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Report on the stakeholder consultation and engagement activities

Accompanying the document

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Establishing a European Declaration on Digital rights and principles for the Digital Decade

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1. THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1.1. Scope and objectives of the consultation and engagement activities

The Commission launched on 12 May 2021 a **broad consultation and engagement exercise on the formulation of a set of digital rights and principles to promote and uphold EU values in the digital space**.[1] This consultation and engagement exercise aimed at collecting the views of all interested citizens and stakeholders.

The consultation activities had primarily the following objectives:

> (1) bring the initiative to the attention of stakeholders and **measure support for the establishment of a clear set of digital rights and principles**;
>
> (2) collect concrete **feedback, opinions and views on the formulation of specific digital rights and principles**.

More broadly, stakeholders were also invited to share their experiences and suggestions beyond the above consultation scope and objectives.

The results of the consultation activities were taken into account as input to the proposal for a European Declaration on Digital rights and principles of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

1.2. Mapping of stakeholders

A stakeholder mapping was conducted, and the following stakeholders were identified as particularly relevant for the consultation and engagement exercise:

1) **Member States authorities, at national, regional and local level, including cities,**
2) **Non-governmental and civil society organisations**, in particular those that represent the interests of, and/or interact with vulnerable citizens,
3) **Digital rights organisations** focusing on the defending and advancing digital rights and freedoms in the online environment,
4) **Social partners** that represent the interests of workers and employers both at European and national level,
5) **Consumer organisations** that defend and represent the interest of consumers
6) **Business associations / organisations and companies**, including small and medium-sized enterprises,
7) **Other digital stakeholders** such as for example researchers / academia, and international and umbrella organisations,
8) **Citizens** in their capacity as main beneficiaries of a possible set of European digital principles, but also as interested or concerned individuals.

The stakeholder consultation strategy further indicated that **particular effort would be undertaken to understand the views of relevant sub-categories of citizens that are not easily reached by traditional consultation tools** – e.g. children and young people, vulnerable people, people living in rural areas, persons with disabilities, elderly people.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_2288

Next to the mapping of these stakeholders, an overview of the presumed interest and expertise in the subject matter was established:

Table 1 – Mapping of stakeholders

Stakeholders	Interest	Expertise	Relevance
Member States authorities, regional and local authorities, including cities	High	High	High
Non-governmental and civil society organisations	High	High	High
Digital rights organisations	High	High	High
Social partners	High	High	High
Consumer organisations	High	High	High
Business associations/organisations and companies, including SMEs	High	Medium	Medium
Other digital stakeholders	Medium	Medium	Medium
Citizens	Medium	Medium	High

1.3. The conducted consultation and engagement activities

In line with the consultation strategy, the following consultation activities were organised:

Roadmap – the roadmap on the 'Declaration of Digital rights and principles – the 'European way' for the digital society' was published on 12 May 2021, and remained open for feedback until 16 June 2021. Stakeholders and citizens were invited to provide feedback on the initiative, and in particular on the objectives and key areas for digital principles. In total, 46 feedback entries were collected.

Public Consultation – the public consultation on a set of European Digital Principles took place between 12 May and 6 September 2021, and was made available in all 24 official EU languages, ensuring that the public consultation was accessible to as many stakeholders as possible, especially citizens. The main aim of the consultation was to collect views from various stakeholders such as citizens on a list of possible digital principles.

Eurobarometer – The Eurobarometer survey was carried out by an external contractor in the 27 EU Member States between the 16th of September and 15th of October 2021. The consultation was directed at citizens and aimed to consult on the perception on the future of digital tools and the internet, the protection and application of rights in the online environment, and their views on establishing a common European vision to digital rights and principles. In total, 26 530 EU citizens from all EU Member States, and from different social and demographic groups were interviewed in their mother tongue.

High-level event 'Leading the Digital Decade' – This event was co-organised by the European Commission and the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and focused on Europe's digital transformation towards 2030. It was held virtually on 1 and 2 June 2021, and had a dedicated high-level panel session on 'Digital Principles – defining the European way'.

Workshops with civil society and other relevant organisations – two dedicated workshops were organised with civil society and other relevant organisations. The workshops took place on 22 and 28 September 2021, and aimed to collect views of different categories of citizens through relevant organisations that interact with them on a

daily basis, and/or have a very good understanding of their needs in the digital environment.

Targeted consultation with local and regional authorities – the targeted consultation was organised by the ECON secretariat of the Committee of the Regions, and took place between 14 July until 10 October 2021. This parallel consultation aimed to understand the views from local and regional authorities on the principles as put forward in the public consultation and on some additional, more detailed principles suggested by the ECON secretariat on the basis of past opinions and consultative work of the Committee of the Regions.

Targeted consultation on 'How to make Europe's Digital Decade fit for children and young people?' – The targeted consultation was organised by an external contractor from March to August 2021, and directed at children, young people, parents, carers, and educators across (and beyond) the EU. It aimed to consult on the priorities they see to promote, respect and fulfil children's rights in the digital world, and what they believe are key opportunities and challenges.

Targeted interviews with some relevant organisations and stakeholders – A round of interviews was organised, with the support of an external contractor. Interviewed organisations included companies, business associations, public authorities and external stakeholders. The interviews took place in October and November 2021, and aimed to understand the relevance of a set of digital principles for these organisations, the potential opportunities that they could bring, and the role that these organisations consider for themselves in promoting and helping with the implementation of a set of digital principles.

2. FEEDBACK ON THE ROADMAP ON THE EUROPEAN DECLARATION ON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND PRINCIPLES

2.1. When was the roadmap published, and what were its objectives?

The European Commission published on 12 May 2021, a **roadmap on the Declaration of Digital rights and principles**.[2] The main aim of the roadmap was to provide the **first opportunity for the Commission to inform citizens and stakeholders** why the Declaration on Digital rights and principles was being prepared, and what it aims to achieve.

Stakeholders and citizens were invited to provide **feedback on the initiative, and in particular on the objectives and key areas for digital rights and principles**. The feedback period lasted for five weeks, from 12 May 2021 to 16 June 2021.

2.2. Who provided feedback on the roadmap?

In total, **46 feedback entries were collected**. The highest number of entries were received from Belgium (14 entries, 30%)[3], followed by Spain (7, or 15%), and Germany (5, or 11%). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were the most represented stakeholder type (18, or 39%) followed by EU citizens (10, or 22%) and business associations (8, or 17%).

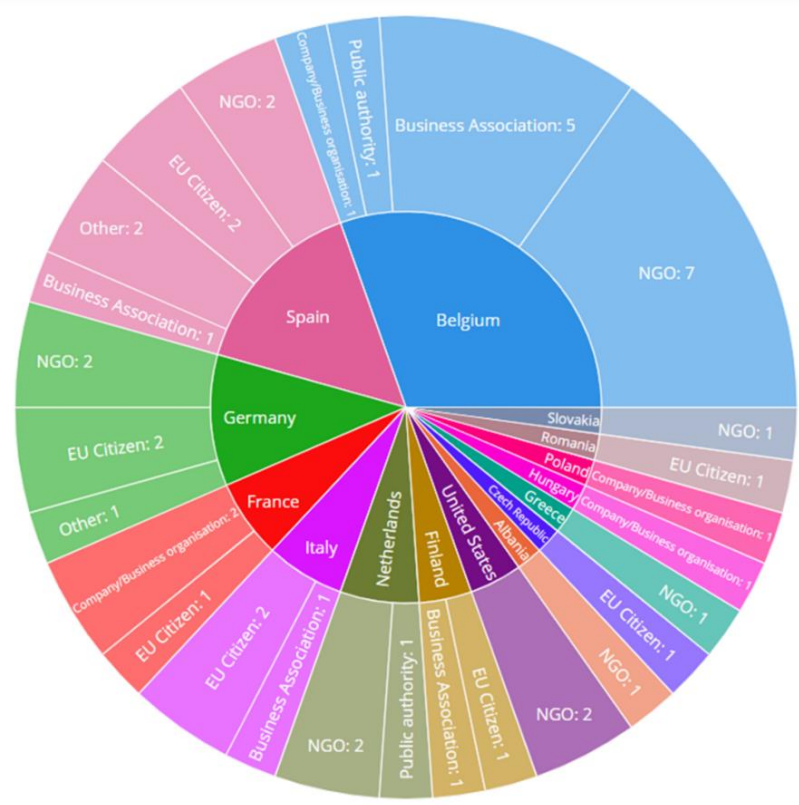


Figure 1 shows the entries split by country and by user type. The **high number of entries from Belgium** can be explained by the location of stakeholder groups and associations. Next to this interest of Belgium-based organisations, **several Spanish organisations provided feedback** and referred to the similar ongoing exercise on the Spanish Digital Charter.

There were 3 feedback entries from countries outside of the EU (Albania and the United States) all of which are from NGOs.

Figure 1 - Overview of roadmap feedback entries per country and per stakeholder type

[2] The roadmap, and feedback can be retrieved on the Have your say page of the initiative: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13017-Declaration-of-Digital-Principles-the-%E2%80%98European-way%E2%80%99-for-the-digital-society

[3] This high number from Belgium can be explained by the location of stakeholder groups and associations.

2.3. What were the general suggestions in the feedback from respondents?

The large majority of **respondents welcomed the initiative to come forward with a European Declaration on Digital rights and principles that would set out principles to define the digital society in the European way.** Some of them also provided general suggestions to inform the writing of the declaration:

- Several respondents welcomed and encouraged to focus the principles on **the wellbeing of people, and society** in general. Furthermore, some of them also flagged the importance to formulate the principles in a **language that is understandable and related closely enough to citizens** and other relevant actors in society.
- Several respondents elaborated on the **interplay of principles with rights**, and several of them (namely the digital rights organisations) indicate a preference of legal obligations over principles. They further indicated that **principles can and should complement legal obligations, but should not replace or undermine legal obligations**. Some stakeholders also indicate that it is important to **clarify that a Declaration on digital principles would not establish new rights**.

2.4. What were specific suggestions in the feedback from respondents?

Responses to the roadmap were analysed, and six key topics[4] that were identified as recurring in several feedback submissions. The themes were the following:

(i) Inclusiveness *– mentioned by non-governmental organisations representing vulnerable people but also other stakeholders such as public authorities, and business organisations*.

These respondents elaborated further by referring to **a digital divide between those who have benefitted from digital transformation and those who have not**. Several of them indicated that digitalisation goes too fast for certain people, and risks to create more inequalities and even discrimination – they referred to **specific groups such as citizens living in rural areas, elderly persons, children, persons with disabilities or underprivileged persons**. Several respondents focused in their feedback specifically on the importance, and **lack of accessible digital technologies for persons with disabilities**. They indicated that this is leading to adverse effects on education and employment opportunities.

Some respondents (business organisations, NGOs and a citizen) also indicated the importance of **having access to a high-quality internet connectivity** and **the protection of a free and open internet** as key components. Other respondents also indicated that **non-digital access to public services should continue to subsist**, in particular for persons with specific needs, low digital skills or elderly persons.

(ii) Digital education and skills *– mentioned by public authorities, business organisations but also citizens and non-governmental organisations.*

[4] These six recurring topics were derived by using topic modelling.

A large number of respondents emphasised that **digital literacy, education and skills should be a key area for digital principles**, in order to ensure that everyone has at least a basic level of proficiency that is required to interact in a digital society and economy.

On this point, several respondents indicated that a **basic understanding of the digital environment is key to participate and interact in today's society** (and for example to access public services, to engage with governments in a digital society). Some respondents (companies and business organisations) focused on **aspects of life-long learning, up- and re-skilling of workers, expert training in digital technologies, support for entrepreneurs and start-ups, and education that prepare youngsters** to work in a digital environment.

