

# Ensuring an Inclusive Digital Transformation. Policy Recommendations from the Latvian stakeholders.



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## Kā nodrošināt iekļaujošu digitālo transformāciju?

Ensuring an Inclusive  
Digital Transformation

18. oktobris 10:30 – 13:00

Latvijas Nacionālās  
bibliotēkas korē un  
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# Ensuring an Inclusive Digital Transformation

18 October, 10.30-13.00 (EEST)

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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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 in Latvia to contribute to the discussion, ECAS, and ManaBals (MyVoice), organised an interactive training and co-creation event focusing on five policy areas: Digital Democracy, Digital Economy, Digital Safeguards, Digital Rights, and Digital Education.

During the event, experts on digital policies presented the main challenges of digital transformation at the EU level and showcase the recommendations advocated by civil society organisations all across Europe. Participants were encouraged to propose their own recommendations and ensure that their interests, and mainly the interests of vulnerable groups, are included in the development of the EU's ongoing and future Digital Transformation strategy.

## 1.1. Civil Society and the EU's Digital Policies

European Citizen Action Service (hereafter ECAS) is an international, Brussels based non-profit organization with the mission of empowering citizens to exercise their rights in the EU, particularly the right to participate in the policy making process. ECAS for the past 12 months have been working with a network of more than 90 organisations all over Europe to form a coalition called the Civil Society Convention for the Future of Europe. This coalition aims to establish links between civil society organisations and the institutional setting of the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE) to ensure an ambitious, structured forward looking agenda in which citizen's proposals and concerns are taken into account.

The Convention's Steering Committee Members have been given seats in the COFE'S plenary sessions. This means that the results of the consultations in the thematic clusters have been feeding into the COFE's working groups. Within this process different tasks and policy areas were established, with ECAS leading the Digital Transformation Cluster.

## 2. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE LATVIAN CONTEXT

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### Didzis Melkis, communications manager for MyVoice/ManaBalss

With its very good internet coverage and broadband availability to the population, digital transformation also in the civic sphere in Latvia has a good potential. 4G in Latvia is available to nearly 100 % of households; the broadband is available to 90 % of households against 60 % in the EU as a whole. Still, with all the impressive progress in the development of e-government and e-services, and opening up of the public data, there has been less emphasis on the development of participative solutions than developing user-friendly one-way e-information portals.<sup>1</sup>

In order to enhance the participative solutions, the recently introduced Single Portal for Development and Harmonisation of Draft Legal Acts (acronym TAP in Latvian) has an option for civic and professional NGOs to comment and make suggestions about legislative drafts of the government.

In parallel, organisation MyVoice has developed and is introducing OpenSaeima<sup>2</sup> tool as a deeper participatory functionality of its Open2Vote.eu<sup>3</sup> platform. Like the TAP on the government level, OpenSaeima gives NGOs access for comments and eventual co-creation of the legislative acts on the level of the parliament.

A recent example of digitally enhanced civic deliberation of policymaking is co-creation of Latvia's Fifth National Open Government Action Plan 2022-2025 with the widest societal engagement. In partnership with MyVoice, it was done by the State Chancellery via "Open Latvia" platform<sup>4</sup> – an issue-adjusted national dialogue tool of MyVoice. In 2018, the same tool was used for comprehensive societal consultations on the European policymaking – an NGO/MyVoice enabled public sector innovation featured also by the OECD.<sup>5</sup>

As a part of sustainably effective digital transformation in Latvia, the citizens' initiative platform ManaBalss.lv continues to empower citizens in making legislative changes for the solution of societal challenges. As of October 2022, 56 citizen-initiated laws and regulations in Latvia have been introduced via ManaBalss.lv since 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> See Valtenbergs, V., Čaplinska, L. (2021). *Introducing Digital Advocacy Tool for Civil Society Organisations in Latvia*. Available at: <https://manabalss.lv/system/cs0-advocacy-tool-eng.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://myvoice.group/en/project/open-saeima>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://myvoice.group/en/project/opentovote>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://myvoice.group/en/project/openlatvia>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/comprehensive-consultations-on-europe>.

Overall, not without its challenges and caveats, digital transformation in Latvia continually tilts towards inclusive and participative digital solutions, and civic society itself plays a substantial role in it. Inter alia, challenges of the digital transformation and participation include digital gap, especially generational one, and regional gap. Probably the main caveat is sustainability of the NGO-sector capacity to maintain the level of public digital participation and especially to enhance it with both higher civic activity and continuous technological innovation.

