhance transparency of governments by allowing citizens to access information online.
3. **E-Participation**: The use of ICT to allow citizens to participate in decision making processes, to improve policy outputs and even co-create politics together with their representatives.
4. **E-voting/ E-Elections**: To allow voters to record secret ballot and have it tabulated electronically in an election system.

Main Challenges:

- Ensure Accessibility;
- Ensure Inclusivenes;
- Ensure Transparency.

Proposed Actions by the Civil Society Convention:

1. Make access to free, equal and affordable Internet a fundamental right of every EU citizen.
2. Provide public services that are fully accessible for hard-to-reach segments of the population, through:
   a. Funding and collaborating with CSO's that currently support those who are excluded from the digital transition;
   b. Expanding initiatives that support and guide citizens in the digital transition ("assisted digital").
3. Ensure that publicly financed software developed for public sector e-government solutions is made available under a Free and Open-Source Software license.
4. Expand e-Participation mechanism and channels by testing and combing new methods of citizen engagement at the EU level e.g. crowdsourcing legislation and participatory budgeting.
5. Pilot e-voting at the next European Elections, provided it is technically secure, efficient and can guarantee transparency in the process.

Comparative analysis among participating Member States

In all participating Member States, at least half of the participants declared they use e-government public services on a regular basis. While only half of the Portuguese participants stated they use e-government public services on a regular basis, for the rest of the countries, the overwhelming majority of participants exploit such tools regularly - with Latvian participants doing so reaching 90%. According to the Latvian co-organiser of the event -Manabalss.lv – this high rate is not surprising, as in 2021 people used the internet almost 90% of the Latvian population on a weekly basis (Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia - Internet usage by individuals at the beginning of year).

Participants from all Member States prefer using online public administration services overwhelmingly, which highlights people's wish to see a fast and efficient transformation of all public services in the EU. However, governmental information and information of the EU institutions are only *sometimes* easily accessible online according to at least half of the participants per Member State. Regarding the accessibility of information on European Institutions, it is worth noting that 1 out of 4 Portuguese participants had never even tried accessing such content.

Most of the Latvian (80%) and Irish (61%) participants stated to have already used an e-participation tool to voice their ideas to policy-makers, such as consultations, participatory budgeting, crowdsourcing, and e-petitions. The corresponding rate for the Portuguese audience reached only 32%.

Participants in Latvia, Portugal and Ireland overwhelmingly declared they feel comfortable to vote online in the next European Elections especially in the events in Latvia, Portugal and Ireland. While in Belgium participants were more wary of the possibility.

When asked to reflect upon the current challenges to the accessibility of governmental services online, participants provided a wide array of responses with recurring themes among Member States. The most often encountered responses revolved around a lack of digital literacy, especially for some vulnerable groups (e.g. the elderly and people with disabilities). Other commonly identified themes were security issues and shortcomings in user experience and user interface designs. To tackle security threats, participants repeatedly proposed two-factor authentication to be required in governmental services. Regarding enforcing a more intuitive design, participants of all countries require a better-thought structure of the information online, simplified navigation processes, and breaking down websites with enormous scopes into more sites with better structure. In the words of a participant, the challenge is to "get the right information before giving up". For that, there were recommendations for increased budget to enhance the user-friendliness of online services so that governments may provide top-of-the-line IT services. Other identified issues were the lack of communication strategy to reach citizens when a new service is provided by the government, lack of digital assistance for people digitally excluded, difficulty in telling fake sites apart from real ones, and, of course, the connectivity barrier.

3.2 Digital Economy

Setting the groundwork – Civil Society recommendations – 2022

Based on the Civil Society Convention Digital Transformation Report

Digital economy is the development of an economy that is based on digital computing.

1. **Digital Industry 4.0:** (e.g. Internet of Things, Cloud Computing etc,) Industry 4.0 is the comprehensive transformation of the whole sphere of industrial production through the merging of digital technology and the internet with conventional industry.
2. **Digital Finance:** The impact of new technologies on the financial services industry. It includes a variety of products, applications, processes and business models that have transformed the traditional way of providing banking and financial services.
3. **Data Economy:** The creation of a single market for data in the EU where data can flow across sectors to benefit all and the rules for access and use of data are fair, practical, clear and respected.
4. **Supporting green digital solutions:** The use of green digital technologies for the benefit of the environment- mainly by developing and investing more green digital technologies to achieve climate neutrality and accelerate the green and digital transitions in priority sectors in Europe.
5. **Social Welfare in the digital age:** Digital transformation of public welfare services.
6. **Digital Business/ Companies:** The use of technology to create new value in business models, customer experiences and the internal capabilities that support its core operations (E.g. Uber, Amazon, etc.)

