

The i4T logo, consisting of a central blue circle with the text "i4T" in white, surrounded by several smaller blue circles of varying sizes connected by thin lines, resembling a network or molecular structure.

Pretoria's Proposition for Action on Digital Platform Governance

International Conference on Digital Platform Governance

A pledge of the Global Forum of Networks of Regulatory Authorities,
supported by UNESCO and the I4T Knowledge Network.

Members of the Global Forum of Networks:

- The African Communication Regulation Authorities Network (ACRAN)
- The European Media Services Board (former ERGA)
- The European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA)
- The Global Online Safety Regulators Network (GOSRN)
- The Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities (MNRA)
- The Platform of Ibero-American Audiovisual Regulators (PRAI)
- The Francophone Network of Media Regulators (REFRAM)
- The Platform of Regulatory Authorities for the Media of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and Territories (PER)

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Pretoria's Proposition for Action on Digital Platform Governance

Digital platforms have become essential infrastructures for global communication, yet notwithstanding this achievement their governance, in most cases, remains fragmented, opaque, and often disconnected from human rights standards. Effective governance is possible through coordinated action grounded in clear principles and concrete commitments.

Meeting in Pretoria, regulatory authorities, governments, platforms, civil society organizations, and researchers convened to address digital platform governance. They agreed that safeguarding freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of association, the right to privacy and the protection of diverse cultural expressions while addressing systemic risks requires key actions. This continues the multi-stakeholder approach developed at the UNESCO 2024 International Conference on Digital Platform Governance in Dubrovnik and the UNESCO 2022 Internet for Trust Conference.

This Proposition for Action represents a pledge by regulatory authorities and institutions dealing with the governance of digital platforms to multistakeholder approaches to advance on the implementation of the principles of transparency, accountability, due diligence, user empowerment, and alignment with international human rights standards in the public oversight of the design of new products and digital services as set out in the UNESCO Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms and the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Action Plan for Digital Platform Governance. It reaffirms the importance of respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, safeguarding freedom of expression, the right to access to information, the right to privacy and freedom of association, with a gender transformative approach, in all aspects of digital platform governance.

Progress and stocktaking

There has been a meaningful shift in how digital platform governance is understood and practiced. Issues once treated as private corporate policy are increasingly recognised as questions of public governance. For some companies and in some jurisdictions, transparency reporting has expanded, civil society engagement has deepened, and regional cooperation among regulators offers pathways toward greater coherence while respecting cultural diversity and independent media ecosystems.

Yet progress remains uneven. In some contexts, political pressure and weakened oversight erode the checks and balances essential to protecting freedom of expression and public trust. Platform practices remain starkly asymmetrical: transparency and redress mechanisms flourish in some markets while opacity persists in others. Technological advances are expanding and constraining public discourse and challenging current national regulatory models. Clear mechanisms to sustain accountability and engagement across jurisdictions remain urgently needed.

Platform governance can no longer be addressed in isolation. It intersects with information policy, data protection, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, competition, election governance, gender equality, minor's protection, education policy and cultural policy, thus demanding attention to the specific services and features that generate systemic risks, particularly algorithmic curation and monetization models. Meeting these challenges requires strong independent oversight institutions, consistent accountability, inclusive participation, and a governance vision centered on human rights and human dignity.

This Proposition for Action sets out a shared framework for durable inter-regional cooperation and dialogue, translating common priorities into coordinated and concrete examples of action. The Proposition for Action recognizes that effective implementation requires a differentiated approach that reflects variations in legal systems, institutional capacities, political priorities, resource availability, and local contexts. It therefore proposes a set of possible lines of action which individual regulators, regional regulatory networks and the Global Forum of Networks can select and adopt, depending on which are relevant to their mandate and which match their capacities and the political, economic and social circumstances in which they are operating. It is not a uniform template, but a shared compass, with some actions relevant at the national, and some at the regional/international level of inter-institutional cooperation.

In this context, the regulators committing to the framework of this Proposition for Action, with the support of civil society, reaffirm that:

- Platform governance must be grounded in international human rights law, which is universal, indivisible and interdependent, with any restrictions on expression meeting tests of legality, legitimate aim, necessity, and proportionality.
- Platforms, regulators, and governments must operate transparently, with accessible information about rules, decisions, and their effects.
- Governance measures should follow a transparent, inclusive, gender-transformative, multistakeholder approach, enabling diverse actors, particularly stakeholders from communities that have faced marginalisation or discrimination, to contribute expertise, scrutinize decisions, and ensure accountability.
- Governments need to invest in independent regulatory systems, capacity building processes for those involved in regulatory actions, and develop mechanisms and programs for inter-regulatory and cross-border collaboration and multistakeholder engagement.
- People must have meaningful control over their online experience, access to clear information, adequate safeguards to prevent violations of their privacy, expression and association online, and effective redress and remedy.