(iii) Children *– mentioned by non-governmental organisations but also other respondents such as business organisations.*

Several respondents emphasised the **importance of digital education from an early age in order to best prepare children for the digital future**. Some of them elaborated further by indicating that a **large number of schools are overwhelmed, and need support on the level of infrastructure** but also encouragement to move to new technologies and teaching methods.

An often-recurring aspect that is discussed by some respondents (notably NGOs) is the **need to protect minors from negative effects of the online environment, cautioning** for example against the impact of intensive use of digital technologies and social media on the mental wellbeing of children, or referring to the protection of children, particularly in relation to child sexual abuse material, and online exploitation.

Several respondents also pointed to the **importance of data protection and privacy for children** in the digital environment. More specifically, respondents refer to aspects such as children's consent, protection of the collected personal data from children. Another suggestion was the establishment of a **right for a clean data slate at the age of 18**, so that children are granted the right to demand companies to delete any personal information collected about them (when they are old enough to understand the consequences of data collection).

(iv) Privacy, data protection and data-sharing *- mentioned by non-governmental organisations representing vulnerable people but also other stakeholders such as public authorities, and business organisations.*

Several respondents (in particular digital rights' organisations) touched upon **issues of privacy, data protection and mass surveillance** in an increasingly digital society. The feedback often focused on and raised concerns about today's hyper-centralised platform economy and the **widespread use of personal data** (i.e. users are being 'locked-in' and subject to platforms sharing their personal data). Another point touched upon in feedback entries, is the **need for more democratic models of data governance and algorithmic transparency**, as some respondents put forward that the application of AI in different contexts has facilitated deeper, more extensive forms of inequality, discrimination and violations of fundamental rights. These stakeholders further elaborated that citizens **need real understanding on how to control the use of their data** and on **how the algorithms that process their data function.**

Some respondents indicated that it is of crucial importance that **democratic values are upheld**, and that **government surveillance is in line with human rights**, **proposing that mass surveillance practices are prohibited within the EU**.

Finally, some respondents (business associations but also other types stakeholders) refer to the **importance of integrity, ethics and codes of conducts** for professionals working on for example the development of digital technologies (and applications), data collection and research (to ensure compliance with data protection requirements). Related to this, some respondents (in particular digital rights' organisations) also indicated that **confusion needs to be avoided with existing legal obligations** (arising from the EU Charter, the EU Treaties and the EU statutory law) and regulatory reform initiatives (such as for example the proposals for the Digital Services Act, or Artificial Intelligence Act). Other respondents indicated further that **duplication also needs to be avoided with other more specific initiatives** such as for example the Ethical Principles on Artificial Intelligence, or the work of the Council of Europe on artificial intelligence in the ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence.

(v) Intellectual property and copyright *– mentioned by NGOs, business associations, and company/business organisations.*

Several respondents (in particular business associations and companies) centred their feedback on the **need to adequately protect content creators regardless of size or scale**, with specific reference made to the importance of this for SMEs and startups. Some of them further suggest to closely align principles to the freedom of expression and the protection of intellectual creations, given that these are viewed by these stakeholders as complementary to each other. Some respondents (NGOs) indicated that the **areas on intellectual property and copyright required further development** by having more flexible management of those rights and allowing for copyright exceptions and limitations for example for educational use, in the area of culture, or to allow for citations or parody. They indicate that this could lead to benefits for society.

(vi) Business specific areas - *mentioned by business associations and company/business organisations*

Several respondents highlighted how **business organisations can help in the implementation of digital principles**. They indicate that they have a role to play to ensure that digital technologies and innovations are used to benefit citizens, thus leading to more inclusive societies. For example, some respondents indicate that **new and disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence** should be designed with humans in mind, also highlighting that **innovative technologies can help bring more competitive jobs, better health, and better public services**.

These respondents often called, in their feedback, for a **focus on digital education and training** to ensure that a workforce is ready to work in a digital environment. Next to this, they also refer to **need of having access to high-quality and secure infrastructure (including connectivity)** and **to public services in a digital format**. Some of them also emphasize the **right to set up and conduct business online.**

Some respondents also suggest having **small and medium-sized enterprises, startups and entrepreneurs as a key target group** for any communication or awareness-raising effort on digital principles. They further elaborate specifically on the **needs of SMEs, startups, and entrepreneurs** by indicating that special attention should be given to this group and by ensuring that regulation does not stall innovation by providing barriers to entry for this group.

3. THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON A SET OF DIGITAL PRINCIPLES

3.1. When was the consultation launched, and what were its objectives?

The European Commission launched a **public consultation on a set of European Digital Principles** on the Have your say online portal[5] to gather views on the formulation of European digital principles. The consultation took place between 12 May and 6 September 2021, and was made available in all 24 official EU languages, ensuring that the public consultation was accessible to as many stakeholders as possible, especially citizens.

3.2. Who participated in the public consultation?

In total, 609 replies (and 67 positon papers) were collected. Out of this, 574 were from stakeholders based in EU Member States. Citizens (401 contributions) and NGOs (61) made up around 75% of all contributions (609). Several contributions were collected from NGOs representing European citizens in various fields (e.g. organisations representing persons with disabilities, consumers, families, elderly, and children).

Next to civil society, the consultation saw replies from business stakeholders (37 companies/business organisations and 31 business associations). In addition, a relatively high number of public authorities (26) participated in the public consultation. Most were local or regional authorities who indicated that they find the topic relevant given that they are close to and/or interacting with citizens on a daily basis.

Table 2 - Respondent types in the sample

Type of organisation	No. of responses	% response
Citizens	401 (of which 391 EU citizens)	65.8%
Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)	61	10.0%
Company/business organisations	37	6.1%
Business associations	31	5.1%
Public authorities	26	4.3%
Trade unions	3	0.5%
Consumer organisations	3	0.5%
Environmental organisations	2	0.3%
Other categories of stakeholders	24	3.9%
Total	609	100%

3.3. What were the main suggestions and messages from respondents to the public consultation?

Overall, a large number of respondents to the public consultation showed **broad support for a European Declaration on Digital rights and principles** as well as for the **first set of principles outlined under nine specific areas of the public consultation**[6]. More precisely, the

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13017-Declaration-of-Digital-Principles-the-%E2%80%98European-way%E2%80%99-for-the-digital-society_en

[6] The following topics were identified and presented in the public consultation as 'areas of principles': (i) access to internet services, (ii) digital education and skills, (iii) digital public services and administrations, (iv) digital health services, (v) open, secure and trusted online environment, (vi) children and young people in the online space, (vii) European digital identity, (viii) digital products and services that respect the climate and the environment, and (ix) human-centric algorithms.

majority of respondents rated all principles as 'important' or 'very important', highlighting the importance of some of them over others (see chapter IV of this report) and with some respondents outlining the need for additional principles (see chapter V of this report).

These respondents welcomed the initiative, and often indicated that **Europe's digital society should be based on European values**, like plurality, inclusivity, non-discrimination, openness, privacy, democracy, and sustainability. Several respondents indicated that it is **key for a digital society led in the 'European way' to not leave anyone behind**.

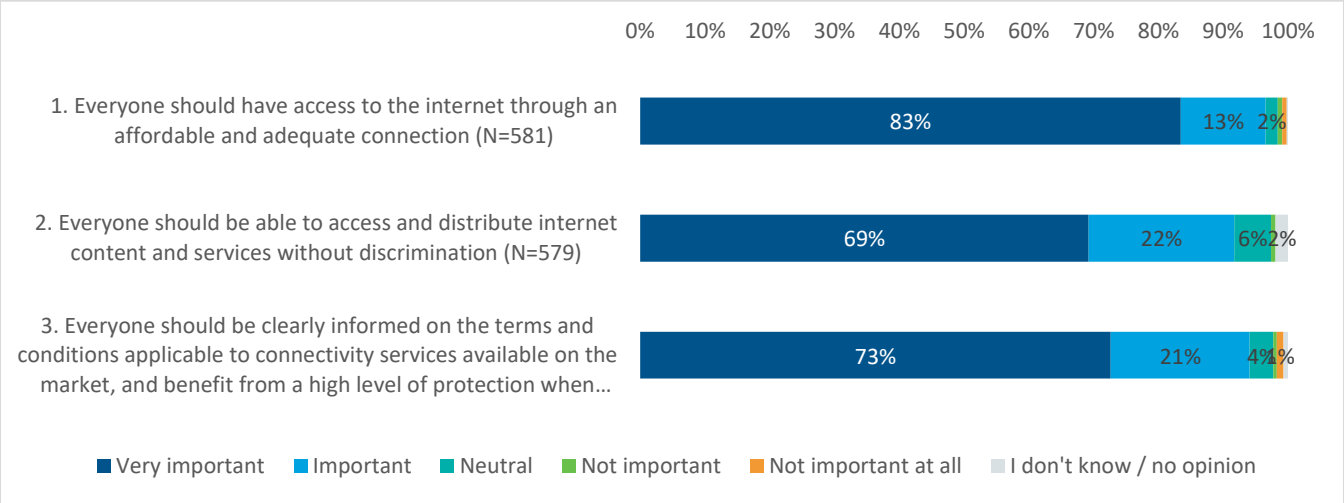
Although several respondents proposed to make certain principles more elaborate, a large number of respondents (in particular citizens) also indicated the **need to have concise, clear principles** which can be **understandable** for every European citizen.

It is also worth noting that the **concepts of 'rights' and 'principles'** were used in an interchangeable manner in some of the responses. Several respondents indicated that there is a **need for more clarity on the difference (and interplay) between a Declaration on Digital rights and principles and the existing rights and principles** as recognised and established in legal or other frameworks.

3.4. What were suggestions from respondents on the proposed principles under the nine specific areas?

i. Universal access to internet services

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'universal access to internet services' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):