Main Challenges:

- Ensure Accessibility;
- Create of Single Market for Data in EU.

Proposed Actions by the Civil Society Convention

1. **Support digitally and socially excluded groups** with funds, resources and digital transition programmes. These should be specifically targeted at people left behind due to inaccessibility, unavailability, or unaffordability of technologies, or due to their lack of connectivity or digital skills.
2. **Introduce corporate tax rules** so that profits are registered and taxed based on where businesses geographically have significant interaction with users through digital channels.
3. **Set up/ establish a central pool of advisors** that can be requested by smaller companies to advise them on what can be improved (advocating open source, enabling knowledge sharing, sustainable practices, etc.).
4. **Improve the Market in Crypto- Assets (MiCA) regulation-** it must sufficiently differentiate between all crypto asset types of establish a single taxonomy, while also remaining open to new developments; it must be clear which assets fall under its regulation, especially since the lack of regulation of these assets is very problematic.

During the Digital Economy questionnaire, Member States again presented common trends and tendencies.

In 3 out of 4 events, participants overwhelmingly stated that digital finance services are not accessible to all. Only in Latvia was this rate slightly more moderate, with only 63% considering financial services not accessible to everyone.

Participants were divided into two almost equal groups when asked if they regard the use of technology in emerging business models (e.g. Uber, Amazon, etc.) as mainly good or bad for our society. Almost half of the participants in all countries said they consider it mainly positive, while the rest "*sometimes good, sometimes bad*". Few believed that the emergence of such business models and customer experiences was mainly negative for our societies.

Regarding their recommendations, we had some emerging themes that were present throughout all focus areas, such as digital literacy, developing a support system for the digitally excluded and ensuring minimum infrastructural standards. Apart from these themes (discussed in detail under the Digital Inclusion Guidelines section), participants introduced the dilemma between improving the design of the digital finance services and allowing private interests to use citizen/consumer money to enhance the impact of their products.

Moreover, to reduce the challenges that small and medium enterprises often endure, participants proposed the creation of online platforms dedicated explicitly to local shops and services.

Another recommendation for financial services mentioned was to reduce barriers to freedom of movement in the EU by applying more universal protocols – e.g.having protocols such as Bankcontact in Belgium and IDEAL in the Netherlands can represent a barrier between borders and lead to the exclusion of expats.

3.3 Digital Rights

Setting the groundwork – Civil Society recommendations – 2022

Based on the Civil Society Convention Digital Transformation Report.

Digital rights ensure secure and sustainable infrastructures- the right of everyone to have an access to technological infrastructures.

1. **Digital citizenship:** The development of a framework of digital rights and principles that will help promote and uphold EU values in the digital space.
2. **Digital Services:** The right to fair, transparent and accountable digital services' content moderation processes.
3. **Online Privacy:** The level of privacy protection an individual has while connected to the Internet.
4. **E- information:** The right to access information given by governments, companies etc.
5. **Net neutrality:** The right to internet access which should be offered to everyone on a non-discriminatory basis, without favouring certain websites, applications or services.
6. **Data (Protection and Retention):** The right to data protection and knowledge about data retention.
7. **Copyright:** Traditionally, the exclusive and assignable legal right, given to the originator for a fixed number of years, to print, publish, perform, film, or record literacy, artistic, or musical material. In the digital age, copyright should be implemented in a way which benefits creators and society.
8. **Online safety of journalists:** ensuring plurality of voices in digital media markets.
9. **Protecting fundamental rights in online environments,**

Main challenges

- Ensure accessibility of digital infrastructure and tools to entire population;
- Ensure inclusiveness and equality.
- Ensure corruption and censorship; do not occur in regard to control of data and freedoms online;
- Ensure online privacy and data protection;
- Ensure net neutrality.

