



# INTERNET GOVERNANCE STRATEGY

*Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet. Since 2012 the Council of Europe's Internet Governance Strategy has been a meaningful tool for coordinating this process, as well as for providing timely and adequate responses to the challenges to human rights, democracy and the rule of law inevitably deriving from the ever evolving digital environment.*

Brief overview of the Council of  
Europe Internet Governance  
Strategy 2016-2019

Thematic  
Focus

Information  
Society

[www.coe.int/freedomofexpression](http://www.coe.int/freedomofexpression)

## A continuum of core values

The **Internet Governance Strategy 2012-2015** brought together relevant Council of Europe standards and monitoring, co-operation and capacity-building activities. The strategy linked legally-binding treaties, the transversal strategies on gender equality and children's rights and the dynamic platform for youth participation. It also enabled member States to debate the cultural challenges of the internet.

## Assessing challenges

The Council of Europe's **Internet Governance Strategy 2016-2019** aims at ensuring that public policy relating to the internet is people-centred and contributes to building democracy online, protecting internet users, and ensuring the protection and respect for human rights online. Strategic objectives for the indicated period are to build democracy online, to protect Internet users, and to ensure respect and protection for human rights online. To this end, the strategy proposes a series of specific activities.

The strategy is a multi-disciplinary tool which covers issues concerning content, services and devices connected to the internet, including relevant aspects of its infrastructure and functioning which can affect human rights and fundamental freedoms. The strategy identifies many challenges to the internet and provides a mapping to governments and other stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and technical and academic communities for addressing these challenges.

## Building democracy online

The internet is of critical value for democracy. Beyond the deployment of **e-democracy and e-voting, e-government and e-justice initiatives**, the internet's public service value should be developed further. This includes enabling online participation in public life, also at local level, introducing **digital citizenship education** into formal education systems and encouraging citizens to engage with digital culture and to benefit from its potential for inclusion and innovation as well as to develop a healthy and balanced relationship with the internet.

## Ensuring online safety and security for all

The online safety and security of internet users is a shared responsibility. This requires action to combat violent extremism and radicalisation, cybercrime, as well as the exploitation, harassment and bullying of people via the internet. This also includes the protection against sexual abuse and exploitation of children online, action to fight organ and human trafficking, and the sale of counterfeit medicines and drugs.

The Council of Europe's Conventions, such as the **Convention on Cybercrime** (ETS No. 185), **Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse** (CETS No. 201), and **Convention for the**

**Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data** (ETS No. 108) are of special relevance to this work.

## Respecting and protecting human rights

The internet is an invaluable space for the exercise of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and information. While the risks to the human rights of internet users are increasing, as an inevitable side-effect of the development of the "**internet of things**", it is necessary to **raise awareness** of legitimate expectations and restrictions when using internet services, available remedies and ways to seek redress when human rights have been violated, as well as to enable internet users to **protect their privacy**, including with the help of **anonymity and encryption** tools.

## Enhancing standards

As a standard-setting instrument, the **Recommendation (2016)5 on Internet Freedom** sets clear and detailed indicators for the evaluation of member States' performance in respecting, protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms on the internet.

Another standard, the "**Guide to human rights for internet users**" (2014), elaborates on human rights online, their possible limitations, and available remedies for such limitations. This is a comprehensive tool for all, available in many languages.

## Building partnerships

The Council of Europe participates in regional and global **dialogue on internet governance**, such as IGF, WSIS, EURODIG, SEEDIG, ICANN and others, providing policy orientations and instruments.

Steps have been taken to establish a framework for a **partnership for human rights, democracy and the rule of law between the Council of Europe and internet companies** with a view to creating a space for closer consultation with intermediaries on issues related to the exercise and enjoyment of human rights online. The Council of Europe thus also aims to promote dialogue between internet companies and other stakeholders.

## Exploring new opportunities

**Internet intermediaries** play an ever growing role in terms of providing and customising internet content, managing user data, but also implementing restrictive policies or surveillance programmes. The Council of Europe has tasked an expert group to develop a rule of law-based policy for the relationship between state authorities and intermediaries and their respective human rights obligations and responsibilities.

In parallel, the work on **human rights dimensions of algorithms** discusses legal, social and ethical considerations related to algorithms and automated data-processing techniques. It explores areas such as automation, data analysis, social constructs around algorithms, the impact of algorithms on human rights as well as the mechanisms of governance accountability, transparency and ethics.