

Protecting  
human rights,  
democracy and  
the rule of law  
in the digital  
environment

COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
**DIGITAL**  
DEVELOPMENT AND  
GOVERNANCE FOCUS  
**2024-2025**



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

**data**protection  
**cyber**crime  
**artificial**intelligence  
**internet**governance  
**digital**partnership

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

## Overview

The Council of Europe is committed to protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the digital environment.

The 2023 **Reykjavik Declaration** of Heads of State and Government calls for the Council of Europe to take a leading role in **developing standards in the digital era** to safeguard human rights online and offline, and for **strengthening the role of the Council of Europe** in the evolving European multilateral architecture and in global governance.

The **Digital Development and Governance Department** leads the development and implementation of Council of Europe standards concerning privacy, action against cybercrime, and artificial intelligence. It actively participates in the global dialogue on internet governance and engages in cooperation with major tech companies. It also provides support to, and coordinates the implementation of, the Council of Europe Digital Agenda.

## Data Protection

The Council of Europe safeguards and promotes the **rights to privacy and data protection** through international standards and international cooperation.

For over 40 years, the Council of Europe has guaranteed the right to data protection and informational self-determination by means of **the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data** (Convention 108).

In 2018, an Amending Protocol (CETS 223) has modernised Convention 108 and its entry into force will allow an upgrade of the protections it provides.

In the field of Data Protection, the objectives for the biennium 2024-2025 are:

- The Entry into force of Convention 108+ (CETS 223);
- Enhancing data protection, including biometrics, within the framework of vote and elections;
- Developing a “digital identity” in the context of migration;
- Fostering cooperation with other committees and institutions;
- Addressing neuroscience-related data protection issues.

## Action against Cybercrime

The Convention on Cybercrime ("**Budapest Convention**") is regarded as the only international agreement on cybercrime and electronic evidence to date. It provides its 75 Parties with a framework for domestic action and international co-operation for:

- **criminalisation of offences** against and by means of computers;
- **procedural powers** to investigate cybercrime and **secure electronic evidence** in relation to any crime;
- **international cooperation** on cybercrime and electronic evidence.

In the biennium 2024-2025, the main goals of the **Cybercrime Convention Committee** are:

- The promotion of additional signatures and in particular ratification of the Second Additional Protocol and accession to the Budapest Convention;
- The completion of the ongoing assessment of Article 19 on the “search and seizure of stored computer data”;
- The preparation of new guidance notes, namely on AI.

The **Cybercrime Programme Office (C-PROC)** in 2024-2025 will continue to work with countries in all regions of the world and focus on:

- Supporting the implementation of the Second Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention;
- Fostering the implementation of the Budapest Convention by countries that have been invited to accede to this treaty;
- Promoting effective measures on cybercrime that meet the requirements of human rights and the rule of law;
- Making use of electronic evidence to prosecute war crimes in Ukraine.

## Artificial Intelligence

Adopted in May 2024, the Council of Europe **Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law**, became the first international legally binding instrument in this field. It aims to ensure that activities within the lifecycle of artificial intelligence systems are fully consistent with human rights, democracy, and the rule of law,

while being conducive to technological progress and innovation.

The Framework Convention establishes a follow-up mechanism, the **Conference of the Parties**, composed of official representatives of the Parties to the Convention to determine the extent to which its provisions are being implemented. The Conference of the Parties shall also facilitate co-operation with relevant stakeholders.

The **Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI)** which drafted and negotiated the AI Convention, is also responsible for preparing the standard-setting and policymaking of the Council of Europe in relation to new and emerging digital technologies, including AI. It also coordinates the AI-related activities across the sectors of the Organisation to ensure coherence and compatibility and acts as liaison office with international and supranational organisations, as well as external partners.

The 2024-2025 AI-related work will be focused on:

- Promoting the **worldwide adoption** of the Framework Convention on AI;
- Developing a **methodology for risk and impact assessment** of artificial intelligence systems in relation to human rights, democracy and the rule of law (HUDERIA);
- Developing **additional binding or non-binding instruments**, and relevant policy guidelines to address challenges relating to the application of AI in specific sectors.

## Internet Governance

To ensure a sustainable, people-centred and rights-based approach to the Internet, the Council of Europe engages in setting and **promoting standards, building partnerships and fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue**.

Over the years, the Council of Europe has developed a **solid body of standards and tools** to help its members States and other stakeholders act in the digital environment in a human rights-compliant way and it is actively working to foster cooperation in that field.

The Council of Europe supports and participates in **regional and global forums on Internet governance**, such as IGF, WSIS, ICANN, and EuroDIG.

In this respect an important process has been engaged for the **WSIS+20 Review Process and Vision Beyond 2025**, the **UN Summit for the**

**Future** and the new **Global Digital Compact**, whose aim is to “outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all”.

The Council of Europe will also strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation in early risk-assessment and policy proposals concerning new technologies, e.g. Generative AI, Metaverse etc.

## Digital Partnership

The Digital Partnership aims to promote a shared commitment and cooperation between the major **digital and telecom companies and their associations** and the Council of Europe, in order to strengthen dialogue and explore ways to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Internet users in accordance with Council of Europe Conventions and standards.

The multiple **cooperation initiatives since 2017** have spanned across diverse domains, ranging from combating cybercrime, ensuring privacy and data protection, encouraging responsible utilisation of artificial intelligence, advocating freedom of expression, promoting equality and non-discrimination, fostering education, to safeguarding children's rights. Most recently a **joint report on the Metaverse's** impact on human rights and democracy was developed in cooperation with IEEE. In May 2024 a Digital Partnership Workshop has identified a new **Digital Partnership Roadmap 2024 +**.

## Council of Europe Digital Agenda

The Council of Europe **Digital Agenda 2022-2025** set strategic priorities in the digital environment with the goal to consolidate the existing digital regulation, develop new legal instruments responding to new challenges and taking advantage of opportunities provided by emerging digital technologies; and accompany member states for a digital transition with European values.

The **Digital Agenda Mid-term Review 2023** highlighted new opportunities arising in the fields of legal technology, online training, mutualisation of expertise and co-operation with business and civil society. These include early risk assessment of new technologies; enhancing digitalisation of the judiciary in member states; developing online training opportunities and nurturing the global agenda in the field of digital governance.

A **final assessment report** is expected to evaluate results and set new orientations for the future in 2025.

# The rapid digitalisation

of the society has brought many new opportunities, but also challenges to protecting human rights in the digital environment.

The Council of Europe action to accompany digital development and strengthen digital governance focuses on safeguarding privacy, combating cybercrime, managing artificial intelligence, and cooperating with key international institutions and leading tech companies.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

@ **DIGITAL  
GOVERNANCE**

Protecting  
human rights,  
democracy and  
the rule of law  
in the digital  
environment

Social Media



Council of Europe  
# Digital Governance

ENG