EDRi's vision for digital futures for people, democracy and the planet.

Reclaiming power from Big Tech and fighting state surveillance

2024

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This vision does not necessarily mean endorsement by all individual EDRi members. EDRi members remain committed to coming together with their own unique sets of expertise and priorities.

Vision

Imagining a brighter future can be challenging amid prevailing pessimism, but the future is not written. We, as individuals, as collectives, communities, and societies, have the agency, and the responsibility, to shape it. EDRi's mission since its inception has been to protect and uphold civil and human rights in the field of information and communication technology. As technology has weaved itself into the fabric of our lives, our societies, EDRi's mission has never been more relevant. Actualising the EDRi vision in 2023 and beyond means envisioning a future where technology serves humanity, democracy, and the planet. Where our greatest challenges, from climate collapse, to the power of Big Tech, to threats against democracy and fundamental rights, are addressed holistically, and through an intersectional lens incorporating justice, equity, sustainability, and decolonising principles.

The following visions present a snapshot of what can and should be possible - a north star - to guide us in the work we collectively do to protect and extend human rights, strengthen democracy, reimagine our societal systems, and care for our planet.

We are eager to share these visions and welcome your thoughts, imaginative insights, explorations, and expansions on these concepts. **In the future we are working towards the following.**

1. OUR TECHNOLOGY SHOULD EMPOWER PEOPLE TO FLOURISH AND THRIVE.

- We prioritise the values of dignity, agency, autonomy, justice, safety, creativity, well-being and individual and collective freedoms.

- We maintain freedom of thought, and reject the pervasive tracking and technological and exploitation of our bodies and minds.

- Our labour practices, supported by technology, empower workers and communities, eliminate job instability, and ensure a high quality of life for everyone.

- Free from the grip of mass surveillance, people have the freedom to express themselves, to communicate safely and securely, to resist oppression, and to assemble and protest.

- We have space and appetite to create, iterate, share ideas, and col-laborate.

- Communities, particularly marginalised groups, are protected and supported to seek justice for historical and ongoing harms.

2. OUR TECHNOLOGY SHOULD PRIORITISE PLANET CARE.

- Caring for the planet is synonymous with caring for ourselves, our communities, and our societies. We acknowledge that technology production is interconnected with living beings, and nature, and ensure our economies and societies respect the planet's limits.

- We incorporate the values of the circular economy, where goods, including technology, are built to last, and we maintain our rights to repair, tinker, and build.

- Industries of all types no longer support, facilitate, or profit from human and natural resource exploitation and extraction. We work toward sufficiency and sustainability frameworks that prioritise de-growth, meeting our needs within planetary boundaries, and reparations for the Global South, in the global north.

- We collectively respect and protect land and territories of Indigenous Communities and in the periphery that hold cultural, ecological, or historical significance.

3. OUR TECHNOLOGY SHOULD MAKE DECISION-MAKING JUST AND ACCOUNTABLE.

- Our decision - making is guided by principles of justice, equity, power-sharing, and is inclusive, collaborative, and accountable. Technology facilitates rather than hampers these principles.

- Public and private actors' power is checked through meaningful transparency and accountability, where equity, inclusion, and justice prevail.

- Public services and infrastructure build resilience to adapt to uncertainty and change, and are protected against takeover by private actors.

- People affected by technology are meaningfully engaged in digital decision-making, and have efficient and effective mechanisms for redress if harms occur.

- Decision-making is localised, representative and accountable to those who are impacted by such decisions.

- Technology does not replace human decision - making, especially in the context of the digital welfare state and the criminal justice system. Public services deployment of digital tools are limited, meaningfully transparent, open to public scrutiny, and contestable.

4. OUR SYSTEMS SHOULD PRIORITISE SAFETY, PARTICIPATION, AND COMMUNITY CARE.

- Technology is used as a tool to enhance and support people, communities and public services, not to oppress, control and manipulate.

- Digital technologies and the internet are designed and used to foster community and enable universal access to knowledge, culture, and spaces for organising and community care.

- The social web and other collaborative spaces are liberated from the grasp of global advertising firms and centralised platforms are replaced by open protocols that enable decentralised and diverse forms of collaboration and communication.

- The rights to a private life, to safety, and dignity online and off, to communicate, organise, protest, and assemble are affirmed as foundational pillars which enable free and democratic societies to flourish.

- Populations are resilient against manipulation, including disinformation, as democratic participation and civic engagement, and the rights to freedom of expression and association are affirmed.

5. TECHNOLOGY SHOULD BE BY, FOR, AND OF THE PEOPLE.

- States invest significant resources to support public infrastructures and public technologies, which are accountable and are governed by clear frameworks of democratic accountability.