**Gatis Ozols, Deputy State Secretary on Digital Transformation issues, The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development**

In Latvia, 90% of public services are available online, compared to 75% in the European Union. As a society, Latvia is quite digital. Digitally, a wide range of services are offered, including car registrations, appointment for a visit, and participation in democratic processes, for instance, utilizing the ManaBalss platform. The digital environment offers an increasing number of services.

Many of these services are no longer provided in person because many service providers believe that providing them in a digital environment is more profitable and practical. Due to their lack of digital literacy, older people are frequently constrained in this way, which is where the issue begins. Both the public and non-profit sectors can offer assistance in this area.

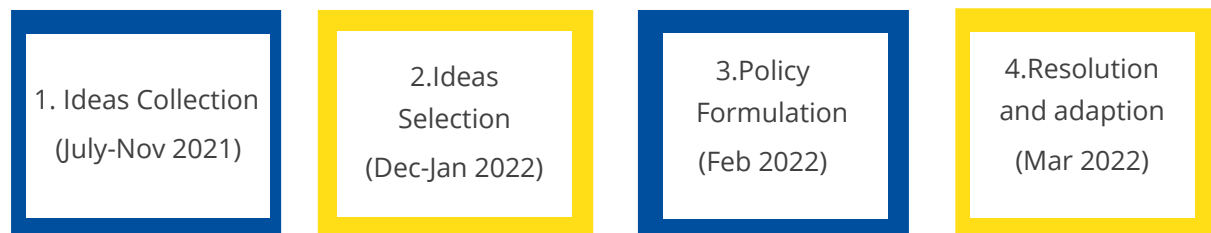
At the same time, we must keep in mind that there are obstacles and dangers, such as those posed by AI, therefore it is crucial to know how to use technology effectively.

## 3. THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CLUSTER

Elisa Lironi, Programme Director, European Democracy, ECAS

The Civil Society Convention's Digital Transformation Cluster covers the topic and subtopics that will feed into the EU's priority of a 'digital age fit for all', working particularly on the values and ethics that will strengthen the EU's digital sovereignty and set standards on data, technology and infrastructure.

In order to gather inputs for the Cluster, ECAS opened a crowdsourcing platform to collect civil societies' recommendations on digital transformation in Europe. The elaboration of the Convention's Digital Transformation proposals went through a crowdsourcing exercise that included 4 different phases:



216 ideas and recommendations generated representing approximately 1200 Civil Society Organisations across Europe.

The Digital Transformation crowdsourcing activity was composed of five thematic questionnaires:

### 1. Digital Democracy

E-Government, E-Transparency, E-Participation, E-Voting/E-elections.

### 2. Digital Education

Digital Competencies, Digital Skills, Digital Learning, Media Literacy, Awareness Raising.

### 3. Digital Safeguards

Cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence, Algorithms, Online Disinformation, Audio-visual Media Services, Integrity of Elections, Terrorist Content, Online Hate Speech, Illegal Content Online.

### 4. Defending Rights and Freedoms Online

Secure and sustainable digital infrastructure, Digital citizenship, Digital Services, Online Privacy, E-information, Net Neutrality, Data, Copyright, Online safety of journalists, pluralist of voices in digital media.

### 5. Digital Economy

Digital Industry 4.0, Digital Finance, Data Economy, Supporting Green Digital Solutions, Social welfare in the Digital Age, Digital Business/ Companies.

## 4. CO-CREATION SESSIONS

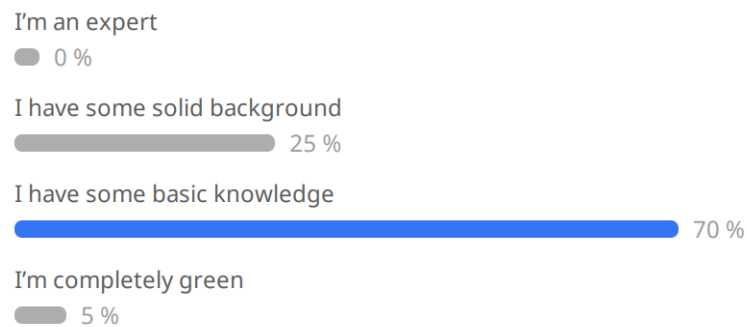
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Led by Vasiliki Katsikerou, Training and Event Manager, ECAS and Elisa Lironi, Programme Director, European Democracy, ECAS

Co-creation session was designed to discover how to attain a digital transformation in Europe that leaves no one behind. There were five presentations on each theme discussing the policy landscape, key terminology and main challenges. Participants were invited to participate through the interactive Q&A tool Slido to collect insights and ideas to help ECAS to understand better perspectives on inclusion policies for digital transformations.

