

Alliance For

Universal

Digital Rights

# Securing our human rights in our digital world

A digital framework for a future where everyone in the digital world can enjoy the right to safety, freedom and dignity.

[www.audri.org](http://www.audri.org)



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The Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRI) was formed in 2022 by two international gender equality and advocacy organizations, Equality Now and Women Leading in AI.



Imagine a future in which all citizens of the global digital ecosystem, no matter who they are or where they live, can enjoy equal rights to safety, freedom, and dignity.

## This means:

**Equal protection** from persecution, discrimination, and abuse

**Equal access** to information, opportunity, and community

**Equal respect** for privacy, identity, and self-expression

Such a future can only become a reality if governments and leaders around the world put into place mutual and binding agreements to uphold these rights, to minimize opportunities for their infringement, and to develop universal mechanisms to hold violators to account.

Because the digital environment, like the natural environment, transcends borders.

And just as the efforts of individual nations alone can never solve a worldwide environmental crisis, nor can we rely on separate national laws and policies to guide, regulate, and care for our global digital ecosystem.

To achieve universal equality of safety, freedom, and dignity in our digital future, we need a universal approach to defining, upholding, and advancing digital rights – for everyone.

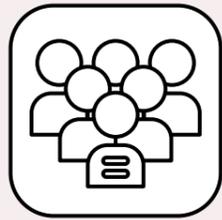
The Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRI) was formed in 2022 by two international gender equality and advocacy organizations, Equality Now and Women Leading in AI.

We are calling for the adoption of a universal digital rights framework, rooted in human rights law and underpinned by an intersectional feminist, anti-discrimination analysis.

# Introducing our digital framework

Nine principles  
for a future where  
everyone in the  
digital world can  
enjoy the right to  
safety, freedom  
and dignity.





# UNIVERSAL AND EQUAL RIGHTS

Everyone has an equal right to protection, opportunity, and respect, including in the digital realm.



**Article 1 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This means that the rights of all members of the human family are equal, and every person must be respected, protected, and provided with an opportunity to fulfill their interests and realize their human rights.**

Digital technologies and services provide historically discriminated-against groups with new opportunities to overcome dominant societal, cultural, traditional, and mobility barriers.

But if our digital selves are not afforded the same human rights as our physical selves, the very people who experience intersecting forms of discrimination and prejudice in the real world will continue to be subjugated and denied their human rights within the digital ecosystem, and be subjected to new and amplified forms of discrimination.

The systems and processes by which digital services and technologies are developed, accessed, and regulated must be underpinned by non-discrimination and equality to ensure that our fundamental human rights remain universally upheld – including in the digital world.

## THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Everyone is equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law, including in the digital realm, its ecosystem, and the metaverse.
- Everyone is entitled to equal protection from all forms of discrimination, including, but not limited to, discrimination on the grounds of sex (including grounds related to pregnancy, childbirth, gender identity, intersex status, and sexual orientation), race, ethnicity, color, social or economic class, disability, religion (with the understanding that such protections do not extend to defending/excusing discrimination against others on the grounds of sex and/or gender equality), language, political opinion, national origin, descent, veteran status, genetic information, marital status, and age.
- Human rights, as envisaged in international and national laws, shall be interpreted with a gendered and intersectional lens to ensure that they are enforced equally and fairly in the digital realm, so as to address any gendered digital discrimination and inequality.
- Equality by design principles should be included at the design stage of algorithmic decision-making systems and digital technologies to prevent discrimination and harmful biases being amplified and/or perpetuated.





## PERSONAL SAFETY AND DATA PRIVACY

Everyone has a right to control information about themselves and to secure protection from digital harms.



**The right to privacy underpins our use and enjoyment of other human rights. It encompasses the right to privacy in family life, the home, and correspondence, and freedom from attacks on a person's honor or reputation.**

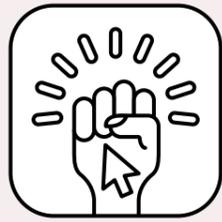
In the digital realm, the right to privacy is not just about the right to be left alone. With our personal data increasingly being extracted and analyzed to inform and fuel algorithmic decisions that affect every aspect of our lives, the right to privacy is also about protecting our rights to justice, dignity, and autonomy.

