

## LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE DECLARATION

### ON PROMOTING A SAFER, RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTWORTHY ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

The presence of online harmful content and systemic risks continues to be a major concern as the use of social media, in particular by children, increasingly plays a formative role in their daily lives. Furthermore, children are increasingly exposed to deceptive advertising and marketing practices that are based on behavioral economics and profiling techniques using personal data, conduct that is now explicitly prohibited under the Digital Services Act. Research also indicates that digital media can have a significant negative impact on the physical and mental health and well-being of children. 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 and systemic risks, 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 and freedom of expression and information are fundamental pillars of the internet, and keeping in mind the need for digital solutions, on devices and online platforms, 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 Wallet with the aim to provide comprehensive safeguards for the users of digital services in the Union, in particular the most vulnerable groups, for example children.

Mindful of the new obligations for all online platforms covered by the Digital Services Act to ensure a safe, predictable, and trusted online environment, as well as new obligations in particular for very large online platforms and search engines to effectively mitigate systemic risks stemming from the design or functioning of their digital services, including risks to the fundamental rights of the child or to a person's physical or mental well-being or a negative impact on freedom of expression and civil discourse; 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, in order to ensure a safe, healthy and age-appropriate online experience ;
- 2) To issue clear and comprehensive guidance to online platforms – as part of a comprehensive policy to protect children in the online world - on how to ensure the required high level of privacy, safety and security for all users, in particular children, as well as on how to mitigate systemic risks particularly important for the protection of children, including on how to reduce addictive designs and on how to make effective use of parental controls, identity and age assurance tools, taking into account a multilayered and time-efficient approach, whilst strictly preserving their fundamental rights, such as the highest privacy standards, and the choice of users to engage anonymously, pseudonymously or through real identity profiles as well as respecting children’s right to communicate and access information ;
- 3) To develop as well as build on existing harmonized technical solutions and standards across EU Member States and taking into account national initiatives deployed by the Member States, for the purposes of providing interoperable, universal and user-friendly parental control mechanisms as well as for identity and age verification purposes, through privacy preserving technologies, including by relying on the functionalities available under the upcoming European Digital Identity Wallets, without precluding the use of other suitable age verification systems ;
- 4) To pursue discussions on the rising challenges related to promoting a safer, responsible and trustworthy online environment, including the possible need for additional joint efforts.

Utilizing the synergies of these four initiatives, rooted in the principles of digital trust, safety and empowerment as well as those of the General Data Protection Regulation and the ePrivacy Directive, such as data minimization, purpose limitation or data protection and privacy 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, these initiatives would help strengthen cybersecurity by taking measures to minimize phishing activities, help to protect the exchange of data between devices and between users, limit opportunities for harassment and combat identity theft, fraudulent activities leading to financial scams and other integrity breaches, reduce the impact of online opinion manipulation and prevent "bot farms" from obtaining verified accounts, and deter user manipulation practices. They will also strengthen the link between individuals and their digital responsibilities and ultimately contribute to protecting 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.

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Kingdom of Belgium

Republic of Bulgaria

Republic of Croatia

Republic of Cyprus

Czech Republic

Kingdom of Denmark



Republic of Estonia

Republic of Finland

France

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Greece

Hungary

Republic of Italy

Ireland

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