Proposed Actions by the Civil Society Convention:

1. **A strong ePrivacy Regulation** should be adopted swiftly by the Member States, whilst also better enforcing GDPR nationally.
2. **Protect highly sensitive information** such as migration status, sexual orientation, race of any information on vulnerable economic conditions by:
    a. Restricting access to this information as much as possible
    b. Limiting the requirement of this information for very exceptional cases
    c. Ensuring public decision are not based in big data and biased algorithms

3. **Monitor any attempts to introduce practices such as zero-rating that undermine net neutrality**, and take regulatory action where needed.
4. **Ensure that encryption is protected** in the upcoming chat control legislation and in any other attempts to undermine it.
5. **Build public digital infrastructure** (like public charging stations and Wi-Fi) and ensure its financial sustainability, especially with regard to access to equipment for people facing material deprivation (i.e. low-income households, the homeless).
6. **Ban mass surveillance and facial recognition technologies** as they fundamentally undermine an enabling environment for democratic societies, threatening political pluralism and civil and political rights.
7. **Reform the Copyright Directive** to allow exemptions for people with disabilities to access e-books, films and music.

Comparative analysis among participating Member States

Participants in all Member States agree almost unanimously on making access to free, affordable, high-speed internet and other basic technological infrastructure an EU fundamental right.

However, more than half of the participants in all countries but Latvia do not feel their rights are sufficiently protected online. Interestingly, none of the Portuguese and Irish participants considered their rights to be at all protected online. On the other hand, almost half of the Latvian participants believe that sometimes their rights are protected, still, 28% of them do not feel protected in the online world. This poll question received a significant amount of "I do not know" responses (17% for Portugal and Latvia), indicating a pressing need for communication campaigns promoting the Commission's actions that ensure citizens' data and privacy are protected online.

When asked whether it is clear to them how their data are processed in the online world, none of the Portuguese and Belgian participants responded yes. Only 11% of Latvian participants and 4% of Irish understand how their data are processed. Half of the Latvian participants stated that sometimes they understand what happens to their data, while half and more participants in the remaining countries stated to not know how their data gets processed.

In the follow-up question asking participants what they do when it is unclear how their data is being processed we received different responses. Some participants just admitted to accepting all cookies settings without thinking about it too much, while most participants stated they just accept the least possible cookies settings and then try to proceed in the site in this way. Some participants stated they read the terms and conditions carefully before accepting even the required cookies settings.

To tackle the difficulty of citizens in understanding how their data are being processed, participants proposed diverse solutions. All responses were mainly around the importance of presenting information in an efficient way. Some participants suggested that the information should be integrated in the architecture of the browsers. Others proposed the development of a citizen data charter, others focused on effective campaigning practices on the Commission's behalf. Education was presented also in this focus area's recommendations; interestingly, it was proposed that education on data processing should begin very early.

3.4 Digital Safeguards

Setting the groundwork – Civil Society recommendations – 2022

Based on the Civil Society Convention Digital Transformation Report

Digital safeguards need to be put in place by decision markers to ensure the respect of values, ethics and norms in the digital space (e.g. EU polices, regulation, etc.)

1. **Cybersecurity:** The protection from hackers, fraud, viruses etc. and manging risks of hybrid attacks.
2. **Artificial Intelligence:** An AI that is ethical and that protects people, communities and society from the escalating economic, political and social issues posted by AI.
3. **Algorithms:** Transparency of algorithms.
4. **Online Disinformation Protection** against false, inaccurate, or misleading information used to intentionally cause public harm or make a profit.
5. **Audio-visual Media Services**: Regulation of online content and the role of online platforms in disseminating it as it has a direct impact on freedom of expression and access to information.
6. **Integrity of Elections**: protection of the integrity of elections and promotion democratic participation.
7. **Online hate speech-** Prevention of practices that denigrates people, based on their race, ethnicity, gender, social status, etc.
8. **Illegal content online-** Measures to effectively tackle illegal content online.

Main Challenges

- Ensure Cybersecurity;
- Ensure the Ethical Use of AI;
- Transparency of Algorithms;
- Monitoring of Online Disinformation;
- Ensure Accessibility;
- Monitoring Online Hate Speech.