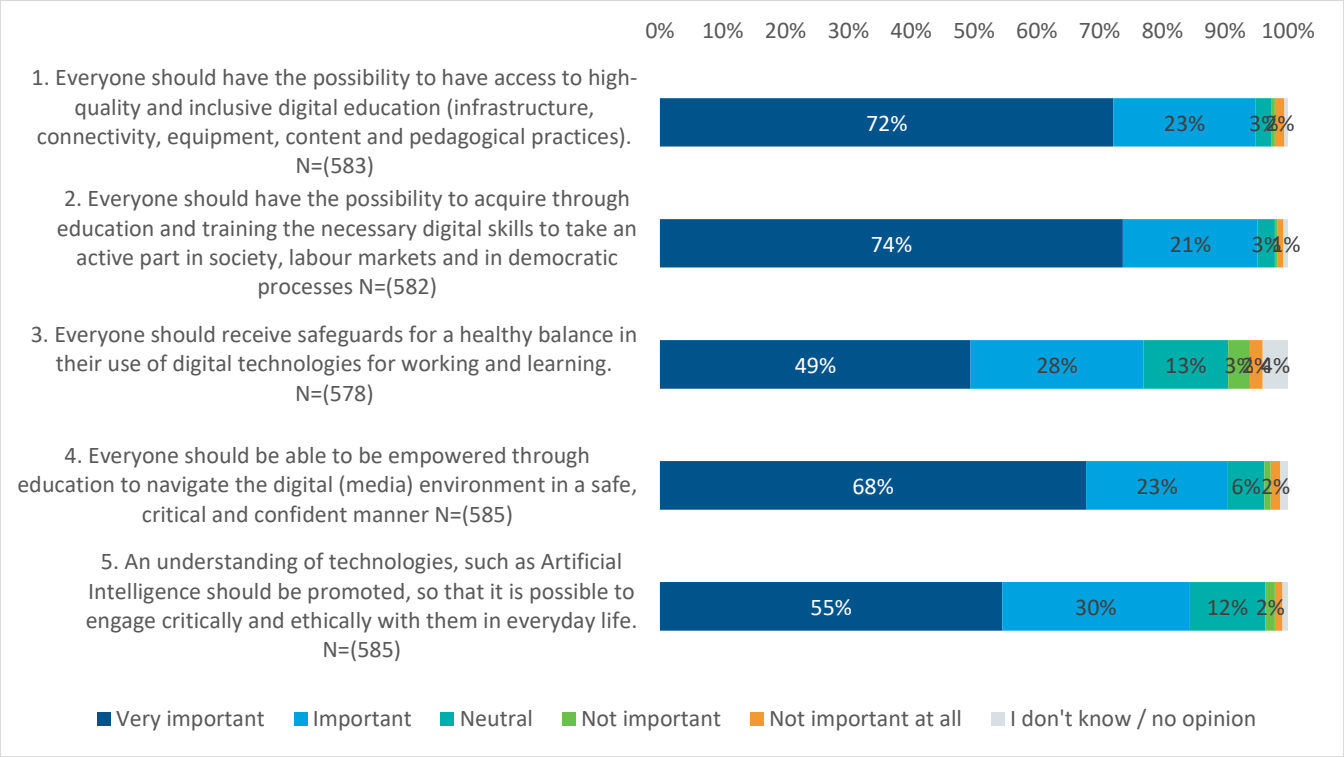
Most respondents indicated **strong agreement[7] with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

[7] Given the high perceived importance of the principles under the 'universal access to internet services' heading, no major discrepancies exist among different stakeholders groups. However, **business associations** and **non-governmental organisations** seem to attach slightly more importance to all three principles by indicating more often very important than respondents from other stakeholder groups.

- A large number of respondents indicated the **importance of having access to high-quality internet for everyone (without economic and social barriers)** and referred to groups such as underprivileged, migrants, persons with disabilities, and groups living in rural and remote areas.
- Several respondents (including a relevant number of citizens) proposed to add further emphasis on the need to have clear and **easy to understand terms and conditions**.
- Several respondents asked to **clarify 'adequate connection**' and showed preference for stronger language such as 'high quality', 'high speed' or 'fast and reliable'.

ii. Digital education and skills

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'digital education and skills' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):



A large number of respondents indicated **strong agreement[8] with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

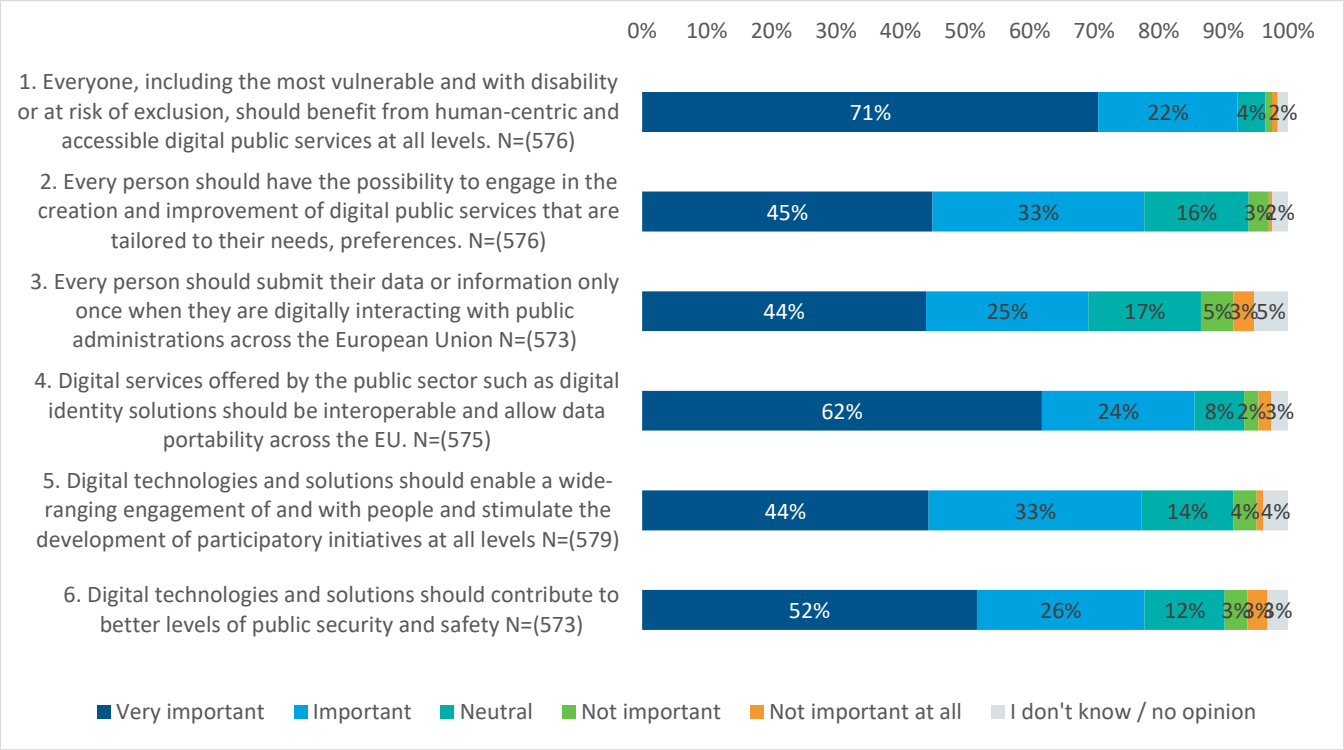
- A large number of respondents (in particular NGOs but also companies/business organisations and associations) mentioned the **need and importance of having principles on digital education, skills and literacy** in order to **leave no one behind in a digital society**.

[8] Although all stakeholder groups considered the principles under this heading to be important (or very important), it is notable that this is more the case for **consumer** and **non-governmental organisations** (which almost always indicated that they considered the principles to be very important). On average, **companies/business organisations** and **associations** considered the first two principles under this heading also to be slightly more important than other stakeholder groups, but this was not the case for the third principle (for which they indicated less support than other stakeholder groups).

- Several respondents (in particular citizens, and non-governmental organisations) stressed the **need to acknowledge the high rate of non-digital natives and persons with low digital skills** for whom digitalisation is sometimes advancing too rapidly.
- Several respondents (including businesses, public authorities and NGOs) also mentioned the need to have a specific focus on **lifelong learning, upskilling, digital experts** in the context of the (digital) work environment, next to education to enhance the **ability to identify disinformation** in order to be able to make informed choices.
- On the suggested **principle on a healthy balance**, several respondents elaborated further by indicating the need to have **a right to disconnect, or to remain offline**.
- Some respondents indicated that the **last proposed principle** could be better kept broad enough by referring to digital technologies (instead of focusing on artificial intelligence alone). Next to this, the importance of **understanding cybersecurity** recurred in several responses.

iii. Digital public services and administration

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'digital public services and administration' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):



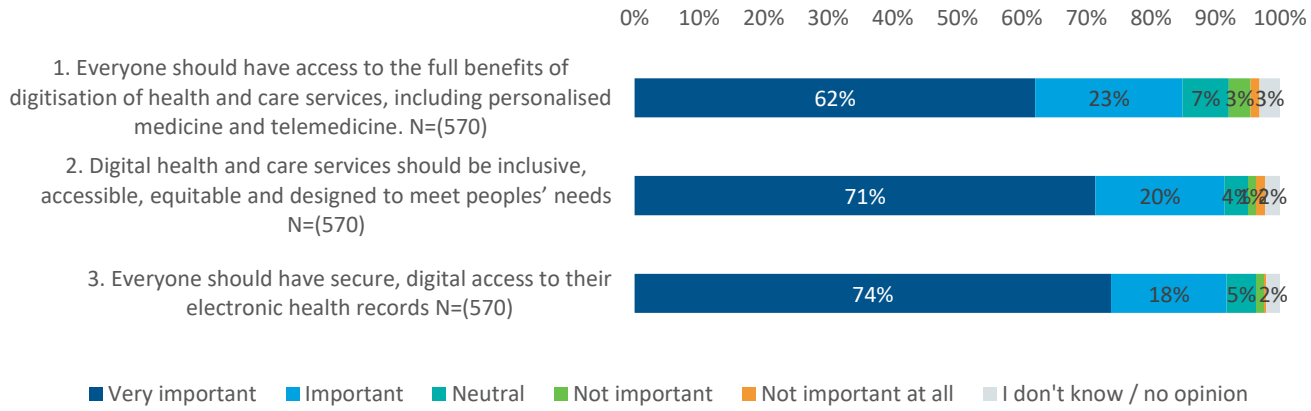
A large number of respondents indicated **strong agreement with the proposed principles**[9], and the analysis of the suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

[9] **Consumer organisations** tend to attach more importance to all the principles; and **non-governmental organisations** to the first, second and last principle under the 'Digital public services and administration' heading in comparison to other stakeholders groups. **Academics/research institutions** tended to indicate more neutral on the third principle in comparison to other stakeholder groups.

- A large number of respondents indicated that **access to public services should not only be digital but also include non-digital access** for those who are less comfortable with the rapid pace of digitalisation. Several respondents elaborated on this, and emphasized **the needs of specific groups such as elderly, underprivileged, persons with disabilities, and refugees**.
- Several respondents provided comments, and emphasised the **importance of data protection**, especially with regard to reviewing personal data held by administrative bodies.
- Some respondents pointed to the relevance of having a principle on '**open source software'** indicating the importance of open source software over proprietary software.
- On **the principles about engagement**, some respondents indicated that these principles can be subject to various degrees of interpretation (hence, their support would depend on this).

iv. Digital health services

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'digital health services' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):



Most respondents indicated **strong agreement**[10] **with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of the suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

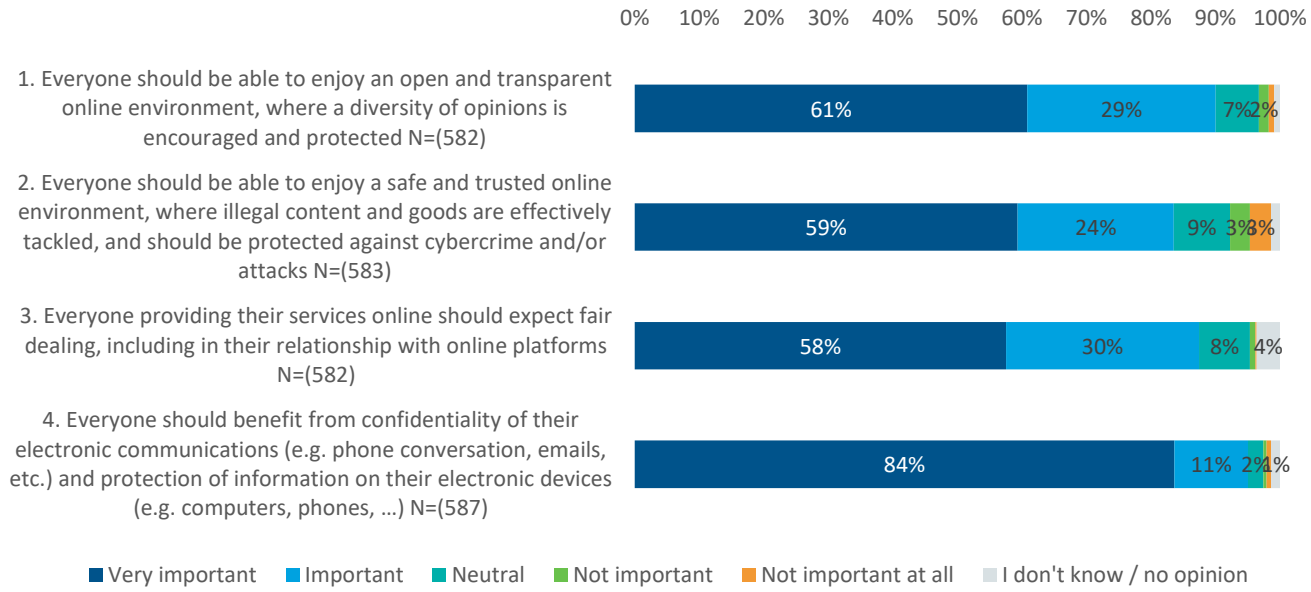
- Most respondents indicated **strong support for digital health and care solutions** but several also indicated that digital health solutions (such as telemedicine) whilst important and useful, should **not be viewed as a replacement for traditional in-person consultations**.
- Several respondents pointed to related areas (and enabling aspects). Several respondents referred to the need to **ensure equitable access to digital aspect of healthcare across the population** by focusing on infrastructure and ensuring **high quality connection and hardware**. In addition, respondents also flagged the need to ensure and build **digital literacy and skills** across the population, taking into account the needs of vulnerable groups.