Below is an example of the Slido poll:

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



## 4.1. Digital Democracy: Can it be inclusive?

*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 Inclusiveness
- Ensure Transparency.

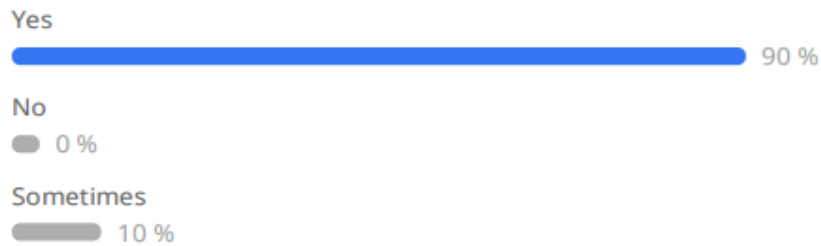
### Proposed Actions by the Civil Society Convention:

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 combining 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.



## Digital Democracy Co-Creation Poll Results

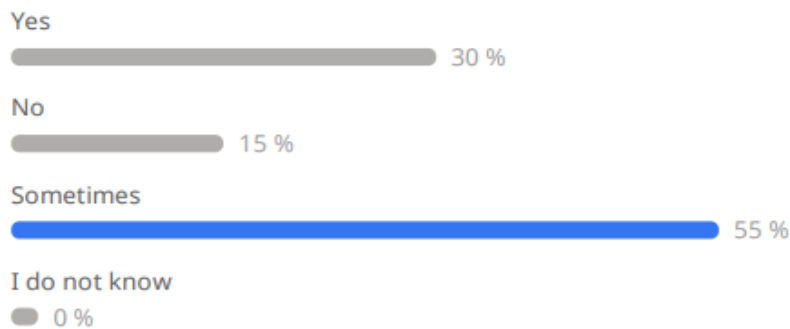
### 1. Do you regularly use online e-government public services in Latvia?



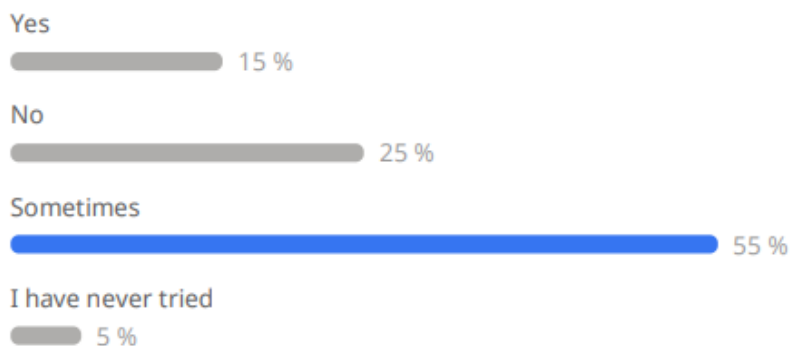
### 2. Do you prefer public administration services to be online or offline?



### 3. Do you find it easy to access online governmental information (eg. Public services, legislative procedures, policy-making processes, info on MPs, etc.)?



### 4. Do you find it easy to access online information of the EU Institutions?



5. Did you ever use an e-participation tool to voice your ideas or engage in policy-making? (e.g. consultations, participatory budgeting, crowdsourcing, e-petitions)

Yes



No



I do not know



6. Would you be comfortable in voting online at the next European Elections?

Yes



No



I don't know



7. What do you think is the main challenge to accessing e-government services online?

- Design of these IT services, their level of user-friendliness, design of IT tenders and governments capacity to deliver top of the line IT solutions (which is traditionally - limited).
- sometimes hard to find (complex navigation in web pages)
- Complexity
- Lack of digital skills for certain groups of citizens and limited access to internet for people from rural areas.
- Low digital literacy level of some groups of society
- Creating user friendly and easy interfaces
- Lack of information; user friendly access to tools, lack of equipment
- To find the route
- User friendly, easy to use.
- Failures of the architecture of systems
- Knowledge - part of population does not know that it is an option

