

LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE DECLARATION

ON PROMOTING A SAFER, RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTWORTHY ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

The presence of online harmful content continues to be a major concern as the use of social media, in particular by children and young adults, increasingly plays a formative role in their daily lives. Creating a safer, more secure and trusted digital environment therefore has to be at the heart of Europe's digital strategy; with a firm commitment to support, empower and respect children online and protect them from harmful content, which could have serious negative consequences not only for the users, citizens and society at large, but equally for companies.

Aware of the crucial importance of the protection of personal data, privacy and autonomy online, recognizing that anonymity is a fundamental pillar of the internet, and keeping in mind the need for digital solutions which enhance trust and responsibility in the use of digital services, we, the signatories of this Declaration, call on the European Commission to bring together the tools available under the Digital Services Act and the European Digital Identity Wallets with the aim to provide the necessary safeguards for the users of digital services in the Union, in particular the most vulnerable groups, such as children and young adults.

Mindful of the new obligations under the Digital Services Act on all online platforms to ensure a safe, predictable, and trusted online environment, as well as new obligations on very large online platforms to effectively mitigate systemic risks stemming from the design or functioning of their digital services, including risks to the rights of the child or to a person's physical or mental well-being; and recalling the forthcoming obligation on very large online platforms to accept the European Digital Identity Wallets for user authentication.



We, the signatories of this Declaration, undertake to work together as well as with the European Commission:

- 1) To commit to a rigorous and effective enforcement of the new rules for the protection of children and young adults in order to ensure a safe and age-appropriate online experience;
- 2) To issue clear and comprehensive guidance to all online platforms as to how best to ensure the required high level of privacy, safety and security for all users, in particular children and young adults, including on how to make effective use of identity and age assurance tools whilst strictly preserving the highest privacy standards and the choice of users to engage through anonymous, pseudonymous or real identity profiles ;
- 3) To develop harmonized technical solutions across EU Member States for the purposes of identity and age verification by relying on the functionalities available under the upcoming European Digital Identity Wallets.

Utilizing the synergies of these three initiatives, rooted in the principles of digital trust, safety and empowerment as well as those of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), such as data minimization, purpose limitation or data protection by design and by default would aim to significantly improve the online experience of all users, but in particular of those needing most protection, ensuring a safer, more responsible and inclusive digital environment. Moreover, it would strengthen cybersecurity by effectively countering phishing activities, limit opportunities for harassment and combat identity theft, reduce the impact of online opinion manipulation and prevent "troll farms" from obtaining verified accounts. It also strengthens the link between individuals and their digital responsibilities and ultimately it protects online democracy.

By endorsing this declaration, we aim to cultivate a digital sphere characterized by increased safety, security and accountability.

We therefore affirm this joint declaration on April 12, at Louvain-la-Neuve, marking our commitment to advancing our common digital future.

