

Statement on Ethical Responsibility towards a Value-Based European Digital Sovereignty

by the participants of the 35th National Ethics Councils Forum -
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Digital technologies now shape how we learn, work, form relationships, participate in society, and understand ourselves. The digital systems we rely on are not mere tools. They partake in determining human behavior and form the infrastructure of everyday life. The choices we make today, about how these systems are built, governed, and utilized will shape the humans and society of tomorrow.

The participants at the 35th NEC Forum in Copenhagen recognize that digital technologies cannot be guided by efficiency or market forces alone. Their design must be grounded in the values that hold our societies together. We must ensure, that we have the capacity to shape technology in ways that reflect core European values and respect human rights.

This responsibility is especially urgent when considering children and young people. They are growing up in digital environments that frame attention, identity, and social relationships. Many of these environments are designed primarily to maximize engagement, not to support healthy development and well-being. Protecting children, and in particular their mental health, is therefore of a major concern that goes beyond digital regulation — the present and future European generations are at stake.

To safeguard dignity, human rights and freedoms, and fairness in the digital world, it is essential that technologies we depend on are transparent and their design is responsible. And to achieve this, Europe must have the ability not only to evaluate and regulate technology, but also to develop and sustain its own digital solutions. Digital sovereignty has become an ethical imperative.

Therefore, we believe that Europe must take the following steps:

1. People before technology

Digital systems are part of our lives, influence our behavior and should contribute to human flourishing. They should support our cognitive abilities, freedom to think, assist us in making informed choices, and help us to think critically.

2. Ensure explainability, transparency and accountability

Explainability, transparency and accountability are prerequisite for building trust in digital technologies and promote digital inclusion, access and education and build digital literacy for all. More effort should be made to ensure that all citizens can understand how digital systems work and who is responsible for their development, functioning, and outcomes.

3. Create safe and enriching digital spaces for children and young people

Online environments should support curiosity, creativity, learning, and healthy development. Digital spaces must protect young people from harmful manipulation and exploitation. As digital technologies are increasingly used in our education systems, we must ensure that they help children develop critical thinking in their online and offline lives.

4. Strengthen European digital solutions

European citizens should be able to make genuine choices about the technologies they rely on – including access to more value-based technologies.

We should work for a digital future where technology supports human dignity, rights and strengthens democracy. A future where children and young people grow up in safe and secure digital spaces. A future where Europe does not simply adapt to technological change, but actively shapes it.

This is not only a technical challenge. It is our ethical responsibility.