[10] **Non-governmental organisations** tend to be somewhat less supportive for the first principle, but slightly more for the second principle under the 'digital health services' heading in comparison to other stakeholder groups. C**ompanies/business organisations** tend to slightly support more the second principle, whereas **public authorities** are somewhat more supportive for the third principle compared to other stakeholder groups.

- Several respondents also pointed to the relevance of **data protection, privacy, cybersecurity** in the context of digital health and care services. Some respondents also pointed to the **topic of health data ownerships (and control**).

v. Open, secure and trusted online environment

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'open, secure and trusted online environment' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):



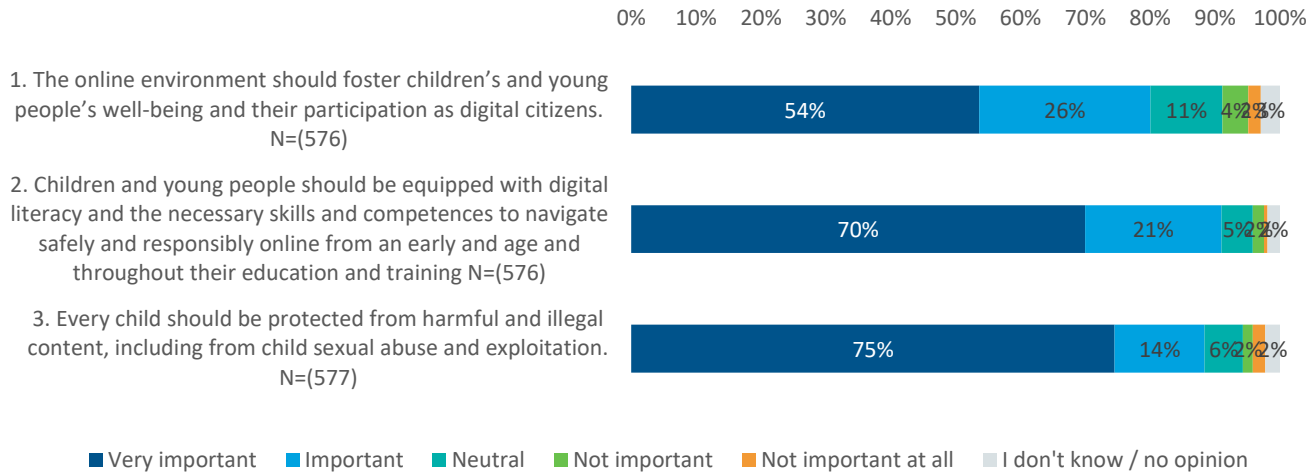
A large number of respondents indicated **strong agreement**[11] **with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of the suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

- A large number of respondents indicated the **importance of privacy and data protection,** and further pointed to **trust, responsibility** and robust **security and safety** requirements.
- A large number of respondents (in particular citizens) also touched upon the **topics of disinformation/hate speech** and the **need to have more control over content online** while stressing that **this should not be left to private companies**.
- On the other hand, several respondents (also citizens) flagged the **importance of free speech, anonymity and privacy on the internet**. They emphasised the importance of freedom of expression and how this is protected whilst, at the same time, balanced with the rights and freedoms of others in the digital world.

vi. Children and young people in the online space

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'children and young people in the online space' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):

[11] **Consumer organisations** tend to attach more importance to the principles under the 'open, secure and trusted online environment' heading in comparison to other stakeholders groups. Although, most **citizens** seem to agree strongly with the second principle, several of them also indicated slightly more neutral or not important in comparison to other stakeholders groups.



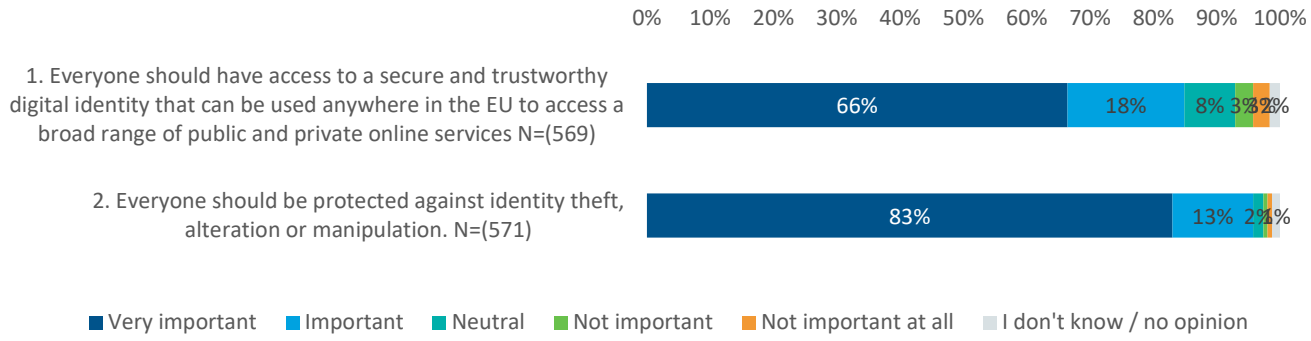
A large number of respondents indicated **strong agreement**[12] **with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of the suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

- A very high number of respondents (in particular citizens) emphasized the **importance of education** to understand and safely navigate the online environment. Some respondents also suggest focusing more on education on relevant digital topics such as algorithms, cybersecurity, and privacy.
- There was **slightly less support towards fostering digital citizenship for children and young people**. Some respondents (in particular citizens) indicated that the **term citizenship is not the right one**, as it is connected to adulthood.
- Several respondents pointed to the need to have a **healthy balance between online and offline time for children and youngsters** – particularly for young children. Some respondents pointed out that exposure to digital tools should only start from a certain age.
- Several respondents pointed to the importance of (and sometimes tension between) **privacy and the freedom of expression of children/young people** on the internet. The concept of **age-verification and age-appropriate** came back several times in responses.
- Some respondents (in particular NGOs) indicated the need to **ensure the same opportunities (e.g. affordable and adequate equipment, skills) in the digital environment** to children living in poverty, low-income households.

vii. <u>European Digital Identity</u>

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'European Digital Identity' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):

[12] **Non-governmental organisations** tend to attach more importance to the first two principles under the 'children and young people in the online space' heading in comparison to other stakeholders groups. Compared to other stakeholder groups, **citizens** tended to indicate slightly more neutral or not important for the first and third principles but their support for the second principle is similar to other stakeholder groups. No major discrepancies existed in the perceived importance of the principles among other stakeholders groups.

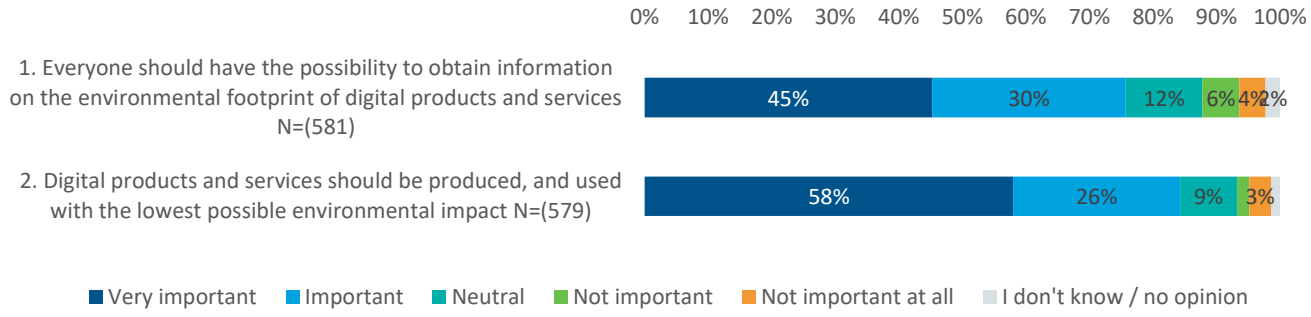


Most respondents indicated **strong agreement**[13] **with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of the suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

- Almost all respondents agreed that everyone should be protected against identity theft, alteration or manipulation.
- Most respondents showed **support towards a European digital identity** and several of them (in particular public authorities) indicate the **high relevance of such a solution**. Some respondents (in particular citizens) indicate that **having access to a digital identity should be voluntary**, and not made mandatory.
- Several respondents touched upon the importance, and raised concerns, about **sovereignty, privacy, security and data protection**. Several respondents also referred to the need to have **control of their personal data.**
- Some respondents (in particular NGOs) flagged that a **European digital identity could be relevant beyond the category of European citizens** (e.g. refugees, expats, and more). They further flag the need to **create awareness and foresee education on using a digital identity solution.**

viii. Digital products and services that respect the climate and the environment

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'digital products and services that respect the climate and the environment' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):



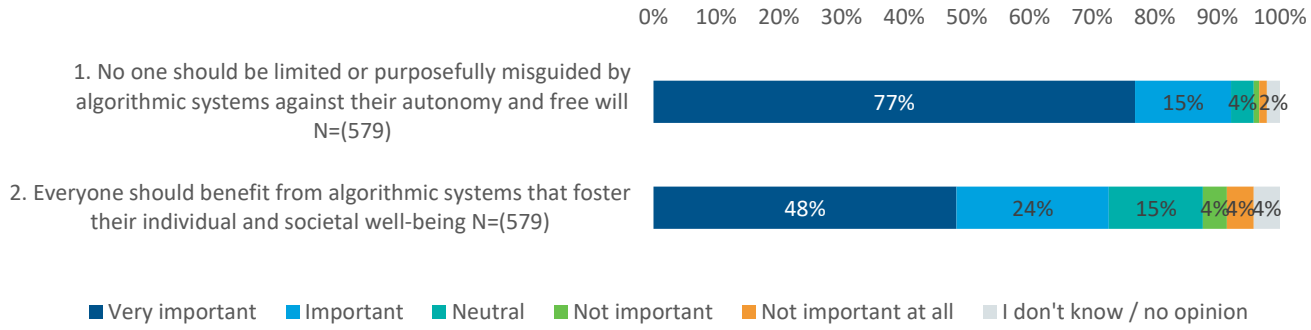
[13] **Public authorities** and **companies/business organisations** attach slightly more importance to the principles under the heading 'European Digital Identity' by indicating more often very important than respondents from other stakeholder groups. **Consumer and non-governmental organisations** indicated slightly less support the first principle, whereas **EU citizens** tended to indicate slightly more support for the same principle compared to respondents from other stakeholder groups.