Proposed Actions by the Civil Society Convention:

1. **Develop a framework that determines the extent, type, form and moment of human intervention in AI automated decision making**. In this framework, one of the determining criteria should be the AI's impact on rights, duties and liberties.
2. **Regulate AI systems, including in those areas that fall under the remit of the Common Foreign and Security Policy** (e.g. for military purposes)

3. **Provide support- technical, policy, financial for CSO's** countering online hate speech, protecting survivors and conducting independent media and fact-checking; and providing digital literacy education, including education on cyber security and AI to citizens.
4. **Defend fundamental freedoms and deter illegal hate speech** by including an online content moderation regime that requires a form of human review and removal or restrictions on content (in the Digital Services Act)
5. Include **more specific safeguards in the Digital Services Act (DSA)**
6. Ensure that Member States **transpose and implement efficiently the Audio-visual Media Services Directive.**

Comparative analysis among participating Member States

Participants reflected on the discriminative processes of AI and algorithms. Some of the most repeated recommendations on how to tackle the issue were: striving for the transparency of algorithms, thorough testing with various target groups before releasing the product, and promoting budgets on AI research with a focus on humanitarian and social aspects. Other responses included imposing processes for human review, increased regulatory provisions, and developing guidelines for developers that train the machine learning models.

On a more targeted question asking participants what policymakers should do to ensure online safeguards, participants emphasised the priority of protecting children and young people from sensitive content, and introducing media literacy in school curriculums.

A participant proposed that we shift the focus of safeguards policies from protecting citizens to empowering them to tackle the challenges of the online world.

In their effort to identify the potentially vulnerable groups in society and their corresponding vulnerabilities, participants listed the following target groups: the elderly, children and youth, disabled and homeless people, ethnically minority groups, poor people and people with no access to infrastructure.

The identified vulnerabilities revolve around the lack of accessibility in infrastructure and the lack of digital literacy. While for disabled groups of people, difficulties derive from the lack of design processes that would tailor a website or online service to their needs.

A participant also mentioned “being prone to disinformation” as a new form of vulnerability.

3.5 Digital Education

Setting the groundwork – Civil Society recommendations – 2022

Based on the Civil Society Convention Digital Transformation Report

Digital Education is concerned with resetting education and training for the digital age.

1. **Digital Competencies:** The set of basic digital skills, covering information and data literacy, online communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving.
2. **Digital Skills:** Job related skills or Digital skills for ICT professionals.
3. **Digital Learning:** The innovative use of digital tools and technologies during teaching and learning.
4. **Media Literacy**: The skills that allow people to access, critically evaluate and create or shape the media.
5. **Awareness Raising**: Informing and communication to citizens about digital practices.

Main Challenges

- Ensure Accessibility;
- Ensure Digital Literacy for all citizens;
- Data Protection.

Proposed Actions by the Civil Society Convention:

1. Develop **training and EU programmes on a wide range of digital skills** (e.g. technical, ethics, soft skills) ensuring that they are tailored to the needs to citizens in a vulnerable position and ensure adequate and continuous funding for such actions.
2. Enable more **EU- funded programmes for CSO's** to support the development of digital education strategies (especially with regard to digital skills and competencies beyond formal education).
3. **Consult informal education trainers** when developing digital education plans both at European and national levels.
4. **Train teachers and public administrations** in the essentials of digital technologies, software and algorithms to foster a greater understanding, better discussions and handling thereof and the transmission of knowledge.

Comparative analysis among participating Member States

In our enquiry on whether the local digital education initiatives are easy to find and accessible for all, more than half of Irish and Portuguese participants stated that available initiatives are not easy to find nor accessible. At the same time, 1 out of four was unsure – emphasising the lack of easy to find initiatives. For Belgium, more than half was not sure whether there are such initiatives, and one out of four of them stated that initiatives in the country are easy to find but not accessible. Latvian participants were divided between the responses "Not easy to find and not accessible", and "not sure". Only one Irish participant deemed the available digital education initiatives easy to find and fairly accessible.

Most of Irish and Latvian participants were aware of some digital education courses contrary to most of Portuguese participants.[2]

According to the Irish, Portuguese and Latvian participants, there are not enough opportunities for digital education after formal education. Half of the Belgian participants did not know if there are enough opportunities, while the others stated there are.

To identify the stakeholders that can empower citizens in their journey to digital independence, we asked the audience who could support by giving free digital education courses. The available options were: NGOs, Public Institutions, Private companies, Other (usually justified by participants as all the above). The Irish participants were divided between NGOs and Public Institutions. Belgian participants were divided between the aforementioned options and the additional option "Other". The overwhelming majority of Portuguese participants believed the responsibility lies solely with Public Institutions. More than half of Latvian participants think NGOs should take the lead in providing Digital Education opportunities.

When asked "who do you ask for help if you have questions regarding an app/ platform", most participants responded a "friend", or a "family member".

