

# UNESCO chief urges tougher regulation of social media

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UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay, delivers her speech during a conference on guidelines for regulating digital platforms, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023 in Paris. UNESCO is leading consultations on ways to regulate digital platforms and making the internet a safer space. The two-day conference aims to formulate guidelines and principles that would help regulators, governments, lawmakers and business manage content that undermines democracy and human rights while supporting freedom of expression and promoting the availability of accurate and reliable information. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard

The United Nations' educational, scientific and cultural agency chief on Wednesday called for a global dialogue to find ways to regulate social media companies and limit their role in the spreading of misinformation around the world.

Audrey Azoulay, the director general of UNESCO, addressed a gathering of lawmakers, journalists and civil societies from around the world to discuss ways to regulate social media platforms such as Twitter and others to help make the internet a safer, fact-based space.

The two-day conference in Paris aims to formulate guidelines that would help regulators, governments and businesses manage content that undermines democracy and human rights, while supporting freedom of expression and promoting access to accurate and reliable information.

The global dialogue should provide the legal tools and principles of accountability and responsibility for [social media companies](#) to contribute to the "public good," Azoulay said in an interview with The Associated Press on the sidelines of the conference. She added: "It would limit the risks that we see today, that we live today, disinformation (and) conspiracy theories spreading faster than the truth."

The European Union last year passed landmark legislation that will compel big tech companies like Google and Facebook parent Meta to police their platforms more strictly to protect European users from hate speech, disinformation and harmful content.



2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa delivers her speech during a conference on guidelines for regulating digital platforms, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023 in Paris. UNESCO is leading consultations on ways to regulate digital platforms and making the internet a safer space. The two-day conference aims to formulate guidelines and principles that would help regulators, governments, lawmakers and business manage content that undermines democracy and human rights while supporting freedom of expression and promoting the availability of accurate and reliable information. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard

The Digital Services Act is one of the EU's three significant laws targeting the [tech industry](#).

In the United States, the Justice Department and Federal Trade Commission have filed major antitrust actions against Google and Facebook, although Congress remains politically divided on efforts to

address online disinformation, competition, privacy and more.

Filipino journalist and Nobel laureate Maria Ressa told participants in the Paris conference that putting laws into place that would prevent social media companies from "proliferating misinformation on their platforms" is long overdue.

Ressa is a longtime critic of [social media platforms](#) that she said have put "democracy at risk" and distracted societies from solving problems such climate change and the rise of authoritarianism around the world.



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UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay answers the Associated Press during a conference on guidelines for regulating digital platforms, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023 at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The two-day conference in Paris aims to formulate guidelines and principles that would help regulators, governments, lawmakers and business manage content that undermines democracy and human rights while supporting freedom of expression and promoting the availability of accurate and reliable information. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard



UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay listens to the Associated Press Vice President International News Ian Philips during an interview Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023 at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The two-day conference in Paris aims to formulate guidelines and principles that would help regulators, governments, lawmakers and business manage content that undermines democracy and human rights while supporting freedom of expression and promoting the availability of accurate and reliable information. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard

By "insidiously manipulating people at the scale that's happening now, ... (they have) changed our values and it has rippled to cascading failure," Ressa told the AP in an interview on Wednesday.

"If you don't have a set of shared facts, how do we deal with climate

change?" Ressa said. "If everything is debatable, if trust is destroyed (there's no) meaningful exchange."

She added: "Just a reminder, democracy is not just about talking. It's about listening. It's about finding compromises that are impossible in the world of technology today."

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