Digital privacy is also about safety. The internet is rife with bullying and harassment, while the online exploitation and abuse of women, girls, and children has reached unprecedented global proportions. At the same time, digital technologies and services are increasingly being used for manipulation and suppression of dissent, including through the use of smart devices by domestic abusers to monitor and control women's behavior.

The lack of recognition and enforceability of the digital right to privacy results in women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people lacking protection from – and redress for – serious harms to their careers, safety, and social freedom, as well as to their dignity, bodily integrity, and autonomy.

### THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Everyone has the right to the protection of the data that concerns them – and to be able to understand, in very simple terms, how that data is processed.
- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference of this right, and any limitation of this right shall be reasonable, necessary, proportionate, and justifiable.
- Any processing of data shall be fair, lawful, and transparent, adhering to data processing principles set out in international norms and standards.
- Particular attention should be afforded to the structural issue of intimate privacy violations against women, girls, and people of marginalized genders.
- Everyone has a right to protection against unfettered forms of surveillance, including in places of work and education and during civic participation. The use of facial recognition or biometric technologies must be regulated, necessary, and proportional.
- Everyone has the right to encryption and online anonymity. Sharing of data with third parties, including law enforcement agencies and the private sector, must be limited to what is reasonable, necessary, and proportional.
- Everyone has the right to control their digital legacy and to decide what happens with the publicly available information that concerns them after their death.
- Digital service providers must be held accountable as more than mere conduits for user-generated content, particularly that involving hate speech, incitement to cause harm, and/or the exploitation and abuse of women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people.
- States must accept an obligation to safeguard citizens from online abuse, misogyny, and hate crime, including by conducting swift, cross-jurisdictional investigations and upholding the right of victims to obtain appropriate and holistic remedies.
- Protection from abuse should include all forms of online sexual exploitation and abuse, including sexual harassment, stalking and tracking, coercive control, technology-enabled sex trafficking, livestreaming of sexual abuse, child sexual abuse material, and image-based sexual abuse, including through deepfake sex videos.



## DIGITAL SELF - DETERMINATION

Everyone has a right to exercise self-determination in the use of digital technologies.



**The right to self-determination refers to our ability to fully exercise our agency in choosing our own destiny, including through freely determining our political status and pursuing our economic, social, and cultural development.**

Digital technologies can be used not just to monitor and categorize, but also to influence. Vast amounts of digital data are used to train models that contain the same biases that exist in the real world, including those based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status. With predictive technologies increasingly supporting the creation of government policies about how public services and resources are accessed and allocated, such biases can interfere with people's freedom of choice and affect their ability to make their own decisions.

While historical data can be useful, for example, in facilitating the identification and understanding of trends on emerging social issues and in real-time crises, it is not neutral. Data represents society as it is, including its layers of social inequality and discrimination. If it is used uncritically and with no controls, it perpetuates existing oppression and leaves people – particularly women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people – less able to choose, challenge, or change their own destiny. Artificial intelligence and machine learning can also exaggerate existing biases, resulting in further discrimination and harms.

### THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Everyone has the right not to be treated unfairly or be discriminated against – or disproportionately denied their rights – because of automated decisions made about them based solely on data collected or inferred from their digital footprint.
- There should be no judicial or administrative order or decision that could significantly impact an individual based solely on the automated processing of personal and other data which has been collected to establish the profile or personality of that person.
- Everyone, including women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people, should be able to exercise self-determination in the digital age.
- Equality by design principles, including human rights and gender rights impact assessments, should be incorporated into the development of any algorithmic decision-making systems or digital technologies prior to going to market, to prevent discrimination and harmful biases being amplified and/or perpetuated.
- Everyone has a right to the complete and up-to-date representation of their identity on the internet.
- Preventative measures and safeguards should be implemented to prevent unfair, biased, and arbitrary decisions being made about a person, and there should be meaningful transparency around the criteria used for decision-making.
- Inferences generated by big data should be limited to safeguard people's autonomy of choice and freedom. Sensitive information should not be used to the detriment of the person, or to infer personal information, including their religion or sexual orientation.
- A presumption of algorithmic bias should be considered, to better balance the burden of proof, and to encourage the adoption of bias mitigation tools and controls.



## DIGITAL ACCESS FOR ALL

Everyone has a right to access the digital realm and to be free to participate in digital life.