- to do things online, thinks it is hard and is not trying
- Finding the way to access them and need for detailed explanations on every process and document
  - They are bad designed
  - Literacy.
  - User experience and bureaucratic approach to the information presentation and the language.
  - Willingness to do this
  - Trust and security.
- Complicated implementation that represents the old paper way instead of tailoring the process for online.
  - Complicated system

### What should be improved in terms of accessibility and inclusiveness in digital democracy?

- Design of services should be user-centric, with higher standards of quality. Complexity expressed through simplicity and good user interface is usually a challenge for public services.
  - websites made much simpler with an end user in mind
  - More mobile apps
  - Rising awareness for the benefits of digital skills as well as making internet more accessible
  - Training, places where people can yet, only in cooperation with all stakeholders, for example - digital health projects cannot be planned and established without patient expert engagement.
  - Usability - involving User experience specialists in creation of the e-government services. Education and training of the society on the usage of the participatory tools.
  - Info campaign
  - To merge online
- get help (libraries etc.)
- Less bureaucracy
  - Provision of internet, equipment, knowledge
  - Awareness and skills
  - Funding to CSOs ready to provide inclusion of specific groups.
  - Make the Internet=public good
  - Educating society
  - Access to web- unified nationally and accepted eu wide
  - Training for excluded groups
  - Providing more digital services, and offline smartly.
  - More accessibility and UX/UI testing whenever new services are implemented.
  - Easy language.

### Analysis by ManaBalss: Digital Democracy: Can it be inclusive?

Digital democracy can certainly be inclusive, the key success factor is whether people have access to the internet and a computer or phone to participate in digital democracy. Of course, there are many other factors, such as whether people have the necessary internet skills and whether people will be comfortable (user experience) using the e-democracy tool. But it all starts with the infrastructure - the internet and the computer or the phone. If people have access to these prerequisites, then the necessary skills can be mastered.

According to the results of the Latvian participants, it is evident that people regularly use e-government services and they want to be able to do so online. In the case of Latvia, this 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 (per cent of total population within the corresponding group)).

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total												
Internet												
Use regularly (at least once a week)	62.5	66.2	70.3	71.2	71.8	74.9	77.0	78.5	81.2	83.7	86.9	89.7

The fact that people are willing to use digital services on the internet can be partly explained by the fact that Latvia has one of the most successful e-participation tools - the ManaBalss initiative platform. In total, 56 out of 96 citizens' initiatives considered by the Saeima and other government-level institutions have been implemented in legislation since 2011. When it comes to leading change, it is very often for Latvian people to publish an initiative on the ManaBalss platform.

To increase the integration of such tools in all citizens' digital habits, participants pointed out the importance of having user-friendly tools and websites and a holistic strategy to education of digitally excluded groups.

## 4.2. Digital Economy: Who is not following?

*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.

## Digital Economy Co Creation Poll Results

### 1. Do you think digital finance - the impact of new technologies on the financial services industry (e.g. banking and financial services) is accessible to everyone?

Yes



No



I do not know



### 2. What could be done to improve the accessibility to these services?

- Taking into account special needs of elderly and people with disability and providing them with access to tools and technology
- Combining digital+phone consultations in delivering these services by default.
- Sadly, but mostly it's generational change.
- "User mode" differentiations depending on the user- senior, experienced user etc
- Digital literacy
- Money for internet access
- less restrictive AML and KYC
- People knowledge
- Internet coverage, digital skills
- Accessibility of devices and training for seniors and disadvantaged groups.
- Provision of digital skills. Many might access tools. But they do not know how to use them
- Knowledge, skills, equipment
- Simplier addition of support persons to help elderly/disabled, assistants (that have fair pay too)
- Not to have everything digital and find cooperation with other service providers in person

### 3. Do you see 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.) as a good thing or a bad thing for our society?

