GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON DIVERSITY OF CONTENT ONLINE

INTRODUCTION

This document aims to guide actions and measures that foster greater exposure to diverse cultural content, information and news online. This exposure to diverse content should contribute to a healthier public discourse, greater social inclusion within society, bolster resilience to disinformation and misinformation, and increase our citizens' ability to participate in democratic processes. Diversity of content in this context is defined as a diversity of sources, ideas and perspectives, a variety of content types or genres, as well as the level of exposure and consumption of diverse content by an individual.

The guiding principles in this document are not legally binding and complement existing domestic and international obligations. They apply to a diverse group of stakeholders including governments, regulators, civil society organizations, media sector representatives and private sector companies, such as services operating online, whose primary purpose is to broadcast or distribute content or share user-generated content online.

These guiding principles have been developed by a multi-stakeholder working group, in consultation with subject matter experts. They cover four themes deemed essential to the promotion of diversity of content online: (1) *Creation, access and discoverability of diverse content online* (2) *Fair remuneration and economic viability of content creators* (3) *Promotion of diverse, pluralistic sources of news and information as well as resilience against disinformation and misinformation* (4) *Transparency of the impacts of algorithmic treatments of online content*.

By endorsing these guiding principles, the signatories agree to implement them within the scope of their responsibilities. Signatories also agree to pursue their engagement by developing specific commitments by December 2022 at the latest, to show concrete actions they will take to implement the guiding principles.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Signatories endeavor to integrate the following core values in the implementation of these guiding principles:

Human Rights

- **Reaffirm** their respect for human rights, particularly the freedom of expression, which includes freedom to seek, access, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers;
- **Restate** that the guiding principles of anti-racism, anti-hate, equity, diversity and inclusion are at the core of respect for human rights in a free and democratic society and globally.

Democracy and media freedom

- **Recognize** the relationship between access to credible information and a broad diversity of ideas as a foundation of democratic resilience;
- **Emphasize** the importance of media freedom, pluralism and diversity of content and cultural expressions;

- **Recognize** that online platforms have become places for public discussion and may impact the opinion-forming process of society and the accessibility and discoverability of content.

Digital inclusion

- **Recognize** that digital shifts and increasing media convergence have had an impact on all aspects of content creation and consumption.
- **Recognize** the importance of greater connectivity that allows communities to fully engage with one another to build resilient and strong democratic societies;
- **Highlight** the importance of diverse content in local languages and meaningful civic participation;
- **Confirm** their support for the principle of net neutrality and the promotion of a free, open, interoperable and secure internet;

Equity

- **Confirm** that systemic barriers, which limit access and undermine the economic viability of diverse content and opportunities for creators from equity-deserving groups, should be identified and remedied; and
- **Recognize** that some content and ideas that may be circulated on online platforms, including hate, racial prejudice, disinformation and misinformation, can have real and concrete consequences and that these can disproportionately affect Indigenous people and equity-deserving groups and persons, including persons with disabilities, racialized and local communities, linguistic or religious minorities, members of the LGBTQ2+ and gender diverse communities.

THE PRINCIPLES

Theme 1 – Creation, access and discoverability of diverse content online

- Content reflecting different cultures and perspectives, including in local languages, should be created, and discoverable;
- Users should have access to local, national and international sources of content, including in local and Indigenous languages, where applicable;
- Users should have access to settings that influence what content is recommended to them.

Theme 2 – Fair remuneration and economic viability of content creators

- Market conditions that allow creators to create and disseminate information and content from different perspectives and languages should be promoted;
- Content creators should be appropriately and proportionately remunerated for the use of their works and copyright;
- There should be appropriate safeguards and tools against the online infringement of copyright. This includes a role, in accordance with national laws, for relevant internet service providers in the enforcement of copyright, which appropriately balances the interests of rights holders, users and online services;
- Content creators should have opportunities to develop their skills to improve their economic viability;
- All relevant actors should foster transparency and ensure fairness in their remuneration models and when negotiating terms and conditions of a transaction.

Theme 3 – Promotion of diverse, pluralistic sources of news and information as well as resilience against disinformation and misinformation

- A diverse, pluralistic, healthy and sustainable media ecosystem, which includes public service media and independent news and information sources should be fostered;
- Exposure to a variety of local, national and international news, as well as information from diverse and pluralistic sources should be promoted;
- Media and digital literacy for all citizens should be improved to further their ability to critically assess content they encounter;
- Ethical journalistic standards should be upheld and encouraged;
- Any measure to address disinformation and misinformation should ensure respect for the right to freedom of expression;
- Information about media ownership and funding sources should be made accessible to the public and transparent to safeguard a diverse and pluralistic media ecosystem.