- Corporate technology providers are prohibited from dealing, or profiting in any way, from the sale and deployment of surveillance technology. They are held accountable under democratically approved laws and regulations and their power over people's lives is limited.

- People are freely able to access the open and free internet, sharing and contributing to the world's information, knowledge, as the digital commons are established.

- Technology is conceived of, built, iterated, and deployed in service of all, including people with disabilities, in multiple languages. Those who are most affected are meaningfully engaged throughout.

- Digitalisation efforts, including public services, do not impose upon or result in the exclusion of people, groups, or communities.

- Incentives and freedom to build, tinker, contribute to, and deploy technology, including software, lie with communities and prioritise well-being, accessibility, and care.

EDRi turned 20 in 2023. Our large network of organisations and activists has consistently put human rights at the centre of national, European, and global digital laws, policies, and debates. In an increasingly digital society, EDRi's mission to reclaim power from private and state actors' surveillance and control is more relevant than ever.

The above vision for technology and society is informed by the key learnings from our 20+ years of activity, and the collective ideation and transformation work co-led with Digital Freedom Fund (DFF) to decolonise the digital rights field in Europe.

The following are some reflections on how EDRi sees its role in advancing these visions:

- **We cannot do this alone**. These visions are part of a broader effort, comprising of multiple movements, of which one group, organisation, or single entity could not possibly take on alone. We stand in solidarity with, collaborate with, and continue to learn from broader movements, activists, change makers, organisations, and public institutions, to advance truly systemic change for people, planet, and democracy.

- **We need more than policy change.** While EDRi focuses on European legislative and policy changes, we are conscious of the need to incorporate methods that go beyond EU advocacy, including technology development, litigation, research, working with, and learning from communities who resist and re-imagine.

- **We must centre those most impacted.** To meaningfully work towards digital futures that enable us all to thrive, we must centre the needs and asks of those whose mere existence is currently threatened by the digital expansion of our existing systems of governance and power. As EU policies have global relevance, the perspective of populations in Global South/Majority Countries and the lived experience of groups historically marginalised should be reflected in digital activism, policy, and strategy.

- **We need to shift and share power.** To accomplish the above, we must be aware of, and work to change, the power dynamics within and around the field. EDRi will elevate, support, and amplify the voices of those advancing human rights, social and climate justice.

EDRi policy recommendations

EDRi proposes the following policy priorities for the EU and its Member States to advance the visions outlined above. We look forward to working in collaboration with partners and the EU institutions to advance these priorities in the next mandate and beyond.

1. OUR TECHNOLOGY SHOULD EMPOWER PEOPLE TO FLOURISH AND THRIVE.

- Empower workers to address abusive work practices including by:

  - Regulating algorithmic management systems and other uses of AI at work,

  - Ensuring that the enforcement of the Platforms Directive leads to the recognition of labour relationships in platform systems, and

  - Supporting content moderators, Big Tech workers' organising, resisting and/or blowing the whistle.

- Protect people from all forms of real-time and post- remote biometric identification, biometrics categorisation and emotion recognition, whether through the completion of the AI Act and/or a new specific mechanism.

- Urgently address the structural and procedural enforcement issues that prevent the General Data Protection Regulation from reaching its full potential by:

  - Harmonising national procedures for the application of the rules,

  - Increasing the resources, true political independence, qualification and efficiency of data protection authorities and the European Data Protection Board.

  - Develop state of the art tools and practices for consistent enforcement between DPAs.

2. OUR TECHNOLOGY SHOULD PRIORITISE PLANET CARE.

- Ensure an ambitious and comprehensive EU Green Deal that:

  - Makes the right to repair a reality;

  - Prohibits premature and planned obsolescence of technology products;

  - Removes technical impediments to access owned products, such as "Digital

Rights Management" software, in the absence of security or safety concerns.

- Ensures the reuse and recyclability of technological products, including maximum feasible backwards compatibility with older equipment, operating systems (OS), and other software.

- Adopt measures to reduce the EU's demand and consumption of raw materials to stop environmental and human harms, to reduce data accumulation that leads to curtailing freedom of expression and to discrimination. These measures can include:

  - Proposing a comprehensive reform of the online advertising ecosystem;

  - Deliver clear and ambitious standards to ensure the energy efficiency and sustainability of data centres in the EU.

  - Reduce the mass collection and processing of data through the comprehensive implementation of data protection laws, including the GDPR, in particular the principles of data minimisation.

