

Rights-Respecting Digital Public Infrastructure Principles

October 2025

We, the undersigned Members and Observer of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), aim to advance knowledge on frameworks for human rights-respecting, resilient, safe, inclusive and interoperable digital public infrastructure (DPI) to promote inclusive connectivity and civic participation. This includes mitigating potential risks, such as multiple and intersecting issues relating to exclusion, discrimination, surveillance and privacy. It also seeks to explore the contextual realities and differences of the deployment of DPI in different states and mechanisms to redress the uneven impact of advanced digital technologies, while complying with international obligations and commitments. The following principles – drawing on global best practices and frameworks, including the [Universal DPI Safeguards](#) and the [GovStack principles](#) – can help ensure that DPI is built with a commitment to fostering responsible innovation and economic growth so societies and businesses can thrive in today's digital economy:

1. **Human-Rights Based Solutions:** We affirm that the focus of digitalisation should be on humans. Developing human rights-respecting technology, digital solutions, and information systems, whether by governments or private actors, should serve this objective. Technology with the individual at the centre starts with identifying the needs of potentially impacted populations, and collaboratively designing the products and services to cater to those needs through continuous, inclusive, participatory processes and consultation with those who will be affected. Digital transformation should respond to real needs, not be a goal in itself, and should be accomplished in a manner that respects privacy, inclusivity, and human rights.
2. **Inclusivity:** We believe everyone should have meaningful access to a reliable, secure, open, coherent, free, global, interoperable Internet, as well as to digital services and skills. Civic participation and safety online should be promoted to ensure all can benefit from the digital transformation and deployment of DPI. This means closing digital divides both within and between countries so that no one is left behind. Inclusivity encompasses information and digital literacy, capacity building, accessibility, connectivity, affordability, and linguistic and cultural relevance of content. Technology, or its use and deployment, should not discriminate against any individual or members of a group based on race, color, gender, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, Indigeneity, language, religion, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, sex characteristics or other protected characteristics. The digital ecosystem should be inclusive and financially accessible, designed and built for the needs of the whole society, taking into account the needs of individuals that may be in vulnerable situations, and include capacity-building programs.



3. **International Human Rights Law:** In the use of technologies, we uphold international human rights law and standards, including the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to ensure alignment of design, access and security accordingly. We encourage ensuring responsibility, accountability and transparency throughout the life cycle of new and emerging digital technologies, from their design, development, procurement and deployment, and including during periods of transition to digital services. Respect for human rights should be embedded into the life cycle of technologies by design.
4. **Transparency and Accountability:** We encourage all stakeholders to observe and advance the necessary processes for independent, democratic and public oversight, as well as redress, ensuring the enforcement, transparency, responsiveness and accountability of digital solutions. We also encourage the maintenance of options for those who cannot access or who choose to opt out of digital solutions, in order to minimise the negative impact of technologies on the enjoyment of human rights. Transparency regarding data generation, collection, processing (including through automated systems and algorithms), and decision-making processes concerning users is essential, supported by open source software and open data principles. Accountability and oversight mechanisms should be built into systems and be transparent, explainable, fair and independent, ensuring that people receive clear and reliable responses within digital systems and when accessing justice mechanisms, and ensuring participation of communities whose interests are directly affected within a specific DPI context. We also explicitly recognize the right to remedy, ensuring that individuals have effective recourse when their rights are violated in the digital context, consistent with international human rights law.
5. **Privacy and Security:** We stand for a safe, secure, and trusted digital environment. Addressing privacy and security in digital development requires prioritizing users' ability to control their data, while also building safeguards to protect people's rights against structural asymmetries with data holders. Careful consideration should be given to which data is collected, mapping the purposes to ensure data minimization, legal basis, and impacted stakeholders' needs and preferences for data processing. This same consideration should be given to how data is generated, acquired, used, stored and shared, including on a transnational level, ensuring these processes are transparent, accountable, secure, and respect individuals' rights. Appropriate technical and organisational measures should be implemented to ensure a level of security that is proportionate to the risk, including ensuring the use of trusted vendors for infrastructure, software, and services. Misuse of data should be addressed appropriately, with robust safeguards, including legal



remedies, in place to ensure accountability. These commitments should be understood as part of robust data governance frameworks that uphold individual rights, in a manner consistent with international human rights law.