This Proposition for Action proposes that:

a) Regulatory capacity and cooperation can be advanced by:

1. Establishing peer learning networks among regulatory authorities at regional and inter-regional levels, where regulators can discuss emerging challenges, enforcement experiences, practical solutions and priority regulatory measures.
2. Establishing structured coordination mechanisms between national regulatory authorities with relevant competent authorities, including electoral commissions, data protection authorities, health regulators, child protection and education authorities, national human rights institutions, environmental agencies, gambling regulators, and consumer protection bodies, through formal cooperation arrangements, information-sharing protocols, joint risk assessments, and referral and escalation procedures, with a view to ensuring coherent and effective oversight of online platforms across interconnected policy domains.

3. Piloting cross-border cooperation mechanisms where regulators can address platform harms that span jurisdictions, including theme-based consultations on emerging challenges, coordinated investigations, shared enforcement actions, and mutual recognition of decisions where possible and appropriate.
4. Strengthening transparency and independence of regulatory processes, by committing regulators to publish clear, timely and accessible information on decisions, procedures and outcomes; safeguard decision-making from political and commercial interference; and enable public scrutiny through regular reporting and open, consistent and constructive engagement with stakeholders, including key stakeholders from civil society, academia, independent media and communities historically subject to marginalisation and discrimination.
5. Building a regulatory knowledge hub (physical or digital) where regulators can access model legislation, case studies, assessment tools, and comparative analysis. Civil society, academic institutions, and industry experts can contribute by sharing practical insights, research, and best practices; providing peer review of tools and case studies; and facilitating training or workshops to build regulatory capacity and ensure that the hub reflects diverse perspectives and emerging challenges.
6. Prioritising and rapidly expanding the creation of joint training programs for platform oversight staff where regulators can focus on human rights-based platforms governance review, algorithmic auditing, and evidence-based risk assessment.
7. Establishing technical assistance partnerships that pair well-resourced regulators with similar mandates with emerging authorities, enabling hands-on support to build independent oversight capabilities, share best practices, and strengthen regulatory expertise.
8. Building regulatory sandboxes, enabling regulators, civil society, and industry to learn collaboratively in structured, supervised environments. Such sandboxes should build mutual trust, accelerate institutional capacity, and support evidence-based regulation.
9. Exploring and implementing non-statutory mechanisms, including soft law instruments, and cooperative governance arrangements, where regulators can achieve the objectives of this Proposition for Action where formal regulatory powers may be limited.
10. Seeking dedicated funding and resources from governments to regulators to strengthen independent platform governance capacity and implement the commitments set forth in this Proposition for Action.

b) Digital platforms' transparency and accountability can be increased in a coherent manner by:

11. Creating consistent approaches to transparency obligations, covering platform governance decisions (disaggregated by type, language, and region); appeal outcomes and processing times; government requests for content removal or user data; algorithmic recommender system design and impacts; and advertising targeting practices and safeguards, where regulators can agree upon standards, platforms implement them, and civil society can monitor compliance to support shared governance.
12. Advancing the creation of early-warning and mandatory incident-reporting systems, where regulators can define reporting obligations and enforcement mechanisms, civil society can monitor compliance, and platforms are required to notify regulators promptly of systemic risks.

13. Advancing the establishment of researcher data access programs, with regulators and platforms collaborating to define access requirements and oversight mechanisms, independent review boards vetting applications, and with platforms required to provide vetted academics and civil society organizations with secure, privacy-protected access to platform data for public interest research within established timeframes and ethical frameworks.

c) Users can be protected by:

14. Mandating enforceable redress requirements. Regulators can jointly define and adopt parameters for platforms to provide accessible, free, confidential, and timely appeal mechanisms for platform governance decisions.
15. Establishing independent oversight of redress systems. Regulators can put in place independent oversight and escalation mechanisms to verify that platform redress obligations are implemented in practice. This can include structured roles for civil society actors to monitor appeal processes, receive and refer complaints and identify systemic failures, and support affected users.
16. Establishing gender-responsive reporting and response standards. Regulators can define and adopt requirements for gender-responsive reporting mechanisms that recognize tech facilitated gender-based violence, image-based abuse, and coordinated harassment as distinct categories requiring specialized handling.
17. Supporting community-led safety and resilience programs. Regulators can promote and resource community-led safety initiatives that provide training, tools, and support to at-risk groups, including children and youth, women journalists, human rights defenders, and communities in situations of vulnerability and marginalization, and will integrate insights from these programs into policy development and supervisory practice.
18. Institutionalizing regular consultations with families and youth. Regulators can establish recurring consultation mechanisms with parents, caregivers, families, youth organizations, and educators to identify emerging risks, gaps, and opportunities in the protection of children's rights in digital environments, and to inform regulatory priorities and guidance.
19. Embedding a comprehensive, rights-based approach to children in digital platform governance. Regulators can define and adopt requirements, in collaboration with platforms, to ensure that children are protected from harmful, exploitative, and age-inappropriate features and commercial practices, while also safeguarding their rights to access information, freedom of expression, participation, education and development.

d) Communities can be empowered by:

20. Establishing and implementing multilingual compliance standards. Where it is relevant to their context, regulators can jointly define and adopt minimum requirements for multilingual platform governance in all languages where a platform has a significant user base. Regulators can develop clear criteria for culturally competent moderation, mandate the presence of locally informed escalation pathways, and set measurable expectations for coverage and response times.
21. Mandating meaningful user empowerment and transparency tools. Regulators can require platforms to provide accessible user controls that enable individuals to

meaningfully adjust or limit content recommendation systems, opt out of personalized advertising, and understand the key factors driving the content they are shown.

22. Launching coordinated national media and information literacy (MIL) initiatives. Regulators can initiate and support national media and information literacy programs, developed in partnership with educators, media organizations, civil society, and platforms, to strengthen users' ability to navigate digital spaces safely and critically.
23. Elevating MIL as a core regulatory strategy and multistakeholder priority. Regulators can integrate MIL into supervisory frameworks as a systemic risk-mitigation measure, supported by sustained, dedicated public funding and cross-sector coordination.

e) Systemic risks can be addressed by:

24. Ensuring that digital platforms conduct and publish human rights impact assessments before, during, and after deploying new services and products, covering algorithmic curation, targeted advertising, and automated moderation systems. Civil society actors can also be supported to conduct independent, human rights–based monitoring of these features, providing insights that inform regulatory reviews, enhance public transparency, and strengthen accountability.
25. Establishing common standards for systemic risk assessment. Regulators can define clear standards and methodologies for assessing systemic risks, including scope, indicators, data sources, and reporting requirements. These standards could cover risks to electoral integrity and civic discourse; public health information environments; gender equality and women's safety; protection of minors and youth wellbeing; media freedom and pluralism; minority rights and linguistic diversity; and climate change information integrity.
26. Enabling rapid multi-stakeholder response. Regulators can coordinate with civil society actors and platform teams to ensure that identified risks are addressed promptly, including escalation to regulatory or enforcement measures where necessary, and the provision of effective, timely and adequate measures for the protection of individuals against identified threats. Particular attention should be given to situations of conflict and crisis, where risks may be amplified, through the establishment of streamlined and targeted rapid response mechanisms to address high-harm threats.

f) Investment can be made in evidence and research by:

27. Fostering the development of research programs on platform governance at the national and regional levels, with dedicated resources where regulators can study the impact of platforms on historically disadvantaged groups, or can encourage platforms and civil society groups to do the same.
28. Establishing regulator-researcher partnerships where regulators can commission evidence reviews, impact studies, and policy evaluations.

Implementation

The supporters of this Proposition for Action will seek to:

Build a monitoring committee and develop regular multi-stakeholder reviews to assess progress against these actions, identifying obstacles, and adapting strategies based on evidence.

Refer to this this Proposition for Action and, where relevant, reflect relevant aspects when reviewing their organizational strategies and developing annual plans.

UNESCO commits to continue supporting and expanding this network through active outreach to additional governments, platforms, civil society organizations, and regional networks.

Over the past two decades, digital technologies have transformed public discourse, simultaneously amplifying and constraining freedom of expression and the right to access to information. Digital platforms can advance human flourishing, democratic participation, and cultural diversity—but only when governed in accordance with international human rights standards and public interest objectives. This Proposition for Action is a non-binding framework intended to guide coordinated efforts, with UNESCO serving a convening role, and to support implementation, allowing regulators to contribute in line with their respective mandates and operating contexts. **This Proposition for Action sets out a practical, regulator-led agenda for coordinated action, supported by civil society, the academia and the industry, to translate these principles into effective oversight and accountability.**