Participants then identified the groups of people that need digital education the most. Interestingly, the responses varied greatly in all events, and yet, all of the varying themes rose again and again in every country. The most commonly recurring theme was the need of the elderly for digital education. Other target groups identified often were people in rural areas and people with disabilities. Another recurring theme was the response "everyone" with some participants justifying that "Companies, education providers, public bodies, [...] with a lack of knowledge are causing vulnerable groups to be left behind through developing inaccessible platforms" or that "Everyone (needs digital education) as skills are constantly evolving."

[2] For that question, we have no data for Belgian participants.

4. DIGITAL INCLUSION GUIDELINES

During the events in participating Member States, attendants of each event presented complementary responses. Although particular themes did not necessarily repeat within the same event, they did often emerge throughout the Member States.

The recommendations of each focus area would often touch upon other Digital Transformation policy fields. For example, recommendations on Digital Democracy, Economy, Rights and Safeguards would repeatedly spill over the field of Education policy.

Overall, these recurring themes outlined a very robust social design of the mechanisms that need to be put in place. There are two broad categories of the received recommendations: **Infrastructure requirements** and **the deployment of a supportive ecosystem**.

Infrastructure requirements: Resources, Security and Design

The infrastructure requirements concern the resources and processes that ensure the accessible design of online services and the necessary measures to provide security.

Regarding the identified ***resources*** that would ensure accessible design of online services the most prevalent recommendations from participants are the following:

- ✓ **Free, accessible, high-speed internet available to all;**
  The internet should be a public good.
- ✓ **Regular audits evaluating the accessibility of websites, online services and new features;**
- ✓ **Regular update of displayed information and fast bug-fixing;**
- ✓ **Dedicated staff to support the visitors of a website;**
- ✓ **Chat boxes for digital governmental services.**
  Non-robotic sense in the responses, availability of human agent.

Moving to the requirements surrounding the ***design*** of the website, participants proposed:

- ✓ **Developing collaborative processes that will ensure user-centric design of online platforms;**
  With high standards of quality -equal standards to the services provided by private company online services.
- ✓ **The design process should include various user personas;**
  Ranging from digital native users to individuals with certain vulnerabilities such as people with visual impairment, audio impairment, the elderly, children. Each target audience should be included in the design process.
- ✓ **Simplified structure of information;**
- ✓ **Governmental services must have mobile app versions;**
  Some argued the opposite – that the number of apps a citizen needs is getting out of hand. Therefore service providers should seek a balance in multi-use apps with easy to find features.
- ✓ **Compatible with screen readers and following accessibility guidelines;**

Option for magnifying font size – user mode differentiation based on whether it is a senior, person with disabilities etc.

- ✓ **Single sign-in with interconnected governmental services;**
- ✓ **Privacy should be a primary concern.**

Finally, to ensure ***security***, participants recommend:

- ✓ **Prioritise cyber-security to reinforce the trust of citizens in digital tools;**
- ✓ **Security should not be at the expense of privacy.**
  E.g. Facial recognition technologies

Supporting ecosystem: Assistive services, Education initiatives, communication campaigns

The supporting ecosystem will ensure socially excluded groups have the required assistance to navigate through the digital world and develop their digital competencies as empowered citizens. It can be summarised in three broad areas of societal action: Assistive services, Education initiatives, and communication campaigns.

According to participants, there needs to be more supply in all geographic regions for ***assistive services*** that will help individuals from diverse backgrounds use digital tools, get familiar with them and, at a later stage, use the transformational value of such tools in all aspects of their daily life.

- ✓ **Physical spaces;**
  Initiatives aiming to develop a supportive ecosystem for the digitally excluded should provide a physical space. A safe space where people can find digital literacy and digital health training, receive digital assistance, and feel they have a secure environment to develop their digital activities (civic activities, consumer activities, learning and development activities).
- ✓ **A targeted supportive ecosystem should be tailored to homeless people's needs.**
  The existing centers for homeless people should not only provide technological tools and Wi-Fi access but also possibilities for digital education.
- ✓ **Funding to CSOs that can support the digital inclusion of vulnerable groups.**

Participants provided concrete suggestions on the development of ***education initiatives*** which currently – according to them – are both limited in quantity and insufficiently accessible.