A large number of respondents indicated **agreement[14] with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of the suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

- Most respondents supported the proposed principles but the **rate of support is lower compared to other areas for digital principles**.
- Several respondents pointed out that there should **not only (or specifically) be a focus on digital products and services**. Next to this, several respondents asked to see more emphasis on **digital/technology as a source/enabler of positive change** to accelerate the green transition ('digital for green'), and suggested to add a principle on this aspect.
- Some respondents (mainly businesses but also academics) were concerned and **challenged the feasibility of providing information on the environmental footprint of digital products and services**. Furthermore, some respondents referred to the '**right to repair**' and to the **scarcity of raw materials, and resource-efficiency** as important aspects and suggested including principles on these elements.

ix. Human-centric algorithms

The following indications of importance of the principles under 'human-centric algorithms' resulted from the public consultation (from all types of respondents):



A large number of respondents indicated **agreement[15] with the proposed principles**, and the analysis of the suggestions and comments by respondents revealed the following trends:

- Although both principles received support, there was **considerably less support for the second principle:** 'everyone should benefit from algorithmic systems that foster their individual and societal well-being'. Some respondents found the principle unclear and ambiguous hence the lower level of support.
- Several respondents explicitly **linked the European approach (for Artificial Intelligence) to fundamental European values** such as the respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, equality, or inclusivity.

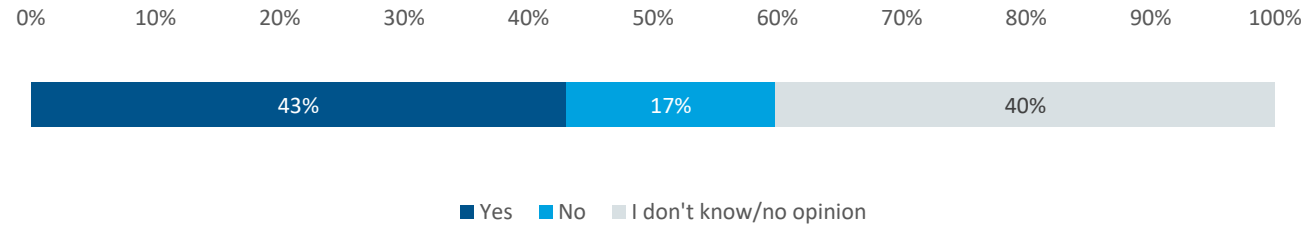
[14] **Consumer organisations**, **non-governmental organisations**, and **environmental organisations** attach more importance to the principles under 'digital products and services that respect the climate and the environment' heading in comparison to respondents from other stakeholders groups.

[15] No major discrepancies existed in the perceived importance among different stakeholders groups of the principles under the heading 'human-centric algorithms'. However, **companies/business organisations** and **non-governmental organisations** attach slightly more importance to the second principle in comparison with other stakeholder groups.

- Several respondents pointed to the **need to create more understanding/awareness about how algorithms work (digital education),** but also to have the possibility to **obtain more transparency on the functioning of certain algorithms**.

3.5. Feedback and suggestions from respondents for additional principles beyond the nine specific areas of the public consultation

In the last part of the consultation, respondents were asked whether there are any other principles that are not covered by above areas. A **large number of respondents (43%) indicated that there are other relevant digital principles** – some of these suggestions were specifications or elaborations on the principles (or areas for principles) mentioned in the above-identified nine specific areas for principles (these suggestions were taken into account in the analysis and writing of chapter IV).



Several respondents elaborated on the **need to have principles that would set out the possibility of alternatives (or choice) in a digital society.** Respondents indicated that such principles could, for example, specify that persons should not be overly dependent on certain digital technologies (from large corporations) to determine their future or actions. Somewhat related to this point, some respondents also indicated the **need to have a 'right to disconnect'** or the need to see digital as something that can help them in their daily life without **being a goal in itself.**

A large number of respondents (in particular business organisations and associations) proposed to include **principles on aspects of the data economy such as elaborating more on data-sharing, altruism, and open access to public data.** On the other hand, some respondents (in particular citizens and consumer organisations) also raised concerns about their use of data, and indicated the **need to have more clear principles on aspects of data ownership and control** (including transparent and trustworthy information about the use of data).

Several respondents (in particular citizens, NGOs and consumer organisations) also indicated the need for **more transparency on the use of (personal) data by companies,** and to **limit targeted content and advertising** (especially when detrimental for persons' **physical and mental health**).

Finally, some respondents propose to include **principles on digital self-determination**. Examples mentioned by respondents were possible **principles on digital legacy**, the **'right to be forgotten',** or having the **possibility to ask for a clean data slate** when someone turns 18 years.

4. EUROBAROMETER SURVEY ON 'DIGITAL RIGHTS AND PRINCIPLES'

4.1. What was the main aim of the Eurobarometer survey, and who participated?

The Eurobarometer survey was **directed at citizens** and aimed to consult on the **perception on the future of digital tools and the internet**, the protection and application of **rights in the online environment**, and their views on **establishing a common European vision to digital rights and principles**. In total, **26 530 EU citizens from all EU Member States, and from different social and demographic groups** were interviewed in their mother tongue.

The survey was **carried out by an external contractor in the 27 EU Member States between the 16th of September** and **15th of October 2021.**

The results of the Eurobarometer were published on 6 December 2021, and the full report can be accessed on the dedicated webpage.

The methodology used was that of Eurobarometer surveys as carried out for the Directorate-General for Communication (Media monitoring and Eurobarometer). However, in order to run fieldwork during the COVID pandemic, it was necessary to adjust the methodology in some Member States by conducting total or partial online interviews.

Table 3 – Participation to the Eurobarometer on digital rights and principles

Countries	Number of face-to-face interviews	Online interviews		Countries	Number of face-to face-interviews	Online interviews
Belgium (BE)	707	363		Latvia (LV)	1002	
Bulgaria (BG)	1032			Lithuania (LT)	1012	
Czechia (CZ)	760	257		Luxembourg (LU)	506	
Denmark (DK)	769	240		Hungary (HU)	1013	
Germany (DE)	1557			Malta (MT)	358	176
Estonia (EE)	1004			Netherlands (NL)	1011	
Ireland (IE)	1007			Austria (AT)	1012	
Greece (EL)	1014			Poland (PL)	1036	
Spain (ES)	1009			Portugal (PT)	1020	
France (FR)	1004			Romania (RO)	1060	
Croatia (HR)	1010			Slovenia (SI)	1004	
Italy (IT)	1027			Slovakia (SK)	1020	
Rep. of Cyprus (CY)	504			Finland (FI)		1010
Latvia (LV)	1002			Sweden (SE)	1020	
				Total EU27	**24484**	**2046**

4.2. What were the main findings of the Eurobarometer survey?

The first part of the survey focused on the **perception of EU citizens on the role and the importance that digital tools and the internet will play in their lives**, and what their **expected impact will be for them at the end of this decade** (in the year 2030).

Many of the surveyed respondents were positive, and feel that digital tools and the internet will bring them more advantages than disadvantages. However, the results also indicate that a large group of respondents expect as many advantages than disadvantages, with some respondents even expecting a negative outcome.

- Around eight in ten of the surveyed EU citizens (81%) feel that digital tools and the internet will be important in their lives by 2030. This feeling is considerably higher among young people (e.g. 96% of those surveyed aged 15-24 feel this way).
- Two out of five respondents (41%) expect that the use of digital tools and the internet will bring them more advantages than disadvantages, and a similar number (43%) expect as many advantages as disadvantages. Only a small proportion (12%) expect more disadvantages than advantages.

Respondents also indicate that they are worried about specific **challenges that are connected to the increasing role of digital tools and the internet in our society**.

- For example, a large number of respondents indicate that they are worried about cyber-attacks and cybercrime (56%), the safety and well-being of children in the online environment (53%), and the use of personal data and information by companies or public administrations (46%).
- Next to this, several respondents also indicate being worried about the difficulty some people have accessing the online world (41%), finding a good online/offline life balance (34%), learning new digital skills (26%), or the environmental impact of digital products and services (23%).

The second part of the survey focused on the **awareness of EU citizens on the application and protection of rights in the online environment**, and whether they think that the EU protects their rights in the online environment.

The report indicates that a large number of respondents is not aware that rights such as the freedom of expression, privacy, or non-discrimination should also be respected online. In some EU countries, and in older age groups, around half of the surveyed respondents were unaware that rights that apply offline should also be respected online.

- Over a third of respondents (39%) indicate being unaware that the rights that apply offline should also be respected online. In some EU countries, more than half of the respondents think this way. Older persons in particular are less aware of this (e.g. 49% of those surveyed in the age group 55+).
- Around half of the EU citizens surveyed (48%) think that the EU protects their rights in the online environment well. However over one in four (29%) think the EU does not protect their online rights very well, while 8% of the respondents think it protects their online rights not well at all.

The third part of the survey focused on the **perception among respondents regarding a common European vision to digital rights and principles**, and explored the **importance of some specific example principles**.

Overall, a large majority of respondents generally considered all the mentioned example principles as important to be included in a list of digital principles. The **detailed results can be consulted in the Eurobarometer report[16], and/or in annex II of this document**.

4.3. What are the main conclusions of the Eurobarometer survey?

The combination of the above findings shows that there is a **need to inform EU citizens better about their rights in the online environment**. This was also echoed by a large number of respondents who would find it useful to know more about their rights in the online environment.

- More than three quarters (76%) of respondents indicate that they would find it useful to know more about their rights in the online environment. This number is even higher among young people (e.g. 90% of those surveyed aged 15-24).

Next to this, a large majority of respondents (82%)[17] consider it useful for the European Commission to **define and promote a common European vision on digital rights and principles**.

[16] https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2270
[17] Only a small number indicate that this would not be very useful (9%), or not useful at all (4%).

5. OTHER CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

5.1. High-level event: Leading the Digital Decade

The '**Leading the Digital Decade' event**[18] focused on Europe's digital transformation towards 2030. It was **co-organised by the European Commission and the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union** and held virtually on 1 and 2 June 2021.

During the first day of the event, a **high-level panel session on 'Digital Principles – defining the European way'** was organised. Opening statements were made by representatives of the European Parliament, the Spanish and Portuguese government to introduce the discussions. The panel itself consisted of **representatives of consumers, business and academics**.

In general, the members of the panel showed support for the development of a set of digital principles, in particular when it would attempt to balance digital innovation with European ethical values and rights. The panel indicated that we should **go beyond only translating offline rights and obligations into the online world** because more protection is needed online. A panel member proposed that ethical principles should be at the heart of digital tools, and be backed by effective rights. Next to this, the panel elaborated on the **need to equip citizens with digital skills to establish trust, participation in the development and understanding of digital technologies**.

The panel also indicated that **citizens, including children specifically, should not only be protected, but they also need to be empowered** in a digital society. The **role of business to help implementing digital principles** was emphasised as well as the **importance of digital innovations and solutions for societal challenges** such as the climate crisis and health.

On the same day, the 'Lisbon Declaration – Digital Democracy with a Purpose'[19] was presented. This Declaration was an initiative of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union and aimed to contribute to the then ongoing public consultation on a set of Digital Principles. All EU Member States supported the Declaration and a majority supported the annex which presents a framework on digital principles.

