

## **Building COFACE digitalization core values and principles**

### **Proposal for discussion**

Context: The following document aims at referencing the core values and principles underlining COFACE-Families Europe actions and activities in the realm of **digitalization**. While the concrete topics covered by COFACE-Families Europe are very wide and diverse, including child online safety, artificial intelligence, big data, online business models, decentralized technologies or blockchain technology, the recommendations and policy proposals formulated always rely on **core principles and values**, which are applied to any new development in the field of digitalization. As a European umbrella organization representing many diverse civil society organizations, COFACE-Families Europe's aim is to ensure that digitalization and new technological developments serve the general interest of all European citizens and families. We propose therefore that COFACE publishes **core digitalization principles** for the following purposes:

- as a compass for COFACE advocacy on various topics of digitalization
- as a reference point for discussions on digitalization in policy, research, politics, etc
- as a COFACE vision for a digital society
- to create a bridge between social and digitalization stakeholders
- to raise awareness of COFACE family organisations on key digitalization trends
- to strive to protection human rights from the negative effects of digitalisation

#### **Principle 1: Non-discrimination, inclusion and accessibility**

As digitalization becomes an integral part of our societies, failure to have access to digital skills and competences as well as having access to digitalization in the form of hardware and software, may lead to exclusion as they become pre-requisites for living a decent life and remain an integral part of a “digital” society.

#### **Principle 2: Transparency**

Transparency is a principle which permeates through many key challenges in digitalization, making sure that users are properly informed about the services/products they use, but also what the implications of their consent and use of those services/products are. Users would greatly benefit from transparency about how algorithms (or artificial intelligence) make decisions, about data that is collected about them and how it is used, about the various online business models and their trade-offs, and about their rights as consumers of connected devices or online services.

#### **Principle 3: Privacy and data protection**

The “digital trail” or “digital footprint” users leave behind is getting larger and larger, and so is the potential for exploiting that data for both positive or negative purposes. This is why it is important that users are directly in control of their privacy and their

data protection to make sure that it is not abused or used without their consent. At the same time, high “default” standards for privacy and data protection should be erected to compensate for the “network effect” and the imbalance of power between the user and a service provider (for instance, the pressure to join a network where all of your contacts are).

#### **Principle 4: Security**

News about yet another data breach and theft of millions of credit card information, user account details and the likes surface more and more often. Cybersecurity, in order to be successful in the future, will have to be considered as a public good. The open source movement is a model in this respect. With a strong community of voluntary and engaged security researchers, open source software such as Linux/GNU stays highly secure. Other proprietary security solutions rely on hiding code and hoping that no one will be able to find a vulnerability or security flaw. Time and again, this has proven to be wildly ineffective. Even “new” technologies as blockchain are based on crowdsourced security as breaking it would require, among other things, to take control of at least half of the computers on which blockchain technology is running.

#### **Principle 5: Participation and agency**

Much of digitalization is controlled by a few powerful players, be it private or public, which leads to an online environment and digital ecosystem where users do not have a voice. The process of decentralization and blockchain are interesting developments which may put the users back in the center of the digitalization process and ensure that each user has an equal “say” in shaping what the collective digital space will be.

#### **Principle 6: Access**

While digitalization is more and more focused on the software and content side, it nevertheless relies on a distributed, functional and well-maintained infrastructure (on the public side, the cables below ground) and accessible, quality and affordable hardware (on the user-end).

#### **Principle 7: Open standards and open source**

Supporting open source software, open standards and open collaborative spaces is key to ensure diversity and access. Many families around the world do not necessarily have the means to access costly digital tools and information. Supporting open source and open standards is the embodiment of the principle of solidarity whereby those that have more can contribute more, and in the end, everyone can equally benefit.

#### **Principle 8: Competences and skills**

Access, and competences and skills, are two sides of the same coin. Even if every user lives in a country with digital infrastructure and access to hardware, this does not guarantee that they will successfully integrate within the digital space. Competences and skills are therefore essential for a

#### **Principle 9: Freedom of expression and association**

Exchanging ideas is how people manage to agree on how to coordinate their actions. If people are not allowed to speak freely, it is impossible to find the optimal consensus between them. Freedom of speech and freedom of association is therefore the cornerstone of human civilization and found the Internet and an increasingly decentralized Web as the best way to share ideas.

### **Principle 10: Governance**

As the saying goes: “no taxation without representation”! Families from all over Europe are active online users, yet their ability to weigh in on the governance of the Internet and the web as a “public good” is small. Governance bodies such as the IGF, ICANN or the W3C should provide more space for civil society to voice its recommendations on the future of the Internet and the web.

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In Sofia during the second session of our COFACE expert meeting, we would like to discuss each of the principles with the COFACE members, explaining the thinking and rationale for each. Then we would like to see how these would be useful in your respective countries, with the following questions to kick-start the discussion.

1. Are there situations in your country (challenges, campaigns, law, media discussion, successes, threats, other developments) which you would like to highlight in relation to any of the principles?
2. Are there organisations or policy-makers which might be interested in these ten principles? How could these principles be useful in your work?
3. Who should be the target audience of these principles? (NGOs, policy-makers, the digital industry, social policy makers, researchers, etc)