

DECLARATION

SEE Digital Rights Network

SHARE Foundation and Balkan Investigative Regional Reporting Network, BIRN, recognise the need to establish the SEE Digital Rights Network in order to counter the growing and fast-evolving use of advanced technologies and address data protection concerns and online violations.

This endeavour comes at a moment when we are witnessing increasing interference by state and commercial actors contributing to the already shrinking space for debate while the exercise of basic human rights is continuously being limited. State-of-the-art technology is being used not only to improve the lives of citizens but to control society, especially organisations and individuals vocal in their criticism of democratic backsliding.

[During the COVID-19 pandemic, through our monitoring](#) we have witnessed numerous cases of digital rights violations across Central and Southeastern Europe. In already fragile and illiberal democracies, the limitation on human rights is also seen in the digital environment in the form of threats. Lack of awareness of these issues within society further undermines democracy, not only in times of crisis.

Moreover, the consequences of these negative trends and tendencies will continue to severely affect the privacy of individuals by spreading fear, especially among marginalised groups, which inevitably leads to curbs on guaranteed freedoms and rights and increases the risk of exploitation and violence which can be easily transferred into real life.

Therefore, we invite you to join our coalition of civil society organisations, media and individuals who wish to contribute their own skills, knowledge and experience to achieve what we see as common goals, primarily improving our democracies and the position of individuals in the digital environment.

The proposed Network aims to gather relevant actors currently working on issues of digital rights abuses, lack of transparency and expanded use of invasive tech solutions in SEE often at the expense of privacy. This Network will serve as a platform for constructive dialogue between its members and fruitful discussion of solutions, examples of good practices, new ideas and suggestions. The SEE Digital Rights Network will work proactively and will issue public statements tackling the existing and emerging problems with the aim of preventing any negative consequences.

While cherishing the values of safety, equality and freedom, the work of the newly-formed SEE Digital Rights Network will be directed towards the achievement of the following goals:

- Protect digital rights and internet freedoms
- Enable people to access accurate information
- Make the internet a safer place
- Detect and report hate speech and verbal violence online, especially against women and other vulnerable groups
- Identify online recruitment, which can lead to exploitation
- Take control of our personal data
- Stop implementation of intrusive surveillance systems
- Hold governments accountable for use and abuse of technology
- Require protection of basic human rights at all times, including times of crisis
- Share knowledge and experiences and build a network
- Improve digital literacy in order to prevent violence and exploitation

The Network will aim to increase the level of understanding of complex and worrying trends and practices, trying to bring them closer to the general public in a language it can understand. By creating a common space for discussion and exchange, organisations and media will be able to increase the impact of their individual efforts directed towards legislative, political and social changes. Reaching out to stakeholders and raising awareness by using the authority of all Network members will give our joint initiatives greater impact and resonance.

We see digital evolution as a set of mechanisms and tools that have great potential to serve the needs of the people, while internet access has proved to be indispensable in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Our societies are becoming more digital, which represents a powerful incentive to increase the capacity of organisations dealing with digital developments and regulations in SEE.

In the fast digital era we are living in, numerous challenges require more coordinated and joint actions, particularly taking into consideration that:

- Our freedom of expression is being controlled by algorithm
- Our virtual communication is often shaped by algorithms that promote hate speech and destruction
- Our discourses are being contaminated with manipulation and misinformation
- Our societies are being shaped by poor levels of digital literacy
- Our security is ever more fragile in the digital space
- Our biometric data, our faces, are subject to mass surveillance
- Our lives are being dehumanised by becoming quantified into data and sold for profit
- Our governments are using technology to exert control over society and accumulate power
- Our fragile democracies are regressing in times of crisis

- Our communities are not working together to address these issues
- Our trust in the institutions that should protect us is dramatically declining

The Network will be unique in the diversity of its members, while uniting them around a common dedication to the protection of core human values and principles both online and offline. Respect for human rights, security and the safety of personal data and the responsible use of fast-developing technologies will be the core of the Network's guiding principles.