



## General Conference

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United Nations  
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Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

36 C/49

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Item 5.24 of the provisional agenda

### CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY PROPOSED BY THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL OF THE INFORMATION FOR ALL PROGRAMME (IFAP)

#### OUTLINE

**Source:** During its 18th session, held in February 2011, the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Council for the Information for All Programme (IFAP) examined the *Code of Ethics for the Information Society*. Subsequently the Code was approved by the members of the IFAP Council who recommended its submission to the General Conference for consideration at its 36th session.

**Purpose:** This item, included in the agenda of the General Conference by the Director-General at the request of the IFAP Council, presents the *Code of Ethics for the Information Society* and seeks its endorsement by the General Conference.

**Decision required:** paragraph 8.

## Background

1. UNESCO's intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) provides a framework for international cooperation, partnerships, resource mobilization and common action in the development of policies, strategies, methods and tools for building an information society for all. The Executive Board, at its 180th session, endorsed information ethics as one of the five priorities of IFAP (180 EX/15).

2. Accordingly, IFAP has been addressing the ethical aspects of the emerging information and knowledge societies, and during its 18th session (Paris, 21-22 February 2011), the IFAP Bureau examined and approved the *Code of Ethics for the Information Society* elaborated by the IFAP Working Group on Information Ethics through an extensive consultation process. It was then submitted to the members of the IFAP Council who recommended that the Code be transmitted to the 36th session of the General Conference for consideration.

3. The Code of Ethics is thus a direct result of the work by the intergovernmental body and incorporates as well the outcomes of a number of regional UNESCO info-ethics meetings and conferences organized over the last five years following the responsibility conferred on the Organization at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to coordinate the implementation of Action Line C10 "Ethical dimensions of the Information Society".

4. In this capacity, UNESCO has engaged with major stakeholders and academia, to conduct research and to develop awareness about the ethical dimensions of the information society. The Code of Ethics, prepared by IFAP, was developed in accordance with the WSIS C10 decision that "the Information Society should be subject to universally held values and promote the common good and to prevent abusive uses of ICTs".

5. The Code of Ethics is not intended to be of a binding nature. It is addressed to all stakeholders of the information and knowledge societies and outlines a number of universal values and guiding principles.

6. In terms of procedure, the General Conference has the following two options:

- (a) to consider that this Code should be adopted under the multi-stage procedure for adoption of declarations, charters and similar standard-setting instruments, and to apply that procedure; or
- (b) to consider either that this Code does not come under the above multi-stage procedure (or that the process of elaboration and consultation of Member States has already occurred in the framework of IFAP as a subsidiary body of the General Conference), and to proceed to its endorsement at the present General Conference.

7. The IFAP Council has recommended that the Code be endorsed by the General Conference at its present session in light of the thorough drafting and elaborations that have already been carried out on the draft Code in recent years after extensive consultations with UNESCO Member States on this matter.

## Proposed draft resolution

8. In light of the foregoing, the General Conference may wish to adopt the following resolution:

The General Conference,

1. Having examined document 36 C/49,
2. Recalling UNESCO's mandate to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image and to maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge,

3. Recognizing the essential role of ethical principles and values based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the attainment of the Organization's objectives of promoting access to information and knowledge for all,
4. Further recalling the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, and bearing in mind the responsibility conferred on UNESCO for the implementation of Action Line C10 "Ethical dimensions of the Information Society",
5. Commends the IFAP Council for its efforts in developing the *Code of Ethics for the Information Society*;
6. Endorses the *Code of Ethics for the Information Society*;
7. Invites Member States and all concerned stakeholders to take into consideration and apply the Code of Ethics in the process of elaboration and implementation of policies, plans, programmes and strategies for building equitable and inclusive knowledge societies.

## ANNEX

### Code of Ethics for the Information Society

The Intergovernmental Council of the Information for All Programme of UNESCO,

Committed to the full implementation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other universally recognized legal instruments;

Recalling the Preamble of the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which underlines the need “to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion”;

Recognizing the central role UNESCO plays in promoting people-centred, inclusive, development-oriented knowledge societies as agreed during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), as well as in respecting peace and upholding the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance and shared responsibility;

Acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the information society, especially with regard to inclusiveness, accessibility, the promotion of common good, privacy and personal data protection as well as the need to take appropriate actions and preventive measures, as determined by law, against abusive uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as illegal and other acts motivated by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, hatred, violence, all forms of child abuse, including paedophilia and child pornography, and trafficking in, and exploitation of, human beings;

Emphasizing that ethical principles are relevant to all stakeholders of the information society, collectively or individually, and that existence and implementation, at all levels, of the ethical principles is essential to ensure an all-inclusive information society;

Agrees upon a set of values, basic rights and obligations in the information society which should guide the actions and be observed by the members of the information society.