Mainly Good



Sometimes good and sometimes bad



Mainly bad



#### 4. Any other suggestions on how to make our digital economy more inclusive?

- Most vulnerable benefit always less
- Educating, training society the digital skills is crucial. That includes also info on fraud avoidance, misinformation and basic security skill-set.
- Transfer the traditional rights, like, unions etc. regarding social protection, to the gig economy.
- More public information on what it is
- No suggestions currently they travel for their own cost to banks in person but we feed the illusion of digital success
- Helping local small enterprises
- Just make it accessible to everyone, everywhere at any time
- Creating more awareness and funding for training on basic digital skills.
- Training of a better quality
- Face to face meetings, consultation anyway is of better value than robots answering. Individual approach.
- Include end users in process of creation more often and on fair principles (being paid, etc).
- Not to digitalize on people's expenses. Now

#### Analysis by ManaBals: Digital Economy: Who is not Following?

Despite the wide public broadband access and advancing digital transformation, among other things of the economy, accessibility of the new services in Latvia, including finances and banking, is deemed not to be equal. Especially the generational digital gap is obvious with a certain part of the seniors presumably never joining completely in the benefits of the digitalization in finances and banking.

One of the main challenges for the seniors are digital skills. Banking is just one sphere that becomes more expensive and less accessible to them due to the closure of the local banking branches.

Another challenge is new forms of civic digital participation, like citizens' initiatives and participatory budgeting. These new technological possibilities may play a stimulating role for the seniors and other digitally less advanced members of society to learn new skills, though not necessarily. Hence the risks of societal exclusion for them and not comprehensively tapping the crowd wisdom for the policymakers.

Overall, societal impact of the digital transformation in the economy in Latvia is seen as neutral – neither good or bad and slightly tilting towards the negative evaluation.

Emphasis on the digital literacy is the most mentioned eventual solution. However, realistically, such a training is unlikely to cover the digital gap completely. Hence, assisted digital services for the digitally less advanced groups is a necessary solution. It means targeted public financing to the specialized NGOs for seniors, handicapped, Romani, refugees et al. to provide digital services assistance to the risk groups they represent.



## 4.3. Digital Rights: Defending Rights and Freedoms Online

*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 literary, 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



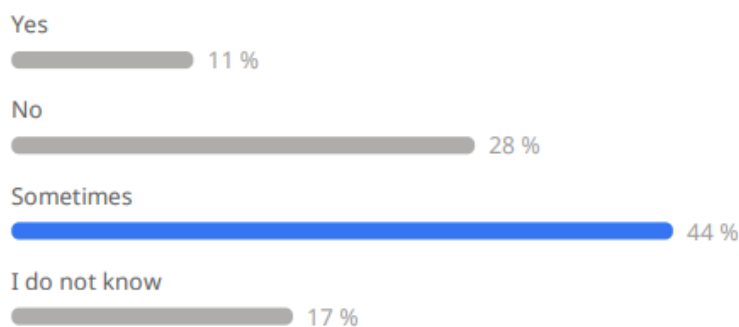
3. **Monitor any attempts to introduce practices such as zero-rating that undermine net neutrality**, and take regulatory action where needed.
4. **Ensure that encryption is protected** in the upcoming chat control legislation and in any other attempts to undermine it.
5. **Build public digital infrastructure** (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.

### Digital Rights Co Creation Poll Results

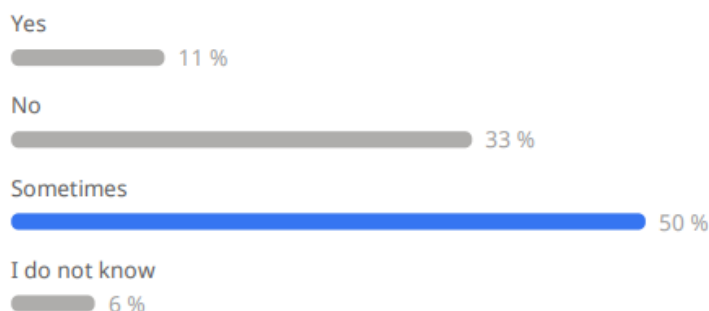
1. **Do you think everyone in the EU should have the right to free affordable high-speed internet and access to technological infrastructures?**



2. **Do you think your rights are sufficiently protected online?**



3. **Is it clear to you how your personal data is treated every time you connect online?**



