



LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Everyone has a right to use any language of their choice to create and share digital information.



Linguistic and cultural diversity enriches the development of society. All individuals and communities have the right to use their own language – or any language of their choice – to create, share, and engage with information and knowledge without being exposed to harm.

As more people shift their lives online, the lack of linguistic and cultural diversity in digital spaces is becoming increasingly apparent. Minority languages are often excluded from digital contexts in favor of eurocentric languages such as English. Meanwhile, software and applications are overwhelmingly developed for the so-called majority, resulting in limited moderation of online content in other languages and the subsequent exposure of users of those languages to online harm.

Internet accessibility is more than the ability to obtain a device and a wireless connection, yet there is currently no requirement for global digital platforms and services to reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in the real world. While some languages, such as Hindi (India) and Mandarin (China), are gaining both dominance and representation in societal and digital contexts alike, other languages that are dominant in physical spaces, such as Swahili (East Africa) and Yoruba (Nigeria), remain woefully underrepresented online.

Feminist activism shows us that the ability to speak one's language is key to seeking refuge and breaking isolation. It is, therefore, crucial that the erasure of the languages and cultures of marginalized groups in the real world is not replicated in the digital realm.

THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Everyone has the right to access culturally and linguistically diverse knowledge and information in an accessible format, where this can be reasonably accommodated.
- Technical and policy innovation should be encouraged to facilitate the diversity, accessibility, and plurality of culture on the internet and in digital spaces.
- National, regional, and local administrations, governments, and publicly-funded international organizations must ensure transparency and accountability by placing any publicly relevant information they produce and manage in the public domain.
- They should ensure that this information is disseminated and made available on the internet and in digital spaces using compatible and open formats and is accessible to people with particular access challenges, such as persons with a disability, those using older computers, mobile devices, or with slow internet connections.
- Digital technologies and the internet should reflect and respect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world.
- Technical development must encourage linguistic diversity on the internet and simplify the exchange of information across language barriers.