**The full realization of human potential requires universal rights to education, to freedom of expression and information, to assembly and association, and to full participation in and enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political life.**

To participate fully in the modern world, everyone requires equal access to the internet and digital technologies. However, around 3.7 billion people – comprising nearly half of the world’s population – do not enjoy such access. People living in rural and remote areas are less likely to use the internet than those in more urban areas, and people who face intersectional inequalities are more likely to be excluded from using digital technologies and services.

This is an issue that particularly affects women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people, who are more vulnerable to coercive control and unequal power relationships. On average, women’s access to digital and mobile technology is about 85% of the level for men, while globally, about 327 million fewer women than men have a smartphone and access to mobile internet.

The ability to freely engage with the digital world is negatively affected by factors including misogyny, hate speech, identity theft, defamation, online sexual exploitation and harassment – all of which disproportionately affect women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people.

### THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Everyone has the right to participate in the digital realm and to access, regardless of their geographical location, universally available internet services and digital technology at an affordable price.
- States should enact policies promoting universal and equal access to the internet, including recognizing and addressing existing gender and intersectional inequalities.
- States should enact policies prohibiting the arbitrary and deliberate slowing and/or cutting off of the internet on any grounds, including public order or national security grounds.
- Interfaces, content, and applications must be designed inclusively to ensure accessibility for all, including people with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities, people who are not literate, and people who speak minority languages. The principle of inclusive design and the use of assistive technologies must be promoted and supported to allow persons with disabilities to benefit fully and on equal terms.





# FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION

Everyone has a right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association online.



**The right to free expression and association underpins the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information, and to associate freely for social, political, cultural, or other purposes. It is also related to rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.**

Online activities are considered expression, and so are protected under existing rights to free expression and association. However, this right is frequently infringed upon – both by governments and by private companies – for purported national security reasons and/or through unevenly applied online content moderation policies and practices.

Some forms of online expression are indeed harmful – harassment or stalking; the incitement of violence against others based on their race, religion, or gender; the generation or distribution of hate speech and mis/disinformation. But ill-defined and unchecked infringement of the right to free expression has created a culture of censorship in which political dissent can be suppressed, and the voices of victims and survivors can be silenced.

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These complexities mean that mechanisms must be put into place to ensure intersectional, feminist-informed application of the right to free expression and association within the digital realm, and that any limitation of this right is necessary, proportionate, and justifiable.

The right to digital freedom of expression is of particular relevance to women and girls, who frequently face gender-based violence and harassment online, including via intimate image sexual abuse intended to silence, shame, and oppress. This includes politicians, journalists, and other communication workers contributing to public debate on the internet. Without adequate protection, all women risk being excluded from full and equal participation online.

## THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference, regardless of frontiers.
- Everyone has the right to seek, receive, and impart non-harmful and non-exploitative information freely, through any medium, including on the internet, without censorship or other arbitrary interference by the State, non-State actors, and private actors.
- Everyone has the right to associate freely, including through and on the internet, for social, political, cultural, or other purposes.
- The internet and digital technologies must be protected from all attempts to silence women, girls, and other people from discriminated-against groups.
- Any restriction to the right to freedom of expression and association must be provided by law and must be necessary, proportionate, and justifiable in a democratic society.



## SECURE, STABLE AND RESILIENT NETWORKS

Everyone has a right to benefit from secure, stable, and resilient digital networks and technologies.



Existing international human rights law dictates that everyone has an equal right to personal and social protection and liberty, to freedom from exploitation and surveillance, and to a social and international order that enables maintenance and improvement of quality of life.

As a global public resource, the internet should be a reliable and trustworthy network for everyone. But the security of the internet and other digital networks is often undermined by unlawful surveillance, monitoring, and interception of users' private online activity or communications, either for individual or commercial gain or to suppress political dissent.

Secure, stable, resilient digital networks keep people safe and protect their digital rights by enabling everyone, from children and teachers to journalists and whistleblowers, to lawfully express themselves and access information online without fear of retribution. With the digital world transcending both national and jurisdictional borders, achieving this stability requires collaboration across the public, private, and civil sectors. It also requires protection from services and protocols that threaten security and from abuse of data and identities.

Fears about digital safety and security are disproportionately preventing women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people from accessing and enjoying the internet. This, in turn, is limiting their ability to realize their rights and to engage in the digital economy. participation online.

### THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Everyone has the right to a secure, stable, and resilient internet.
- The rights to liberty and security must be respected, protected, and fulfilled online and through the use of digital technologies.
- These rights must not be infringed upon or used to infringe other rights, in the online environment or through digital technologies.
- Network security must be guaranteed in the public interest, ensuring infrastructure integrity and protection from external attacks and in the interest of individuals.
- Inviolability of digital technologies should be maintained. The IT systems and devices of every person and the freedom and confidentiality of their electronic information and communications are inviolable. Exceptions and limitations should be exercised only when it is necessary and proportionate to do so.





## 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.





# UNIVERSAL STANDARDS AND REGULATION

Everyone has an equal right to benefit from the development and use of digital technology.



**Everyone in the world is equal before the law. We all have an equal right to contribute to and benefit from the development of our shared society, and we are all, without discrimination, entitled to equal protection and equal enjoyment of our human rights.**

The digital realm has become so ubiquitous as to be virtually inseparable from the real world. As such, the architecture and development of digital networks, technologies, and services must be based on binding, universal standards that adopt a human-rights based approach.

Currently, the internet and digital technologies are predominantly regulated and governed through industry standards and voluntary codes, which are driven by the private sector and lack transparency, coherence, and formal government oversight. This has encouraged unhealthy competition and resulted in uneven and inadequate protection of users' rights, exacerbated by the inability under current frameworks to hold digital service providers and platforms liable for illegal or harmful user-generated content. This has serious implications for the safety, freedom, and dignity of women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people, who are routinely exploited, abused, and harassed online by perpetrators acting with impunity.

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Similarly, without regulation, the inevitable environmental impact of the construction and maintenance of digital infrastructure, and of the extraction of natural resources for use in digital technologies, are disproportionately felt by women, girls, and Indigenous communities. A new regulatory framework is required to provide clarity and

guidance on the expected behavior and liability of digital technology companies. It is imperative that this framework is rooted in a feminist, intersectional analysis and developed alongside women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people to ensure their needs are met instead of codifying inequality into best practice and regulatory conformity.

## THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Digital technologies and architecture shall be based on binding, open standards that ensure inclusion and equal opportunity for all. Content created and shared through the internet or digital networks shall be moderated based on human rights principles.
- States shall mandate technology companies, companies that develop digital technologies, and digital and internet service providers to adopt human rights-based approaches in the development of their content moderation policies and practices.
- The internet's architecture, communication systems, and document and data formats shall be based on open standards that ensure complete interoperability, universality, integrity, openness, inclusion, and equal opportunity for all.
- Notified bodies and national committees should meet diversity targets in relation to representation, supported by governments, and should put into place processes and funds to enable wider stakeholder participation.
- States should take steps to minimize the energy consumption of the internet and digital technologies and minimize harm from the extraction of natural resources to fuel new technologies.



## GOOD DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

Everyone has the right to multilateral, democratic oversight of the internet and digital technologies.



**In a democratic society, every citizen has a right to live and be governed within a transparent national and international system and a right to enjoy the freedom to access and participate in public life.**

The internet was created with the utopian vision of an accessible, inclusive society that everyone in the world could inhabit democratically. But decades later, commercial interests have taken over, and far from being a space of freedom, the internet has become rife with misogyny, violence, and hate. Unchecked development of digital technologies and networks has negatively impacted women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people.

New forms of binding governance and participation need to be established for the digital realm to ensure better protection of our rights and freedoms to both safety and privacy, and to provide more effective access to recourse where infringements occur. The input of governments, technology companies, human rights organizations, civil society actors, and victims/survivors is needed to uphold and expand human rights to the fullest extent possible.

### THE DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

- Internet governance should be multilateral, transparent, and democratic, with the full involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, and the people most negatively impacted – including women, girls, and other discriminated-against groups and marginalized people.
- All decision-making processes related to the governance and development of the digital space should be open and accessible at international, regional, and national levels.
- International human rights standards, the rule of law, and social justice must form the legal and normative foundations upon which the internet is operated, governed, and regulated.
- There must be recourse for illegal interference and violations of human rights in the digital sphere. This shall happen in a transparent and multilateral manner based on principles of openness, inclusive participation, and accountability.



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