Freedom Online Coalition Program of Action 2025

The following consensus document was developed by the FOC 2025 Chair, Estonia, in consultation with FOC Members and the FOC Advisory Network to outline the FOC's vision, priorities, and activities for 2025.

FOC Mission Statement

The Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) is a group of Member countries committed to the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and to upholding their respective obligations under international human rights law. The FOC believes that the human rights that people have offline must also be protected online. The Coalition serves as a coordinating body that advances cross-regional diplomacy and commits to working together, including through engagement with its independent multistakeholder Advisory Network (FOC-AN) and others who share these views, to support Internet freedom and protect human rights online worldwide.

Context

Since its founding in 2011, the FOC has served as the principal forum for like-minded governments to discuss and address issues at the intersection of technology and human rights. The Coalition works together with the FOC-AN and other international partners to promote Internet freedom and shape global norms. Over the years, the FOC has grown in influence and membership.

Estonia's Chairship of the FOC in 2025, like during the Netherlands' Chairship 2024, will be significantly influenced by the large number of ongoing global processes related to technology and Internet governance. It is clear that the decisions made in the upcoming years will set the basis for the governance of digital technologies for the next decade and beyond. It is therefore crucial for all diverse yet like-minded partners to work together and to ensure that human rights remain an integral part of these discussions and decisions.

At the same time, we see significant challenges to Internet freedom and exercising human rights online, including via Internet shutdowns, surveillance and information manipulation. This further exacerbates the need to gather stakeholders, facilitate discussions, engage in advocacy, and take diplomatic actions to address these challenges together.

Priority Areas

In 2025, taking into account the context of global challenges, the FOC will focus on the following priorities of Estonia's Chairship:

1. **Governance and use of digital technologies and the Internet**
   The FOC is committed to ensuring human rights remain at the center of the design, use, and governance of digital technology and the Internet, and to protecting and advancing the multistakeholder approach. The Internet must remain free, open, interoperable, global, reliable, and secure, and digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), must be rights-respecting. At the same time, these discussions must meaningfully engage all relevant stakeholders, including governments, civil society, technical community, private sector, and academia. Extra care must be taken to involve stakeholders from marginalised communities, particularly from the Global South.

2. **Digital inclusion and digital public infrastructure (DPI)**
   The FOC aims to advance digital inclusion and meaningful access to technologies, which rests upon four key pillars: connectivity, digital literacy, civic participation, and online safety. Digital divides exacerbate the social and economic chasm between the Global North and the Global South, with marginalised communities being most affected.

   Digital public infrastructure is an important enabling component towards digital inclusion, with the potential to promote reliable, inclusive, and meaningful connectivity and access to bridge digital divides, and to strengthen civic participation online. However, implementation without human rights safeguards can lead to negative outcomes, including adverse impacts on human rights. When designed and deployed in a rights-respecting, inclusive, and collaborative manner, including with access to effective remedy and redress, DPI can work towards securing social and economic benefits for communities, and enable the fulfilment and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly for marginalised groups.

   This is why, under Estonia's chairship, the FOC aims to advance knowledge on rights-respecting DPI to promote inclusive connectivity and civic participation, and mitigate potential risks of exclusion, discrimination, surveillance and violations of privacy, as well as explore the contextual realities and differences between the deployment of DPI in the Global North and the Global South and explore mechanisms to redress the uneven impact of advanced digital technologies.

3. **Cross-regional engagement**
   The development of inclusive and informed positions, shaped through cross-regional engagement and dialogue with a diverse range of stakeholders, is vital for the FOC to be an effective platform to advance human rights, both online and offline, worldwide. Enhancing this engagement, especially with stakeholders from the Global South, will further strengthen the Coalition's ability to ensure challenges and opportunities relating to Internet freedom and digital technologies are prioritized in national policy agendas and within key multilateral processes relating to the FOC's mandate.

Goals, Objectives, and Activities

GOAL 1: Advocate for a human rights-based and multistakeholder approach to the governance of the Internet and digital technologies.

- Strengthening FOC engagement and coordination around digital technology and Internet governance processes and fora, including the implementation of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and AI Advisory Body report, the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), by:

  - Building the capacity of FOC diplomats on issues and processes relevant to the Coalition's mandate;

  - Facilitating monitoring, issue- and process-based information sharing, and internal coordination between FOC Member countries, including through the Coalition's diplomatic networks;

- ○ Facilitating dialogues with the FOC Advisory Network, strategic partners, and other stakeholders external to the FOC community to share insights and perspectives;

- ○ Utilising FOC statements, foundational documents, and other outputs to inform FOC engagement in relevant forums and processes.

- ● Facilitate information sharing and internal coordination to raise discussion about, and address ongoing challenges to, Internet freedom and Internet governance (e.g., Internet censorship, including shutdowns, surveillance, data protection, content governance, information integrity), including, as appropriate, at the national level.

GOAL 2: Advance digital inclusion, including through the promotion of inclusive and rights-respecting digital public infrastructure (DPI).

- ● Promoting inclusive and rights-respecting DPI, and addressing key factors that contribute to digital divides, by:

  - ○ Developing, through multistakeholder discussions, a common understanding within the FOC of rights-respecting and inclusive DPI, and potential risks of exclusion, discrimination, gender bias, surveillance, and violations of privacy when deployed without appropriate safeguards;

  - ○ Facilitating capacity-building for FOC diplomats on key challenges to achieving digital inclusion, and opportunities to bridge digital divides;

  - ○ Supporting the work of FOC sub-entities and other mechanisms to address factors contributing to digital divides, and to advance digital inclusion, by utilising FOC outputs, toolkits, and other resources;

  - ○ Facilitating discussions on digital divides and DPI with relevant stakeholders, including the FOC Advisory Network, as well as strategic partners and stakeholders external to the FOC community.

- ● Supporting the work of the FOC Funding Coordination Group (FCG) to implement the Donor Principles for Human Rights in the Digital Age and advocate for democracy-affirming and rights-respecting donor investment.

GOAL 3: Increase meaningful engagement with Global South governments and stakeholders.

- ● Strengthening opportunities for engagement from Global South governments and non-governmental stakeholders to support the development of inclusive and informed positions on pressing issues related to the FOC's mandate, by:

  - ○ Facilitating FOC priority issue- and process-based dialogues, including on the margins of regional IGFs and other multistakeholder fora such as the Digital Rights & Inclusion Forum (DRIF);

- Raising awareness of FOC policy areas through capacity building programmes, and information sharing activities;

- Conducting targeted outreach to invite Global South governments to commit to the FOC principles and become Members of the Coalition;

- Participating, where possible, in discussions led by regional, multilateral and other Global South stakeholder groupings;

- Building on and supporting efforts to further promote the principles of DEIA[1] within the FOC's activities and operations.

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[1] Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.