3. OUR TECHNOLOGY SHOULD MAKE DECISION-MAKING JUST AND ACCOUNTABLE.

- Take meaningful steps to make decision-making at the EU level more accessible, transparent, and inclusive, in particular:

  - Advance a more equitable "Brussels effect" by ensuring the inclusion and meaningful participation of Global South actors and people specifically harmed or affected by technology and tech-related harms in EU policy making processes;

  - Strengthening Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 regulating access to documents to ensure that there is a mandatory and broader access to document requests including in digital format and by using online platforms;

  - Reform trialogues to ensure the timely publication of all minutes and key documents, direct access to co-legislators in the form of regular consultations with key stakeholders including civil society. Register and publish all

meetings with lobbyists;

- A committent by the incoming Commission mandate to prioritise measures which increase the diversity, equity, and inclusion of Europeans, including in representation, legislative and policy processes through a public list of objectives and principles.

- Empower people affected by technologies and automated decision making systems (including AI) with a framework of accountability, transparency, accessibility and redress. This should include:

  - Oversight and transparency mechanisms when technologies are deployed to produce substantive decisions and outcomes in areas that impact peoples' fundamental rights.

  - Public transparency registers, public impact assessment frameworks, meaningful engagement with civil society and impacted communities, as well as other accountable technology practices, for instance in the development and design of technologies, must be included in legal frameworks and encouraged as methods of meaningful processes of participation in the adoption of new technologies;

  - Legal frameworks by which people affected by advanced technologies in sensitive areas are informed, have access to information, and are enabled to challenge and seek redress. Public interest organisations must be facilitated to aid this process.

4. OUR SYSTEMS SHOULD PRIORITISE SAFETY, PARTICIPATION, AND COMMUNITY CARE.

- Establish a range of clear, comprehensive legislative measures that protect the fundamental rights of journalists, human rights defenders and all residents which uphold freedom of expression, assembly, association and freedom of thought by introducing:

  - A legally binding proposal to ban the development, trade and deployment of digital spyware and the hoarding and use of security vulnerabilities.

- A clear and unequivocal banning of the production and use of harmful and discriminatory surveillance technology. Any technologies that may violate fundamental rights and perpetuate violence against people must be subject to holistic legislative frameworks, including in the EU AI Act, and national laws.

- Urgently review and limit the further expansion of European surveillance databases, including the Entry/Exit System, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System and the European Criminal records information System for Third-Country Nationals, and the systematic exchange of data about migrants between law enforcement and migration/border officials.

- Build on work in the previous mandate to limit Big Tech power and establish accountability, transparency, and competition in the digital environment through:

  - Effective and comprehensive enforcement of the DSA by providing sufficient financial resources, technical expertise, and political support to Digital Services Coordinators and the European Commission's enforcement units.

  - Ensuring that enforcement actions for DSA follow due process in order to prevent arbitrary public or corporate threats against platform providers or people.

  - Ensure that the development and execution of the risk assessments and related DSA compliance mechanisms are effective, meaningful, comprehensive, and based on fundamental rights risk assessments developed by civil society and human rights bodies.

  - Work in collaboration with civil society and independent experts and academics to participate in the monitoring, implementation and enforcement of the DSA. Notably, institutionalising engagement with civil society through the creation of a permanent advisory body (see [Article 19 report](#)).

  - Propose dedicated legislative and non legislative measures to limit pervasive online tracking, and comprehensively reform online advertising.

5. TECHNOLOGY SHOULD BE BY, FOR, AND OF THE PEOPLE.

- Establish a European Public Digital Infrastructure Fund that pools existing funding initiatives under one umbrella and supports, among others, the creation of platform cooperatives, local internet infrastructure such as community-owned broadband projects, and tech community-based alternatives.

- Use the Digital Markets Act (DMA) to its full potential to restore competition in the digital environment, by:

  - Cooperating with the Free Software community, also known as the Open Source community, and civil society to identify infringements by gatekeepers and to support the flourishing of community based alternatives to the surveillance and ads-based tech industry;

  - Exploring further steps to the DMA including social media interoperability based on open standards with state-of-the-art security features.

  - Rigorously implement, monitor, and enforce the provisions of the DMA, notably the obligations and prohibitions for gatekeepers to prevent them from abusing their market position.

- Ensure that the EU's Connectivity and infrastructure plans protect access to the internet and net neutrality, with an unequivocal affirmation that:

  - The internet should be recognised as a universal public service to promote fast speed connection through Europe and beyond; and

  - Every point on the network can connect to any other point on the network, without discrimination on the basis of origin, destination or type of data.

- Ensure horizontal and mainstreamed accessibility requirements for all AI and technology systems for people with disabilities.

- Ensure that the implementation of Digital Decade digitalisation targets and the Digital Euro plans:

  - Create a public system alternative that does not lead to privacy violations or further social exclusion, in particular by ensuring that these digital systems are not necessary for tax or secure payment purposes.

- Digitalisation efforts should be inclusive, and not be imposed upon or result in the exclusion of people, groups, or communities;

- Digitalisation efforts should not be used to unjustly or arbitrarily expand surveillance measures.

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