5.2. Workshops with civil society and other relevant stakeholders

When took the workshops place, and what were its objectives?

The European Commission organised, with the support of an external contractor, **two dedicated workshops with civil society and other relevant stakeholders**. The workshops took place on 22 and 28 September 2021, and were organised online by making use of design-thinking methodologies to **collect views of different categories of citizens through relevant organisations that interact with them on a daily basis,** and/or have a very good understanding of their needs in the digital environment.

[18] More information can be found on: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/leading-digital-decade
[19] More information can be found on: https://www.lisbondeclaration.eu/

Building on real-life scenarios, the first workshop, organised on 22 September 2021, aimed to **explore the needs, challenges and opportunities for (specific groups of) citizens with regard to digitalisation**. Based on this analysis, the participants were then invited to **discuss what the most important principles are** to address these needs, challenges and opportunities.

The second workshop, which was organised on 28 September 2021, aimed to **further reflect on the most important principles for a digital society**. Its goal was also to **stimulate interactive discussions and gather information on aspects potentially missing** from the proposed areas of **principles**. Moreover, the participants were invited to reflect on possible actions - particularly those that could be implemented directly by the participating stakeholders – and to speak about good practices and existing initiatives. The outputs of the second workshop were aligned with and built on the conclusions of the first workshop

Who took part in the workshops?

A total of 29 participants attended the first workshop, and 16 the second workshop. The participants were selected to understand views of citizens that are **not easily reached with traditional consultation tools** – representatives of children and youngsters, vulnerable people, people living in rural areas, persons with disabilities, families, and elderly people were present. In addition **consumer organisations, regional groups, trade unions** and **representatives of SMEs** were also invited to workshop.

Table 4 – Participation to the workshops

Type of organisation	Workshop I	Workshop II
Local and regional authorities	6	3
Non-governmental organisations representing specific groups in society	11	3
Digital rights organisations	2	2
Representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises	4	3
Consumer organisations	2	1
Trade unions	2	1
Other	2	3
Total	**29**	**16**

Participants included mainly organisations that are located in Member States but also some Brussels-based organisations were invited.

In terms of interactivity, the level of participation and debating was high during the workshops.

What were the most important principles for the participants in the workshop?

There was a **general consensus on the importance of all of the proposed areas of digital principles**. Workshop participants also emphasised that **digital principles should be future-proof to, for example, encompass emerging and future digital technologies.** The need to focus on the **general readability of the principles** was underlined by several participants, as was the need to **make sure that the principles are clear and understandable to all**

Europeans. In addition, the importance of **monitoring and reporting on the implementation of digital principles** was raised.

Through the use of exploratory exercises, **participants to the first workshop were further asked what for European citizens would be the most important principles**. The results are outlined below:

- Preventing disinformation and fake news (including by ensuring access to trusted sources of information).
- Promoting critical thinking skills, digital and media literacy.
- Promoting neutrality and transparency on digital skills and on online services (e.g. by fostering trainings and learning opportunities with open source solutions).
- Ensuring availability and accessibility of cultural heritage online.
- Ensuring non-discrimination in the online environment.
- Ensuring the right to disconnect.
- Ensuring the right to have access to services offline.
- Preventing targeted advertising and profiling of children and youngsters.
- Prevention of negative effects of long-term exposure to digital technologies.
- Limiting the monitoring, corporate/marketing profiling and targeting of end users / providing end-users with the possibility of enjoying the digital environment (including products, devices, services) without 24/7 surveillance.
- Ensuring the right to data portability (i.e. through the disconnection of services and data and by granting ownership on personal data shared online).
- Providing a right to review data online and the right to be forgotten.
- Promoting fairness and transparency in the digital environment (e.g. access to clear information about algorithms and other practices used in online applications and emerging technologies).
- Ensuring the use of a trusted and secure digital identity (including the right to manage shared data, access to platforms and anonymity).
- Ensuring a safe digital environment at EU level.
- Stronger support for digitalisation for citizens and businesses.

The following principles from the list above were voted as the most important by the participants in the second workshop:

- Promoting fairness and transparency in the digital environment.
- Ensuring non-discrimination in the online environment.
- Preventing disinformation and fake news.
- Ensuring the right to data portability.
- Ensuring the right to have access to services offline.
- Prevention of negative effects of long-term exposure to digital technologies.
- Stronger support for digitalisation for citizens and businesses.

Further suggestions and ideas from the exploratory discussions

Participants pointed out that **some principles should be broader and deserve their own area and should not only be a sub-principle** (for example, fake news and disinformation). Disability organisations participating in the workshops stated the **importance of having accessible digital tools**, and to this end asked for a **stronger mention of web accessibility in all areas of principles**.

Several participants also mentioned that **most of the areas of principles overlap and are interdependent** between one another. At the same time, multiple stakeholders in both workshops agreed that **digital skills and literacy** are a necessary requirement for the other principles. Similarly, many participants indicated the suggested **principles in the area of 'a secure, trusted and online environment'** as very relevant, while highlighting the need to further strengthen them with additional principles.

Protection and control of personal data, data portability also prominently featured in the discussions in both workshops, both of which were associated with **online security** concerns. Participants raised concerns regarding **online market profiling, advertising**, and **exposure to inappropriate content** especially for **children**.

When asked about the possible role of actors to implement and promote a set of digital principles, the participants pointed foremost to the **role of regulators to implement existing rights and principles, leveraging existing legislation and legal frameworks**. The feedback received also included a suggestion that national authorities should not only regulate, and **promote implementation**, but also develop a framework and take up a **pioneering role**.

Some participants stressed that the principles should also be **implemented in a decentralised way, i.e. being promoted by multiple actors** rather than only by public authorities through legislation. Using technological advances to better implement the principles with the existing means were recognised. This would for example allow **citizens to take an active part in shaping and promoting the principles.** The need to **regularly revise the list of principles in view of technological developments** was also mentioned.

5.3. Targeted consultation with local and regional authorities

When did the targeted consultation take place, and what were its objectives?

Given that local and regional authorities were identified in the consultation and engagement strategy[20] as important stakeholders, the **ECON secretariat of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched a parallel consultation on the formulation of a set of digital rights and principles**.

[20] For more information, see chapter I on the stakeholder consultation and engagement activities.

The targeted consultation was open from 14 July to 10 October 2021, and aimed to **understand the views from local and regional authorities on the principles as put forward in the public consultation and on some additional, more detailed principles** suggested by the ECON secretariat on the basis of past opinions and consultative work of the Committee of the Regions.

Who participated in the targeted consultation?

The targeted consultation gathered the **views and experiences of 29 CoR members, representatives of territorial associations and development agencies** across 11 EU Member States[21].

What were the main views and suggestions from local and regional authorities?

The consultation has gathered some interesting insights about which digital principles are considered the most important to local and regional authorities and CoR members. The main findings can be summarized along the following lines:

- The proposed principles about a **European digital identity** were considered the most important ones by the participating local and regional authorities with 98% of the respondents indicating these principles at least 'important' (and 79% indicating them as 'very important').
- Local and regional authorities also attached a lot of importance to the principles that relate to **universal access to internet**, with 97% of respondents indicating them at least 'important'. The participating authorities attached particular importance to the principle of 'access to an affordable and high-speed connection', proposing to also include an explicit reference to rural and border regions. In addition, respondents also indicated support (93%) for the CoR's suggestion to add a principle about digital cohesion to ensure that no region or person is left behind.
- Moreover, principles strongly relating to many local and regional authorities' responsibilities also received high levels of support: **digital health services** (93%), **digital public services and administration** (92%). The CoR's suggestion to add a principle about 'efficient and secure data sharing between all levels of governments' received a high level of support (93%) by the participating authorities.
- The principles relating to **human-centric algorithms** (92%) **protecting and empowering children and young people** (90%) and **open, secure, and trusted online environment** (90%) also received high support rates. The CoR proposed principle about 'having robust measures to defend civil liberties and democracy in an increasingly digitalised era' received a similar level of support (89%) by the participating authorities.
- The principles in the area of **digital education and skills** received positive feedback from around 89% of respondents, with the CoR's suggested addition to focus on 'lifelong learning' receiving the highest share of 'very important' answers.

[21] Local and regional authorities from the following EU Member States participated: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands, Romania and Spain.

- Finally, the principles in the area of **digital products and services that respect the climate and environment** received slightly less support compared to other areas, with 81% of the respondents finding them at least 'important'.

5.4. Targeted consultation with children and teachers on 'How to make Europe's Digital Decade fit for children and young people?'

When did the targeted consultation take place, and what were its objectives?

To support the consultation on the Digital rights and principles and the preparation of an update of the 'Better Internet for Children' Strategy'[22], European Schoolnet organised on behalf of the European Commission from March to August 2021 a **targeted consultation on '*How to make Europe's Digital Decade fit for children and young people?*'**.

The consultation was **directed at children, and teachers** across the European Union and aimed to **consult on the priorities, they see, to promote, respect and fulfil children's rights in the digital world**, and what they believe are key opportunities and challenges.

More information and details about this consultation can be found on the **Better Internet for Kids Portal**. [23]

Who participated in the targeted consultation?

A total of 71 consultation sessions were carried out, with with support from the Insafe network of European Safer Internet Centres and a wider range of European online safety and child rights organisations. **Over 750 children and young people across the EU** (and beyond) **participating in the consultation**. Several of these consultation groups consisted of children under 12, or included representatives from one or more of the following groups: children with disabilities, migrant/refugee children, children in care, LGBTQ+ children, or children living in poverty. The methodology of the consultations was based on several existing benchmarks for meaningful child participation.

What were the main views and suggestions from children and young people

The consultation results showed that, overall, **children and young people have a good understanding of both the positive and negative aspects of the Internet**. They realise that the digital world – much like the offline world – will never be entirely safe. When asked to voice their main concerns about the digital realm, most of the groups mentioned the following (in order of importance):

- cyberbullying;

[22] More information can be found on: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13160-Better-internet-for-children-strategy-update_en

[23] The consultation process is explained here: https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/en-GB/practice/articles/article?id=6851949 The full report, published at the Safer Internet Forum 2022 can be found here :

- hateful and harmful content;
- fake news and disinformation;[24]
- privacy and data protection.

Across the different consultation groups, general concerns were raised about the **lack of awareness among Internet users about online risks and potential mitigation measures**.[25] Several consultation groups highlighted their concern specifically for younger children, who may be less experienced and more vulnerable. The respondents agreed that the environment a person lives in is very important, with an essential role to be played by parents.

There seems to be widespread agreement that the **digital world provides a wealth of opportunities**. Yet, respondents consider it **not sufficiently inclusive and accessible for children and young people with disabilities**. Explicit concerns were also raised about **hateful and violent content online targeting children and young people** in vulnerable and marginalised situations, with 'being different' in any possible way seen as a risk factor often leading to harassment and rejection.

What were the main views and suggestions from teachers and educators?

The European teachers and educators involved in this consultation exercise **largely echoed the education needs put forward by children and young people**. They call upon policy makers to substantially invest in national and international programmes which support education and awareness-raising efforts.

For teachers, this is primarily about:

- Making sure that **media literacy, online safety and digital citizenship** are part of the formal curriculum from an early age onwards;
- Ensuring that these topics are properly **addressed in teacher training and professional development;**
- More actively **reaching out to parents and carers so as to develop a shared understanding of what is going on in children's and young people's online lives**, in turn making it possible to foster an ongoing whole-school dialogue;
- Taking an **evidence-based approach** and better assessing the results of existing education efforts.