6. **Societal Context:** We believe it is essential to take into account the unique cultural, legal, linguistic, idiomatic, and social contexts in each country, region, and community when designing digital tools, especially before deciding whether to implement technological solutions. Recognizing local context, a human rights-based approach requires developing and designing bottom-up solutions that empower and respond to the needs of communities, including underserved populations, while respecting international human rights law and international standards.
7. **Sustainability and Resilience:** We encourage building sustainable programs, platforms and digital tools that maximize long-term impact, which is essential to maintain user and stakeholder support, as well as to ensure the financial sustainability of initiatives, including models independent of commercial incentives where appropriate. Addressing environmental, societal and economic impacts of the digital transformation is of utmost importance. These initiatives should also be reliable and attentive to people's changing needs in moments of disruption, enabling communities to navigate crises through responses that are sensitive and adaptable to their specific challenges. DPI should be designed with robust, human rights-based contingency plans and flexible architectures that ensure uninterrupted service delivery during crises. This includes leveraging decentralized technologies, backup systems, and rapid response mechanisms to maintain access, protect data integrity, and support essential services even under adverse conditions.
8. **Evidence-Based Decision-Making:** We strive for evidence-based initiatives that use reliable and accurate information for decision-making and action. It is important to ensure objectivity and reduce data bias, defined as inaccurate, missing or incorrect data points, with particular attention to the effects of data bias on marginalised and underrepresented groups. This is essential to making sure that decisions are based on accurate and reliable information, and that data is collected and used in a human rights respecting manner to support, not replace, human judgment. Through this approach we uphold the principles of universality, equality, indivisibility and accountability while respecting the ability of individuals and organizations to make informed, evidence-based decisions.
9. **Interoperability:** We commit to promote and build interoperable systems, which work together seamlessly across organizations and sectors to minimize invasiveness and reduce the burden on individuals, while upholding intellectual



property rights and applicable, robust data protection frameworks. Interoperability aims to ensure easier access to services, supports inclusivity and facilitates access to essential services without unnecessary barriers.

10. **Technology Neutrality:** We commit to building and implementing DPI without unduly favouring any particular technology, vendor, or proprietary solution. Instead, decisions should be driven by users' needs and interests, objective safety and security criteria, competitive, transparent procurement processes, and international commitments, to ensure that the digital transformation remains flexible and adaptable to emerging needs, opportunities and contexts.
11. **Openness:** We support an open approach to digital development that, when responsibly developed, safe, secure, inclusive and trusted, can help increase cooperation in the digital development community, avoid duplicating work, and reduce overreliance on one vendor. Open standards, open source software and open data, as appropriate, provide visibility into how systems operate, helping ensure that they can be scrutinized and improved while protecting human rights and fostering robust knowledge commons. Pooling skills and resources supports better and faster digital development.
12. **Multistakeholder Collaboration:** We reaffirm our commitment to inclusive, bottom-up and open multistakeholder approaches to the governance of digital technologies and to sustained, meaningful dialogue and engagement with all stakeholders to share knowledge and expertise, at all levels. This collaborative approach enhances efficiency, amplifies impact, and fosters innovation. Collaboration helps ensure that systems and policies are co-designed, equitable, and respect the needs and rights of all persons, fostering mutual accountability and trust, including between all stakeholders. Meaningful multistakeholder collaboration on DPI governance requires the inclusion of diverse voices, including marginalized groups and those who may be in vulnerable situations. We encourage sharing information, insights, strategies and resources across projects, local and global organizations and sectors, leading to increased efficiency, effectiveness and impact.

To view the list of signatories, please visit the FOC website:

www.freedomonlinecoalition.com/rights-respecting-dpi-principles