#### 4. What do you do if it's unclear?

- Depends on the situation. Either I seek more information or disconnect.
- Public education campaigns.
- Refraining from using a given thing
- Assessing the service provider to gain clarification on the processing
- I do not really care...
- Don't connect.
- Nothing
- Most of people do not know rules of behavior, also are not aware of dangers of disclosing personal data in social media, for instance.
- Either not visit the specific site or assume the worst possible scenario.
- Read privacy policy, disclaimer
- I normally assume that my rights are treated well and correctly GDPR wise
- Try to avoid clicking
- Check information. But I might not always be aware of what I should look for.
- Consider if I am ready to publicize every data item. Then use services only for public purpose
- Nothing, just accept the cookies and use info what I need

#### 5. How should we ensure all citizens know what their rights are when they connect to the internet?

- Education
- Browser companies (Google, Mozilla, etc) could by default offer and include that information to users.
- Might be included into the architecture
- Facing citizens to critical situations via stress tests
- Information campaigns maybe
- Stated terms & conditions.
- Education
- Education and information. Unfortunately many citizens are not interested in this information until they are endangered.
- No idea
- Speak more about it in various levels and targeted to various population groups, on specific issues, such as patient data
- Awareness campaigns, trainings
- The same what we do to ensure dedicated competent organisations representing the most vulnerable groups empowered by regular trainings, campaigns and resource pools.
- Easy-to-understand notifications, that keep it short. Also educating the society on what their rights are.
- Provide info
- With official check "government approved" that all citizens know their rights offline.
- Pop up information about the risks, or the regulation

## Analysis by ManaBals: Digital Rights: Defending Rights and Freedoms Online

The majority of those surveyed agree that everyone in the EU should have the right to access technological infrastructures and free, affordable, high-speed internet. The European Union (EU) has 100% coverage of internet access, which is impressive. However, statistics on de facto usage (85%), broadband take-up (78%), users with at least basic digital skills (58%), next-generation access coverage providing at least 30 Mbps (86%) and 5G readiness (21%) cast doubt on the situation. Some 8.4 % of those EU residents who had a fixed broadband subscription did not receive the minimum of 10 Mbps approximately necessary for ensuring the functionality of basic services in 2020.<sup>6</sup> Without adequate internet access, people miss out on opportunities and means of participation that are now a part of daily life. Internet infrastructure is a requirement for inclusive digital democracy.

There is little faith in the security of digital rights. It appears that people rely on trust and intuition to feel secure when connecting to the internet. One persistent problem would be, for instance, the lack of trust in the security of personal information. Users in Latvia believe there is not enough transparency regarding how their rights are protected online and at the same time the majority of the surveyed think their rights are sufficiently protected online. Therefore, users share with third parties the least amount of information possible about themselves. Particularly if the website they are trying to access does not sufficiently explain its privacy practices and user's rights.

To improve users' perceptions of how well their rights are protected, there should be greater transparency and clearer information from internet companies.

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<sup>6</sup> See "Internet access as a fundamental right" - Author: Hendrik Mildebrath. Page 1. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/696170/EPRS\\_STU\(2021\)696170\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/696170/EPRS_STU(2021)696170_EN.pdf)

## 4.4. Digital Safeguards: Identifying Digital Threats

*Based on the Civil Society Convention Digital Transformation Report*

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

1. **Cybersecurity:** The protection from hackers, fraud, viruses etc. and managing 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.

## Digital Safeguard Co Creation Poll Results

### 1. How can we ensure AI and algorithms do not lead to discrimination?

- Empower the NGOs of the interest groups - give them targeted digital participation funding. NGOs are more literate and easy to educate than the individuals. And NGOs then will work as centers and moderators of safe digital participation.
- Data collected should not be biased
- Make it transparent and educate citizens about the process (human) would ever outsmart AI?
- Not making an option to include that information or make it sensitive information
- Very hard problem. Humans should investigate possible cases. Transparency for AI is almost impossible.
- Assist research on AI and social elements
- A online and offline jointly supported decision-making system and aspects. Involve safety norms in creation of AI.
- Legal responsibility for publicly available services that include discriminative mechanisms in it.
- Transparency of algorithms
- We need to make sure the teams creating the AIs and algorithms are diverse as well as the datasets they are using are inclusive. Test properly on all races, society groups etc  
Do you really believe one

### 2. Are there specific safeguards that policy-makers should implement, especially to protect vulnerable groups?

- Don't protect; EMPOWER!
- Some options like if Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men on opinion on AI - opportunities and challenges for gender equality
- Education and digital literacy as a norm.
- There should be a basic public-owned social network, built and maintained by EU. That way algorithms and manipulation tools in such a "public social network as a public service" place would be as neutral and inclusive as possible. Facebook gives significant boost to hateful content through algorithms, because hate sells well. A public social network would avoid this.
- Regulations on hate speech
- That their opinions and needs are taken into account.

