



Data Sovereignty Now's contribution to the EU Digital Compass Communication

In this document, the member organisations of the Data Sovereignty Now (DSN) coalition outline their input for the Communication “2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade” (Digital Compass Communication). As campaigners for data sovereignty, we applaud the European Commission’s ambition to empower citizens and businesses. However, we also strongly urge that data sovereignty should be made mandatory in all policies, regulations and laws in the European Union. As part of our fundamental human rights, data sovereignty deserves strong consideration in all assessments of the targets and digital policy. Data sovereignty should therefore also apply in the case of the four pillars of this EU Digital Compass Communication.

With the Digital Compass Communication, the European Commission lays out its vision for 2030 to empower citizens and businesses through the digital transition. The Union’s approach to the digital transformation of society and the economy should encompass digital sovereignty, inclusion, equality, sustainability, resilience, security, improving quality of life, respect of citizens’ rights and aspirations, and should contribute to a dynamic, resource-efficient and fair economy and society in the Union.

It sets out digital ambitions for the next decade in the form of clear, concrete targets. The Digital Compass Communication uses the four points of the compass to identify the main goals to be achieved over the next decade:

1. A digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals
2. Secure, efficient and sustainable digital infrastructures
3. Digital transformation of businesses
4. Digitalisation of public services

To contribute to the acceleration and success of the EU Digital Compass Communication, we urge that data sovereignty needs to be included as a horizontal value spanning all four dimensions of the EU Digital Compass Communication.

Data sovereignty expresses an organisation’s or individual’s self-determination regarding their data. It is the capability of an organisation or an individual to have control over their respective business data or personal data. This entails that data subjects should be able to know which party holds their data, under what conditions (purpose, duration, reward) and where. In addition to knowledge and controlling the data rights, data subjects should be able to re-use their data elsewhere.

Data sovereignty as a key design principle

Data sovereignty needs to be a horizontal value running through all four dimensions of the EU Digital Compass Communication and the associated targets, similarly to fundamental rights, human rights and environmental sustainability. In other words, data sovereignty in its broadest sense is relevant in each of the dimensions.

There are several reasons why data sovereignty should be made a key design principle.

Firstly, data sovereignty works on all the different levels and for all the different roles in a data-sharing ecosystem. For example, it works with respect to the source holding the data on behalf of people and businesses (e.g. telecoms, utilities, banks, trading partners, etc.), by enabling consent to be given (and subsequently to be withdrawn) for the use of data for a specific purpose. It also works for the sharing of data with other authorised parties, and with respect to all other parties with which a



person or organisation decides to share their data (when the data comes from the initial holding source). Therefore, data sovereignty holds the key to a free flow of data for all involved.

Secondly, it serves as an easy-to-follow and actionable guideline. It is easy to grasp, yet encompasses many relevant aspects: legal, interoperable, functional, technical, governance, privacy, security, business models, etc.

Thirdly, a commitment to data sovereignty will allow European values – in particular with respect to democratic principles, personal data protection and privacy, consumer protection and fair competition – to take centre stage. Furthermore, it will set the EU's data model apart from the other two dominant geopolitical views: 1) that individuals are market actors who are solely responsible for sharing their data (e.g. by clicking on “I agree” as the only viable option), which creates a ‘winner takes all’ platform-based market, and 2) that the decision on what data is shared is state-led. In fact, data sovereignty is the only robust answer if the aim is to create a human-centric data economy and steer away from the ever-increasing dangers of ‘microtargeting’, which is having a paralysing effect on society and the democratic debate.

Lastly, data sovereignty is already embodied in EU legislation, which means that the right foundations are already in place. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has given people the ‘right’ to data sovereignty. The next and vital step is to now also give them the practical and functional means to exercise that right, including tools to manage, share and exploit their data and tilt the data benefit balance in their direction.

Data sovereignty as a horizontal value in the EU Digital Compass Communication

As a central design principle, data sovereignty meets the objective of a human-centric and value-based model of digitalisation with respect to the four dimensions of the EU Digital Compass Communication as follows:

1. **A digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals:** Digital skills are at the core of data sovereignty and of empowering data subjects. Digital skills are thus essential at all levels of society. These skills should also encompass data literacy and awareness about the practical application of the right to data sovereignty in various situations.
2. **Secure, performant and sustainable digital infrastructures:** Soft infrastructure should be included more prominently in the digital infrastructure targets alongside hard infrastructure. Soft infrastructure is a set of functional, operational, technical and legal agreements that make data sharing work in practice. A Data Space is an example of soft infrastructure tailored to the specific needs of a sector, enabling ecosystems of organisations to share data. Data sovereignty should be a leading principle in the development of soft infrastructure solutions that foster mechanisms for the sharing and usage of data.
3. **Digital transformation of businesses:** To unlock the full potential of data economy, private-sector actors, especially SMEs, require coordinated support in adjusting their business models as well as navigating the legal maze. In this regard, businesses need to understand what data sovereignty means in practical terms with respect to both their own data and the data of their clients/service users.
4. **Digitalisation of public services:** Citizens should have better possibilities to exercise their data sovereignty rights when using public services such as health care.



The time is now: data sovereignty should be made mandatory

We'd like to stipulate that making data sovereignty mandatory is the key to ensuring that organisations operating in the European market adhere to European values. If data sovereignty is not given centre stage, we fear that the Digital Compass Communication will only pave the way for further domination of the existing global players.

In our opinion, data sovereignty is not only about setting the rules and equipping people with the right skills; it is also about fostering the emergence of new champions out of the pool of European start-ups (who still struggle to scale up). Without data sovereignty, it will be very difficult – if not impossible – for them to compete in relation to cloud solutions, search engines or other services like social networks.

However, data sovereignty will create a truly level playing field in the data sharing market, and will even give the EU a positive advantage thanks to its progressive existing, and continuously evolving, digital framework.

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About Data Sovereignty Now

Data Sovereignty Now is an initiative of organisations who share the common belief that the digital economy as it is known today is at risk. We believe the only way to combat this in order to release the full potential of data and build a solid and sustainable foundation for the next phase of the digital economy is to:

1. Make data sovereignty the central design principle of the data economy as a whole and a prerequisite for every organisation's own data architecture.
2. Create a digital 'soft' infrastructure for decentralised data sharing based upon European values, built on a sound consent mechanism that works for every entity, whether a person, a business or a government, for example.
3. Focus on adoption of data sovereignty by organisations and end users, rather than prescribing necessary technology. Support businesses, governments and their IT functions/partners in developing their implementations.

For more information, go to: www.datasovereigntynow.org