The respondents raised the issue of accountability of and the need to force (or, more positively, encourage) industry to **develop technological solutions and come up with age-appropriate standards and measures to keep their platforms and services safe**.

[24] The respondents further indicated that this is not only a threat for minors, but perhaps even more so for older people.
[25] The respondents further indicated that this lack of awareness includes not only children and young people, but also parents and other adults.

Several teachers also elaborated about difficulties in getting their own colleagues on board, with reasons cited including that the curriculum is full, **there is not sufficient awareness, many teachers lack the required knowledge, skills and confidence and it is difficult to keep up to date with the continuous flow of technological development**.

It is noteworthy that even the group of participating open-minded and enthusiastic European teachers and educators had – in comparison with the children and young people consulted – a **rather narrow and protective view of children's rights in a digital world**. For example, while many of our younger respondents talked passionately about online entertainment and gaming as important **opportunities for positive and creative participation, teachers primarily framed these activities in relation to concerns about time spent online or minors accessing inappropriate services and content**.

When asked about protective measures, teachers typically argued that access should be restricted based on age. By contrast, children and young people themselves would rather point to the **need for policy makers and industry to prevent negative things from happening in the online spaces they already inhabit, while equally providing more age-appropriate alternatives** for them to engage with.

In many ways, these examples illustrate – in very concrete and practical ways – how the rights of children and young people to provision and participation are easily overlooked when minors are not sitting around the table when child online protection is being discussed.

5.5. Targeted interviews with some relevant organisations and stakeholders

When did the interviews take place, and what were its objectives?

The European Commission interviewed, with the support of an external contractor, a **total of 23 organisations and stakeholders**. These organisations included 10 companies (including both large companies, SMEs and start-ups), three business associations, six public authorities (including national, regional and local authorities) and four external stakeholders (international organisation in the field of economic and social development, and one representing neighbourhood countries, and two international financial institutions).

The interviews aimed to understand the **relevance of a set of digital principles** for these organisations, the **potential opportunities** that they could bring, and the **role that these organisations consider for themselves in promoting and helping with the implementation** of such a set of digital principles.

The interviews took place in October and November 2021 on the basis of an interview guide that was shared prior to the interviews. Interviews were conducted online and last one hour.

What were relevant and recurring themes mentioned by the interviewed organisations and stakeholders?

Overall, all interviewees indicated **support for a Declaration on digital rights and principles, while stressing also the need to avoid possible duplication** with similar initiatives. In general, interviewees emphasized the importance of all listed principles in the public consultation but they attached particular importance to have a focus on human-centricity, digital education, inclusiveness and access to digital environment in a secured and trusted environment but also suggest to include more prominent principles on data protection and privacy, fair connectivity, and digital skills of elderly people and children.

All interviewees agreed to also **focus on concrete actions and implementation following the adoption of such a Declaration**. In particular, a large number of interviewees mentioned the **importance of raising awareness and fostering open dialogue with citizens and other stakeholders** since the implementation of such principles would require the collaboration of stakeholders at various levels (EU institutions, Member States' public administrations but also international partners, regional and local authorities, social partners, research institutes, businesses, NGOs and civil society organisations).

Furthermore, several interviewees highlighted that **citizens should be able to understand, and feel the benefits of such principles**. Therefore, these interviewees suggested to have clear, simple and understandable principles, and to put efforts in **communication and stakeholder engagement strategies and initiatives,** for example for children, and for citizens with a low levels of digital literacy.

Next to this, several interviewees also mentioned the need to have a **monitoring framework** in place to measure the impact and progress of the implementation of the principles against defined **targets**. Furthermore, the need to **regularly iterate/review?** the principles was raised to adapt to the changes in the digital environment (especially considering the rapid pace of digitalisation and the development of specific technologies, such as artificial intelligence).

Finally, several interviewees (in particular external stakeholders) mentioned that **promoting a declaration on digital rights and principles could help create worldwide alliances, partnerships and synergies,** especially to bring together like-minded third countries, regions and international organisations with similar objectives as the EU.

Furthermore, it was mentioned by several interviewees that pro-actively promoting the declaration could bring an opportunity for the EU to reinforce a **leadership position in the promotion of fundamental values in the digital domain** but also to create a **competitive advantages** to attract businesses and foster new investments.

> *What were the potential roles mentioned by the interviewed organisations to help promoting and implementing digital principles?*

All interviewees generally expressed their **willingness to support the implementation and promotion of a set of digital principles**.

The most recurring roles envisaged were the following:

- **Promoter**: raise awareness on digital principles with citizens, consumers and partners to reinforce the European way to the digital transformation.
- **Implementer**: implementing, reusing and disseminating the digital principles through specific projects and actions undertaken by organisations.
- **Investor**: supporting other organisations (such as SMEs and startups) in their core activities to help implement several principles but also by for example facilitate the implementation of certain digital principles through investments in core areas (e.g. infrastructure but also training and digital education opportunities to employees).
- **Partner to the Commission** to promote digital principles with like-minded international organisations and third countries.

The majority of participants offered to take on more than one of the abovementioned roles, in line with their scope of activities (especially relevant for large organisations). The most indicated roles are **promoters** and **implementers**, by respectively 12 and 9 interviewees out of 23. Several interviewees from the private sector (8) confirmed that the declaration would give further credibility to some of their ongoing projects, and they would be willing to explore possibilities to coordinate activities that could focus on the promotion or implementation of digital principles.

Some organisations also mentioned that they can provide feedback and report to the Commission to help with the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of digital principles,

6. DESK ANALYSIS OF INITIATIVES ON DIGITAL PRINCIPLES BY OTHER ORGANISATIONS

6.1. What was the desk analysis about, and what were its objectives?

The European Commission, with the support of an external contractor, undertook **a mapping of other initiatives on digital principles and rights** that were published between 2014 and 2021 by EU institutions, international and intergovernmental organisations, national competent authorities (including EU Member States and third countries), local authorities as well as non-governmental organisations.

During this mapping, a **total of 30 initiatives have been identified and were mapped against the areas for digital principles that were included in the roadmap and public consultation on a set of digital principles**. The main objective was to understand what the focus of these other initiatives was, and to inform the drafting of an EU Declaration on Digital rights and principles. The **table in Annex III of the SWD** offers an overview of these initiatives.

6.2. Who are the authors of the analysed initiatives on digital rights and principles?

At EU level, the **Presidency of the Council of the EU has produced several declarations which have set the ground and served as inspiration for the proposal on the EU Declaration on Digital rights and principles**. Recent examples of such declarations include the '*Lisbon Declaration on Digital Democracy with a Purpose*', the '*Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government*', or the '*Tallin Declaration on eGovernment*'.

Similarly, several **EU Member States have introduced legislative and/or political commitments on digital principles and rights in recent years**, which emphasise the importance attached to digital rights and principles in Member States. The analysis included the Spanish '*Digital Rights Charter*', the Italian '*Declaration on Internet Rights*', the French '*Digital Republic Bill*' and the Portuguese '*Charter on Human Rights in the Digital Age*'.

Relevant initiatives (mostly with a focus on a specific topics) have also been advanced by **pan-European organisations, including the Council of Europe, the OECD** but also for example the **Regional Cooperation Council**, which is focusing primarily on Western Balkans countries and came with a list of main objectives (that contains references to digital principles) for the digital transformation of the region.

Furthermore, worldwide initiatives have been put forward by **inter-governmental political fora such as the G7 and G20**. Recent examples include the G7 Internet Safety Principles, the G20 Digital Government Principles (including annexes on AI Principles, and High Level Principles for the Children Protection and Empowerment in the Digital Environment). Additionally, the **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child** recently adopted a general comment focusing on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.

Several regional and continent-level initiatives have also been promoted by **international organisations** outside of Europe. On the one hand, organisations like the African Union; Mercosur and the Pan American Health Organisation authored initiatives in the field of digital rights and principles with specific aspects responding to local challenges. For example, the African Union's '*Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020 - 2030)*' points out objectives focusing on the economic and technological development of the continent over the current decade. On the other hand, organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have authored a digital development programme which contains some information regarding digital principles.

Likewise, **national authorities from third countries (outside the EU)** came forward with initiatives to advance the implementation of digital rights and principles. Examples are Canada's '*Digital Charter*', the '*Digital Charter*' from the UK's Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, and the Brazil's '*Internet Bill of Rights*'. Other countries launched national digital strategies containing reference to some digital rights and principles.

Moreover, although most initiatives have been promoted at the national level, it is relevant to mention the **existence of some initiatives that are launched by local authorities**. One example of such an initiative is the '*Cities Coalition for Digital Rights*', which brings together around 50 of the major cities across the planet that undersigned five principles with the aim to protect and uphold digital rights at the local and global level.

Finally, a significant number of **non-governmental and civil society organisations** came forward with initiatives that set out digital rights and principles. For example, European Digital Rights (EDRi) came forward with a 10-point '*Charter of Digital Rights*', the Open Society Foundation (co-authored by BEUC, and based on contributions from other civil society organisations) developed '*A Human-Centric Digital Manifesto for Europe*', and the ZEIT-Foundation (on the basis of a group of German experts from all fields of civil society) has created a proposal for a '*Charter of Fundamental Digital Rights of the European Union*'.

6.3. Areas most often covered by the initiatives on digital rights and principles

Based on the desk analysis, the following areas were the most often covered by the 30 selected initiatives on digital rights and principles:

- **Access to the Internet** was the area for digital rights and/or principles found most often. In total, 23 out of the 30 analysed initiatives dealt with providing **access to Internet services** and included principles about improving access to the Internet, development of digital infrastructure, and/or on the quality of Internet connectivity at affordable prices. Several initiatives also underlined the **importance of net neutrality** (i.e. equal treatment of all Internet traffic and the impossibility for Internet providers to speed up, slow down or block any content, applications or website).

- **Privacy and data protection** is the second-most recurring topic covered by 22 out of the 30 analysed initiatives. The main provisions relate to privacy and data, and cover for example **data protection**, and the **transparency of data use**, and users' **control over their personal data**.

  Moreover, several initiatives mention **more specific principles such as the right of anonymity and the right to be forgotten**. Some initiatives (notably from NGOs) also touch upon the right to be free from mass surveillance in a digital environment.

- **Digital education and skills** was mentioned in 17 of the 30 analysed initiatives. These rights and/or principles focused for example on a digital inclusive society, and the **right to digital education and development of digital skills**. Several initiatives also elaborated on the need to ensure awareness of cybersecurity threats, data protection matters, and critical media literacy skills to understand disinformation.

  Several initiatives focused on ensuring **participation in a digital society of the most vulnerable persons** in society (one initiative also stressed the need for technologies to focus on contributing to people's physical and psychological well-being). In this regard, some initiatives also focused on **accessibility of digital technologies** for persons with disabilities, or more general

  It is also worth mentioning that several initiatives have **employment (and working conditions) as a specific sub-chapter**, where they include such principles as life-long learning, upskilling, work-life balance, the right to disconnect, the impact of (digital) technologies on labour and work environments, and working arrangements for online platform workers.

- **Safe, secure and trustworthy online environment** was covered by digital rights and/or principles in 17 out of 30 analysed initiatives. The references encompassed several key elements, such as the **protection of users from online crime** (e.g. fraud, online ID-theft, …), but also the use and provision of **secure and trusted digital identity services**. Some initiatives also refer to a safe online environment that focuses on the **prevention of the dissemination of illegalcontent or hate speech online**.

  Furthermore, 12 initiatives cover the **area of cybersecurity** (sometimes as a specific chapter) by for example elaborating on a right to cybersecurity, the need to raise awareness on cybersecurity threats and to foster the protection of critical infrastructures against cyber-attacks.