- None of them
- Bias checks should be possible
- Continue active research on human aspects and impacts of the Ai
- Speaking in mass media
- opportunity to 100% participations

### 3. What are vulnerable groups in our digital society?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You name it. Left thumb challenged.</li> <li>• Elderly, women, people living in remote areas</li> <li>• Seniors, low income, refugees, people with disabilities, girls and women.</li> <li>• Seniors</li> <li>• Migrants</li> <li>• Minorities, people with different disabilities</li> <li>• Elderly.</li> <li>• Actually everyone is vulnerable. More of</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• course those who has disabilities.</li> <li>• Mainly the people experiencing poverty, a portion of seniors, migrants...</li> <li>• Children, seniors</li> <li>• People with low income, accessibility problems.</li> <li>• Everybody</li> <li>• Children, old people, emotional and ill people which can suffer from imaginary issues</li> <li>• Seniors, persons with small incomes</li> <li>• all people</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

### 4. What are their vulnerabilities? (specify which group has which vulnerability)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to technology, language/ reading, other difficulties, lacking digital Skills</li> <li>• All have less knowledge and awareness of the topic.</li> <li>• Different disabilities - they can be discriminated online</li> <li>• Elderly - they have no such knowledge as young ones has. Thats why they can be taken advantage of.</li> <li>• Bad sight, hearing problems, no digital edecation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of ICT skills, access to hardware</li> <li>• Children are not as critical thinking</li> <li>• Risks to mental health and financial risks</li> <li>• Motivation, money, skills</li> <li>• If people do not care about the vulnerabilities</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

## Analysis by ManaBals: Digital safeguards: Identifying Digital Threats

All types of discrimination in our society, including those based on politics, culture, and finances, typically involve biases. These are again manifested in the data sets collected, the structures and infrastructure around data, technology, and society. Thus such structures represent social standards and affect decision-making. Prejudices can be seen in a variety of applications and domains by AI systems trained on those data sets.

But how can we ensure AI and algorithms do not lead to discrimination? It is a tough question. The responses of the poll participants vary significantly. This is another indication of the increased complication of the subject and of the difficulty to identify a universal answer to the rising threats of inclusion. One of the participants mentioned we should start with investigating possible discrimination cases by AI. Another, comments that we have to make it transparent and educate citizens about the process, while another poll participant says transparency for AI is almost impossible.

Are there specific safeguards that policy-makers should implement, especially to protect vulnerable groups? This question also lacks any obvious common responses, just as the prior one. We have to educate citizens on how AI functions. Digital literacy should be a norm. One of the poll participants mentioned that there should be a basic public owned social media network, built and maintained by the EU. That way algorithms and manipulation tools in such an environment would be as neutral and inclusive as possible.

The most vulnerable demographics when it comes to digital protections have been mentioned in the debates as being the children and the elderly, and of course, people with disabilities. Other groups mentioned in the discussion included people with low income, people who are new to the digital world, and migrants. Vulnerabilities of these groups revolve around the knowledge level and critical literacy, health problems, and financial problems, as well as accessibility to digital tools.



## 4.5. Digital Education: The underpinning of societal inclusion

*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.

## Digital Education Co Creation Poll Results

1. Are digital education initiatives in Latvia easy to find and accessible for all vulnerable groups (old people, minorities, etc.)?