- ✓ **A more holistic approach to digital literacy, which should be accompanied by other fields of literacy (financial literacy, civic literacy, cybersecurity literacy, consumer literacy);**
  This is the most efficient way to integrate various digital tools into citizens' everyday life. Increased literacy should also aim at increasing the user's confidence in identifying security threats.
- ✓ **Online 'fire alarm' drills, such as sending real phishing tests to citizen emails;**
  This is a training practice often used in big corporations to train their employees in potential tricks used by malicious individuals. Phishing emails aim to retrieve specific information and get receivers to download malware. Companies imitate such emails and keep score of failure to ignore such attacks – leading to a gamified approach. This, apart from training the receivers, also keeps them on their toes as they are always expecting a malicious email.
- ✓ **The focus of financial digital literacy should be on fraud avoidance;**

Identifying misinformation, and developing a basic security skill-set is not only part of media and cyber-security literacy, but a fundamental need for sufficiently financially literate citizens.

- ✓ **Introduce Media Literacy in formal education;**
- ✓ **Community Adult Digital Education programmes;**
  Such training programmes should take place in local hubs. According to the comparative analysis NGOs, and public institutions should lead such training initiatives.
- ✓ **All Digital education opportunities should comply with WCAG 2.1.**
  Training providers should partner with organisations already working in this field. We should not reverse positive applications such as the ability to record lectures in Universities.

Another recurring theme throughout all focus areas in all participating Member States was the one proposing new ***communication*** approaches.

- ✓ **Targeted communication campaigns to promote e-participation tools;**
  According to participants, to improve civic digital literacy, providers and governments should develop targeted communication campaigns and education initiatives for governmental and e-participation tools. To maximise their impact, such campaigns and initiatives should target the varying vulnerable groups in their language and communication channels.
- ✓ **Targeted communication Campaigns on Commission's actions that ensure citizens' data and privacy are protected online;**
  This recommendation derives more from the identified absence of awareness of citizens rather than from their explicit recommendations.
- ✓ **Create a digital ambassadors programme which would drive a focused campaign to reach out to a variety of vulnerable target groups nationwide;**
- ✓ **Gather live and real experiences from the vulnerable groups themselves in order to create well-informed solutions.**

5. CONCLUSION

In 2022, ECAS held co-creation events on digital transformation to collect ideas for more digital inclusion in Europe from a wide array of stakeholders in Ireland, Portugal, Latvia, and Belgium. Participants were a combination of citizens, experts and NGO representatives, who had the chance to dive deeper into the topics of digital democracy, digital economy, digital safeguards, digital rights and digital education. These concepts were first illustrated by national experts to give an overview of the local level and the discussions continued amongst ECAS and the participants on the EU level. Participants had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the challenges that arise in each field towards inclusion and were informed about relevant EU digital policies. The results from the crowdsourcing exercise of the Digital Transformation Cluster under the Civil Society Convention for the Conference on the future of Europe, were the starting point of a set of civil society recommendations that were then discussed further during the events. Participants actively contributed with their opinions and suggestions on digital inclusiveness, but also shared their daily experiences with digital technologies.

The similarly structured questionnaires in all events led to comparative results amongst the countries involved. The common experiences among Member States around the challenges of digital transformation indicated the need for a stronger policy intervention at the EU level.

When developing preliminary guidelines on more digital inclusiveness in Europe, participants' recommendations could be summarised into two broad areas. First, the 'infrastructure requirements' should be cautiously defined by policy makers in order to make sure all citizens are included. These requirements should be efficiently incorporated by platforms and online products and sevices. Developers should comply their designs with the latest accessibility guidelines, and products and services should provide support to users that are not able to navigate through their platforms. Moreover, technological infrastructure such as affordable and accessible high-speed internet connection should be mainstreamed.

Secondly, there should be explicit resources for assisting social structures throughout Europe without excluding urban areas. A centre where citizens can access technological tools, infrastructure, training and advice should be physically present and easily accessible to all participants.

Digital literacy is a common theme amongst the different subtopics mentioned by the Member States. With 2023 being declared as the Year of Skills by the European Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen, efforts must focus on providing interdisciplinary training content combining digital with other competencies necessary to citizens, such as competencies to identify and avoid misinformation, cyber-security competencies, financial management skills.

The difference in experiences amongst the participants in the Member States proved to be a good source of best practices that can and should be shared between countries. One relevant example would be Latvia's success story with e-participation tools and how its citizens have developed a stronger culture of using participatory democracy tools online to have a say in policymaking processes.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary engagement of experts in the design process of online services, implying the need for collaboration not only among policy levels and nations but also among fields of expertise.

Civil Society Digital Transformation Agenda & Digital Inclusion Guidelines

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