- **Open environment, and freedom of expression and information** was mentioned in 15 out of the 30 analysed initiatives. Most of the initiatives highlight the **need to guarantee freedom of speech, expression and information in a digital environment**. Some initiatives elaborate further by having **specific principles on the protection from disinformation, transparency and access to documents**.

Several initiatives also elaborate on the **right to create content in the online environment and to have it protected**. More specifically, the protection of copyright and intellectual property are often the focus of a dedicated digital right or principle. Some initiatives (notably from NGOs) promote for example an update of the regulation regarding the protection of intellectual property rights online.

- **Digital public services and administration** was covered in 14 of the 30 analysed initiatives. These rights and/or principles focused primarily on access to, and delivery of digital public services (but some initiatives also indicated that people should be able to access physical public services should they so choose). Several initiatives also included principles on transparency, access and reuse of public data, modern public governments, and on human-centric, secure and accessible public services.

  Finally, some initiatives also emphasise the importance of open sourcing of public data and publicly-funded research. These initiatives contain principles that refer to **promoting interoperability, open data and open standards** or to promote the **use of data to develop solutions for societal challenges.**

- **Artificial intelligence** was mentioned in 13 out of the 30 analysed initiatives. Most of these initiatives highlight the need of transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination of algorithms and artificial intelligence systems. Furthermore, some initiatives focus on respect for human autonomy (especially for decisions that touch upon physical integrity or deprivation of liberty) and the need to have human-centred artificial intelligence systems that are rooted in fundamental rights and values.

The following digital principles included in the Commission's proposal for a Declaration on Digital rights and principles were covered to a lesser extent in the analysed initiatives:

- **Children and young people** were covered in eight of the analysed initiatives. These initiatives focused on the **protection of minors** (by for example ensuring safe environments, balanced use of digital technologies, protection of privacy and data) but also on their **empowerment and participation in the digital environment** (by for example focusing on digital literacy, and taking into consideration their opinions in accordance with their age and maturity).

- **Digital and the climate** was only covered in four of the analysed initiatives. More specifically, these initiatives elaborated for example of the **need for a sustainable digital society and development of digital technologies** (by including for example the reduction of the carbon footprint of the telecommunication sector), or to **promote digital solutions for key social and environmental challenges**.

- **Digital health services** was only covered to a certain extent in two of the analysed initiatives. More specifically, one initiative refers to a **right to health protection in a digital environment**, and further specifies the need to protect the citizen's right in the

context of digital neurotechnologies (to ensure the protection of the individual self-determination, sovereignty and freedom in decision-making). Another initiative emphasized the **need to focus on the digitalisation of the health sector**.

ANNEX I - OVERVIEW ON THE STAKEHOLDERS THAT PARTICIPATED TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION, AND/OR PROVIDED FEEDBACK TO THE ROADMAP

In the course of the preparation of this initiative, the Commission has received position papers from the following stakeholders:

1. Access Now Europe
2. ACT | The App Association
3. ActionAid International
4. Alliance for Healthy Infosphere
5. Association of Commercial Television in Europe
6. Be Global
7. Bundesrechtsanwaltskammer
8. Centrica S.r.l.
9. CERMI
10. Clean Up The Internet
11. COFACE-Families Europe
12. COMMUNIA Association for the Public Domain
13. Concord Europe
14. CONEPA-CETRAA
15. Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
16. CPME - Standing Committee of European Doctors
17. Cultural Broadcasting Archive Verein zur Förderung digitaler Kommunikation
18. Danish Chamber of Commerce
19. Defend Democracy
20. DIGITALEUROPE
21. DOT Europe
22. Dynamic Spectrum Alliance (DSA)
23. ESOMAR
24. Europe Technology Policy Committee of the Association for Computing Machinery
25. European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA)
26. European Digital Rights (EDRi)
27. European Disability Forum (EDF)
28. European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)
29. European Forum of the Insurance against Accidents at Work and Occupational Diseases
30. European Games Developer Federation (EGDF)
31. European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE)
32. European Partnership for Democracy
33. European University Association
34. Europeana Foundation
35. Federación de Personas Sordas de Cataluña
36. Fondation Descartes
37. Forum on Information and Democracy / Forum sur l'information et la démocratie
38. FTTH Council Europe
39. GÉANT
40. GISAD i.G.
41. GLOBSEC
42. ICT Coalition for Children Online
43. IFRRO (International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organisations)
44. inDICEs
45. InfoCert S.p.A.
46. Ingka Group | IKEA
47. Intelsat S.A.
48. Interactive Software Federation of Europe - ISFE
49. Intergraf
50. Internet Society
51. LUMSA University of Rome
52. La Coalición de Creadores e Industrias de Contenidos
53. LA POSTE SA
54. LIDER Lab Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna
55. Lie Detectors
56. MAIF
57. Mediaset S.p.A
58. Microsoft Corporation

59. Open Future Foundation
60. Österreichischer Rechtsanwaltskammertag
61. Qiy Foundation
62. QUALCOMM Incorporated
63. Région Occitanie
64. Reporters Without Borders / Reporters sans frontières (RSF)
65. Respect Zone
66. Science Europe
67. SMEunited
68. SONAE
69. Sustainable Digital Infrastructure Alliance e.V. (SDIA)
70. Századvég Group
71. Telecom Infra Project
72. Telefónica
73. The European Competitive Telecommunications Association (ECTA)
74. The Federation of Finnish Enterprises
75. The Global Enabling Sustainability Initiative (GeSI)
76. The LEGO Group
77. Thorn
78. UNICEF
79. United Nations Brussels Team
80. University of Central Lancashire Cyprus campus
81. University of Graz
82. Wirtschaftskammer Österreichs (WKÖ)

ANNEX II - OVERVIEW ON THE RESPONSES

The table below provides an overview on the example principles that were part of the Eurobarometer survey on digital rights and principles. During the interviews, surveyed EU citizens were asked to indicate whether they would find it important to have below example principles included in a list of principles that define the European approach to digital life.

More details can be found in the Eurobarometer report and the date annexes, which can be accessed on the dedicated Eurobarometer webpage.[26]

Table 5 – Example principles used in the Eurobarometer survey

Example principles	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not at all important	Don't know
Children should be protected in the online environment	74%	19%	3%	1%	3%
The confidentiality of communications such as telephone calls or text messages should be protected	66%	26%	4%	1%	3%
A safe and trusted online environment where people are protected from cybercrime and illegal content and goods	64%	27%	3%	2%	4%
Everyone, including people with disabilities or at risk of exclusion, should benefit from easily accessible and user-friendly digital public services	59%	32%	4%	2%	3%
Everyone should be clearly informed about the terms and conditions that apply to their internet connection	58%	32%	5%	2%	3%
Everyone should have secure access to their online health records (e.g. medical results and prescriptions) and remain in full control of this information	58%	30%	5%	3%	4%
Everyone should be able to use a secure and trustworthy digital identity that can be used to access a broad range of public and private online services	57%	30%	5%	3%	5%
Europeans should be protected against the risky or unethical application of digital technologies including Artificial Intelligence	56%	32%	5%	2%	5%
Access to education and training enabling everyone to acquire the	55%	35%	5%	2%	3%

[26] https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2270

Example principles	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not at all important	Don't know
necessary digital skills to take an active part in society, the labour market and democratic processes					
Education to encourage critical thinking while navigating the internet, including online social networks	55%	33%	6%	2%	4%
Everyone needs to be able to access the internet through an affordable and high speed connection	54%	35%	6%	2%	3%
Digital products (e.g. mobile phones) and services (e.g. storing data and information online) should be produced and used so as to their harmful impact on the environment	54%	34%	6%	2%	4%
Digital technologies should help to address climate change challenges (e.g. weather monitoring and disaster alert systems and traffic management)	52%	35%	6%	2%	5%
Everyone should be able to benefit from digital health and care services (e.g. telemedicine)	51%	33%	8%	3%	5%
Access for all to high-quality digital education (e.g. equipment, availability of courses)	49%	39%	6%	2%	4%
Understanding of digital technologies should be promoted	47%	40%	7%	2%	4%
Everyone should be able to balance the time spent using digital technologies in a remote working and learning environment	47%	38%	7%	2%	6%
Information on the impact that digital products and services have on the environment should be easy to obtain	47%	38%	8%	2%	5%
Data or information should only need to be submitted once when interacting with public administrations	46%	34%	10%	3%	7%

ANNEX III – OVERVIEW ON THE ANALYSED INITIATIVES ON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND PRINCIPLES

The table below provides an overview of the 30 initiatives on digital rights and principles that were selected, with the help of an external contractor, during a desk-analysis. The selection of initiatives was done to ensure a balance between type of authors, geographical regions, and between initiatives focusing on digital rights and/or principles. The selected initiatives were adopted and/or published between 2014 and 2021 by EU institutions, international and intergovernmental organisations, national authorities (including EU Member States and third countries), local authorities as well as non-governmental organisations.

The selection of these initiative was by no means intended to be exhaustive or to contain a judgment on their specific importance/relevance.

Table 6 - List of identified initiatives on digital rights and principles

	Name of the initiative	Author	Publication date
1.	Lisbon Declaration on Digital Democracy with a Purpose	Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU	June 2021
2.	Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government	German Presidency of the Council of the EU	December 2020
3.	Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment	Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU	October 2017
4.	Spanish Digital Rights Charter	Government of Spain	July 2021
5.	Portuguese Charter on Human Rights in the Digital Age	Portuguese Parliament	May 2021
6.	Digital Republic Bill	Government of France	October 2016
7.	Italian Declaration of Internet Rights	Italian Parliament	July 2015
8.	Principles for a fundamental rights-compliant use of digital technologies in electoral processes	Council of Europe	December 2020
9.	Towards Regulation of AI systems: Global perspectives on the development of a legal framework on Artificial Intelligence systems based on the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law	Council of Europe	December 2020
10.	OECD Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies	OECD	July 2014
11.	Digital Transformation - Western Balkans	Regional Cooperation Council	May 2018
12.	G7 Internet Safety Principles	G7	April 2021
13.	G20 Digital Government Principles	G20	August 2021
14.	G20 AI Principles - as annex to the above	G20	August 2021
15.	G20 High Level Principles for the Children Protection and Empowerment in the Digital Environment - as annex to the above	G20	August 2021
16.	General comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment	United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child	March 2021
17.	ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025	Asean	January 2021

18.	The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030)	African Union	May 2020
19.	Mercosur Digital Agenda	Mercosur	December 2017
20.	Eight Guiding Principles of Digital Transformation of the Health Sector. A Call to Pan American Action	Pan American Health Organisation	June 2021
21.	Digital Charter	Government of Canada	May 19
22.	British Digital Charter	UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	January 18
23.	Brazilian Internet Bill of Rights	Government of Brazil	April 2014
24.	Declaration of Cities Coalition for Digital Rights	Cities Coalition for Digital Rights (in partnership with UN-Habitat, Eurocities and UCLG)	July 2020
25.	Human-Centric Digital Manifesto for Europe	Open Society Foundations, BEUC	September 2019
26.	Charter of Digital Rights	European Digital Rights (EDRi)	June 2014
27.	Charter of Fundamental Digital Rights of the European Union	ZEIT-Foundation	November 2016
28.	Universal Declaration of Digital Rights	Article 20	March 2017
29.	Liberal Principles of Digitalisation and Human Rights	Liberal International	April 2020
30.	Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet	Internet Rights and Principles Dynamic Coalition	November 2019