Both easy and mostly accessible

0 %

Easy to find but not fully accessible

26 %

Not easy to find and not accessible

37 %

I am not sure

37 %

2. Are you aware of any classes/informal workshops given on digital education?

Yes

58 %

No

21 %

I do not know

21 %

3. Are there enough opportunities for individuals/communities to attain a digital education after formal education?

Yes

21 %

No

58 %

I do not know

21 %

4. Who could support in giving free digital education to citizens? (e.g. CSOs, Universities, local authorities, etc)

NGOs



Public institutions



Private companies



Other



5. If you have any questions on a particular app/platform who would you ask for help?

A friend



A family member



An NGO



A public institution



A private company



Other



## 6. Who do you think needs digital education the most (who is currently left behind according to you)?

- rural areas
- People from rural areas, healthcare professionals, teachers, financially struggling people
- Elderly, people with low income
- Old People
- Seniors and people with low income.
- Seniors, handicapped, refugees.
- Individuals who work a lot. Individuals
- A large portion of senior people
- Vulnerable groups
- Elderly
- Everybody
- Women at large
- out of society in everyday life
- Children and seniors
- Seniors
- Seniors, NEET, people with disabilities, low income people, youth in regions, especially girls.
- Everyone, even the fancy startups who has no clue they have to engage end users and other than ICT experts
- Almost everyone have to raise the competence

## 7. What are your suggestions for ensuring every citizen has digital education and skills to navigate our digitalised society?

- ensure availability on infrastructure + person to trust and ask questions
- To have country or Europe wide programs that are free of charge and supported by governments and companies.
- Training programs in cooperation with employers (payed time to learn during the working hours)
- More public support.
- Simplicity and thus -
- etc. would be at places like post office, out of city regions
- Very targeted plan at national level + involvement of the plan by public/ non-public/ private institutions
- Creating a wide network of trainers bringing digital literacy to vulnerable groups in the manner most accessible to them.
- Easy and tailored services that are easy to
- accessibility of public digital services. Funds for ever higher, raising IT education quality in schools and for companies to train their employees and carry out digital transformation.
- Empower via CSOs/NGOs.
- Individual approach and mentoring
- Include it in schools, universities, jobs - as seminars. Funding for computers
- use and access would not require extensive training
- Life-long learning
- Decentralise education
- To give the choice to live digital or to enjoy off the grid life
- Local authorities should provide access, representative NGOs should provide training and consultations

### **Analysis by ManaBals: Digital Education: The underpinning of societal inclusion**

Despite comprehensive internet coverage in Latvia and overall digital transformation in governance and economy, its universal social gain is hindered by the digital gap. It affects not only the usual vulnerable risk groups of society – seniors, less educated, some ethnic groups, like, Romani, refugees and handicapped, but also the wider population. The poll of the civic experts suggests that digital education initiatives for the most vulnerable groups in Latvia are certainly not accessible and most probably also not easy to find. Participants are mostly aware of available digital skills workshops but not overwhelmingly so.

Especially lifelong digital education mostly is not seen as attainable. Only a fifth of the polled experts agree to the statement that lifelong learning opportunities are accessible and easy to find.

According to participants, the most viable eventual provider of an accessible lifelong and non-formal digital education initiative is the civic sector. Only a fifth of the participants would expect the public institutions to provide an accessible and free digital education to the citizens.

At the same time, very few of the poll participants – just 5 % – currently would consult an NGO regarding some faced digital challenge. Mostly help would be sought among friends. In order for NGOs to develop such centres of competence and service assistance, the need for targeted public financing and other support, like training opportunities arises.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

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In the event's closing remarks, a number of topics were brought up, one of them was the need for coexistence of online and offline services. To ensure the inclusion of all people in need, able to access high-quality, easily accessible offline and in-person services. It can be achieved via targeted NGOs financing to provide digital services assistance and training to the groups they represent.

With its very good internet coverage and broadband availability to the population, digital transformation in the civic sphere in Latvia has a good potential. 4G in Latvia is available to nearly 100 % of households; the broadband is available to 90 % of households against 60 % in the EU as a whole. At the same time, ensuring inclusion in the process of digital transformation is a challenge requiring close monitoring and targeted actions. Governmental institutions and civil society must keep exchanging information and resources to empower citizens and optimise processes.

A major concern is the participation of young people, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Vulnerabilities of these groups were mentioned as knowledge level and critical literacy, health problems, and financial problems, as well as accessibility to digital tools. Civil societies, NGOs and community organisations must persistently press for the removal of the obstacles that prevent some groups from achieving actual digital inclusion.

Civil society itself plays a significant role in Latvia's ongoing shift toward inclusive and participatory digital solutions, notwithstanding the obstacles and cautions that it faces. The primary caution probably relates to the capacity of the NGO sector to sustain the level of public digital participation and, specifically, to increase it through more civic engagement and ongoing technological innovation.