1. Internet in particular and ICTs more generally should be recognized as a key public service for building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society and are crucial to promote the exercise and enjoyment of universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. Every person irrespective of where they live, their gender, education, religion, social status shall be able to benefit from the Internet and use of ICTs. Everyone shall be able to connect, access, choose, produce, communicate, innovate and share information and knowledge on the Internet.
3. Affordable access to the Internet should serve as a tool for development, social cohesion and for enabling everyone’s potentials. Active social participation in public life through the use of Internet and other ICTs shall be enabled on a non-discriminatory basis.
4. Information should be made available, accessible and affordable across all linguistic, cultural and social groups and to both genders, including people with physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities, and people who speak minority languages. Internet and other ICTs shall serve to reduce digital divide and deploy technology and applications to ensure inclusion.

5. Technological and methodological standards, access solutions, portability and interoperability shall allow the widest possible access to content and content production, and encourage the evolution and improvement of the Internet and other ICTs to bring about greater inclusion and overcome forms of discrimination.
6. Creation, preservation and processing of, and access to, educational, cultural and scientific content in digital form should be encouraged, so as to ensure that all cultures can express themselves and have access to Internet in all languages, including indigenous and minority languages.
7. Everyone should have a freedom of association on the Internet and ICT-mediated assembly. Member States should take preventive steps against monitoring and surveillance of assembly and association in a digital environment.
8. Member States and respective stakeholders should take all steps to develop trustworthy Internet and other ICTs ensuring security, reliability and stability of critical and pervasive applications and services.
9. Member States should encourage and extend the availability of information in the public domain, recognize and enact the right of universal online access to public and government-held records, including information relevant to citizens. Publicly-relevant information should be placed in the public domain and disseminated online in an easily accessible way using compatible and open formats.
10. Media and information literacy is a fundamental prerequisite for access to information, the exercise of cultural rights and the right to education through use of Internet and other ICTs. It is essential to ensure that all user groups have the knowledge and skills to act and make informed and clear consent-based choices using Internet and ICTs so that they can be fully responsible members of the information society.
11. Everyone has a right to freedom of expression, participation and interaction on the Internet that should not be restricted, except in those narrowly defined circumstances that are based on internationally recognized laws and universal human rights standards.
12. Everyone has a right to the protection of personal data and private life on the Internet and other ICTs. Users should be protected against the unlawful storage, abuse or unauthorized disclosure of personal data, and against the intrusion of their privacy.
13. All stakeholders shall work together to prevent against abusive uses of ICTs, protection of private data and privacy and violation of human rights on the Internet and other ICTs by combination of legislative measures, user education, including use of media and information literacy skills, self-regulation and co-regulation measures and technical solutions without disrupting the free flow of information.
14. Member States should implement preventive measures and coordinate strategies to ensure security on the Internet and the protection of society against cybercrime, including acts motivated by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, hatred, violence, all forms of child abuse, and trafficking and exploitation of human beings.
15. All members of the information society, either collective or individual, should be free to develop and distribute new content and applications on the Internet. Freedom of expression and creative use of ICTs should not be restricted, except when impinging upon the basic human rights of others. The basic technical standards used on the Internet and other ICTs must always be open to allow interoperability and innovation.

16. Member States should support the use of the Internet and other ICTs to enhance the effectiveness of democracy and democratic institutions, providing to the public opportunities for effective public deliberation and participation in democratic process, and promoting transparency, accountability, responsiveness, engagement, inclusiveness, accessibility, participation, subsidiary and social cohesion.
17. Intellectual property of the creations in a digital environment should be a subject of and shall be protected under the intellectual property rights legislation. Unauthorized copying and distribution of copyrighted materials must not be condoned. Legal frameworks facilitating owners of intellectual property to share their knowledge and creations should be supported to promote open access to knowledge and foster creativity. Application of international intellectual property conventions should be based on the fair balance between the interests of the rights holders and of the public.
18. Member States are responsible for ensuring an inclusive, relevant, up-to-date and legal environment for the development of the information society.