Theme 4 – Transparency of the impacts of algorithmic treatments of online content

- Meaningful transparency and responsible disclosure around content-based recommendation systems should be made available to enable citizens to understand why they are recommended content;
- Content recommendation algorithms should promote content reflecting different sources, perspectives, ideas and genres;
- Content recommendation algorithms and their developers should minimize potential systemic biases and discrimination in outcome, related to such things as race, sexual orientation, gender identity and ability;
- Organizations must ensure they comply with applicable privacy laws when handling personal information to develop and deploy algorithms;
- The development and implementation of content-recommendation systems should respect freedom of expression in a way that allows for safe and diverse content.

ANNEX A: Specific Commitments (TBD)

Signatories also agree to pursue their engagement by developing specific commitments by December 2022 at the latest, to show concrete actions they will take to implement the guiding principles. These specific commitments will remain evergreen and continue to evolve.

Theme 1 - Creation, access and discoverability of diverse content online

1. **Governments will endeavour to:**

2. **Private sector will endeavour to:**

3. **Civil society will endeavour to:**

Theme 2 - Fair remuneration and economic viability of content creators

1. **Governments will endeavour to:**

2. **Private sector will endeavour to:**

3. **Civil society will endeavour to:**

Theme 3 - Promotion of diverse, pluralistic sources of news and information as well as resilience against disinformation and misinformation

1. **Governments will endeavour to:**

2. **Private sector will endeavour to:**

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Theme 4 - Transparency of the impact of algorithmic treatments of online content

1. **Governments will endeavour to:**

2. **Private sector will endeavour to:**

3. **Civil society will endeavour to:**

ANNEX B: RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of all signatories to work together to achieve the objectives of these guiding principles.

Signatories will promote direct and open dialogue between partner states, the private sector, notably online platforms, media sector representatives and civil society on their responsibilities, in connection with the protection and promotion of exposure to diverse content online.

Signatories recognize that the following guiding principles aim to complement, and have been inspired by, existing regulatory texts and guidelines such as, but not limited to, the *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and the *European Council Conclusions on Safeguarding free and pluralistic media systems*.

Because these guiding principles are set in a rapidly evolving environment, it is essential to perceive them as a document for open guidance, to be revised and adapted according to the evolution of technologies and the societies they aim to help and protect. To interpret them correctly, it is important to keep the following points in mind:

- Although the guiding principles are presented as a list, they are not ranked. The last principle is not less important than the first. However, it is possible, depending on the circumstances of a particular case, to lend more weight to one principle than another, or to consider one principle more relevant than another.
- Although they inevitably reflect the ethical standards, normative values and political culture of the signatories that have developed them, due to the multi-stakeholder composition of the drafting group, the guiding principles can still provide the basis for an intercultural and international dialogue.
- Although they are expected to be implemented in good faith by each signatory party, this remains a legally non-binding document with a set of desired behaviors and outcomes and does not create any legally binding rights or obligations. The implementation of these principles will be consistent with existing domestic and international obligations.
- Signatories are invited to promote the development of structural and procedural indicators for trustworthiness of news and media outlets and their compliance with professional norms and ethics established in their State or industry. However, they should abstain from directly deciding what amounts to quality or reliable content.

ANNEX C: DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this document, the following terms will be interpreted as:

o **Principles**: principles are deemed to be a set of propositions or values that serve as a guide for expected behaviors or outcomes.

o **Equity-deserving groups**: Equity-deserving individuals and groups are defined as those facing significant barriers to participation in different facets of society, primarily due to policies and practices that produce inequitable treatment. This marginalization could be created by attitudinal, historic, social, economic, legal and/or environmental obstacles, based on such factors as age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, racialization, faith, gender, nationality, sexual orientation and transgender status. Equity-deserving individuals and groups are those who face barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination created by institutions, systems, narratives and individuals in power.

o **Discoverability**: ability to find content on a platform catalogue or via search engines (findability), the potential of content to appear in the hits of aggregation or collaborative filtering systems (predictability) and the potential for content to be recommended by the platform or other users based on their preferences (recommendability).

o **Diverse content:** content from a plurality of sources, diversity of types and genres of content from creators of diverse backgrounds, as well as exposure diversity, meaning the level of exposure and consumption of different content by an individual.

o **News content:** content that reports, investigates or explains issues or current events of public significance and interest, and that is relevant for engaging citizens in public debate and in informing democratic decision-making.

o **Disinformation:** false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm. *Misinformation* is false or misleading content shared without harmful intent though the effects can still be harmful, e.g., when people share false information with friends and family in good faith.

o **Transparency:** transparency under this theme is referring to sharing sufficient information and a reasonable justification of the factors and logic that influence decisions and outcomes.

o **Digital Inclusion:** the full and meaningful access to and use of digital technologies and the Internet, requiring not only the availability of physical infrastructure and access in terms of speed, cost, language and literacy, but also online spaces conducive to civic participation free from censorship and the ability to trust industry and governments will keep users safe from online harms and violations of privacy.