

Council Conclusions on Digital Empowerment

Thomas Wahl



News

On 20 October 2023, the JHA Council adopted [conclusions on digital empowerment](#) to protect and enforce fundamental rights in the digital age. They highlight the importance of ensuring that fundamental rights of citizens are preserved and protected in an increasingly digitalised world. They also reaffirm that fundamental rights apply equally online and offline and that everyone should have the opportunity and support to acquire basic digital skills. The conclusions are divided into two parts: (1) digital empowerment of individuals and key sectors, and (2) construction of a safe digital environment where fundamental rights are protected. Several recommendations are made to the Member States and the Commission to take action in order to meet current challenges.

Regarding the digital empowerment, the Council primarily addresses Member States to take the necessary steps in order to achieve digital transformation. Policy goals include:

- Promoting adequate media and digital literacy through education, training and lifelong learning for everyone, as a right to acquire basic and advanced digital skills;
- Increasing efforts to bridge the digital divide;
- Raising awareness among the public of the importance of protecting privacy and personal data in the digital world and promoting the understanding of data processing/use, the exercise of rights and protection tools (e.g. encryption);
- Delivering capacity-building and training activities to help actors in key sectors for the defense of fundamental rights - namely justice and law enforcement.

The Council conclusions also list a number of tailored measures that Member States should adopt for the specific protection and/or digital skills of different groups of persons, such as children and young people, older persons, women and girls, socio-economically disadvantaged persons, workers, consumers, and voters.

Regarding the construction of a safe digital environment, the conclusions call on Member State, *inter alia*, to do the following:

- Promoting a favourable and just digital environment for inclusive and pluralistic public debate and enabling individuals to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information, identify bias and propaganda, and develop critical thinking skills;
- Stepping up the fight against hate crimes and hate speech, including the effective criminalisation of incitement to violence and hatred as well as the enhancement of capacity of judicial and law enforcement authorities to investigate and prosecute illegal conduct;

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- Taking the necessary measures to create future-proof and technologically neutral regulatory regimes, while ensuring that AI is developed and used in a manner that is inclusive, sustainable, and human-centred.

The Council welcomes the Commission's work and initiatives to promote digital skills in the Union and to enhance the protection of fundamental rights in the digital context. The Commission is, *inter alia*, invited to do the following:

- Monitoring the implementation of the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 as well as the digital principles and rights set out in the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade;
 - Countering online disinformation and illegal content by supervising and enforcing the rules of the Digital Services Act and regularly assessing other instruments in place, e.g. the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online;
 - Supporting initiatives aiming to promote the development of digital awareness and skills through financial programmes.
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