



INFORMAL COMMISSION EXPERT GROUP
“HIGH-LEVEL GROUP ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE” (HLIG)
TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. BACKGROUND

The High-Level Group on Internet Governance (HLIG) was established in 2004 for an indeterminate period of time to provide a platform for exchange of views between the Member States and the Commission on a wide range of subjects related to internet governance. The HLIG helped to prepare an EU-coordinated approach towards the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis in 2005, and ever since it has ensured EU-level coordination on matters of importance to promote the interests of the Union in the field of internet governance.

The Commission confirmed the HLIG’s role in its Communication ‘Internet Policy and Governance – Europe’s role in shaping the future of Internet Governance’ (COM(2014)072)¹ and committed to facilitating discussions among stakeholders in line with the Union’s multi-stakeholder approach to internet governance².

The group consists of competent Member States’ authorities and meets several times a year, both regularly and on an *ad hoc* basis in case a specific need arises, to cater for the increasing number of strategic issues in the field of Internet Governance for which the Commission needs expert advice and that require close coordination between the Commission and the Member States.

Since its establishment, the group holds regular exchanges with the multi-stakeholder community in the form of dedicated open fora, in which a broad variety of stakeholders from civil society, the academic community, the corporate sector and the technical community participates. This facilitates exchange of information and views between stakeholders and the members of the group, as well as discussions amongst stakeholders, which is beneficial for the work of the group.

The terms of reference (ToR) of the HLIG were adopted in 2022 to fully comply with the Commission’s horizontal rules on expert groups³. The ToR were further amended in 2024 to include a new task concerning the support of the group to the Commission work on the governance of Virtual Worlds, as laid down in the Communication “An EU initiative on Web 4.0 and virtual worlds: a head start in the next technological transition”⁴.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0072&from=EN>

² [EUR-Lex - 52014DC0072 - EN \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ C(2016) 3301.

⁴ [An EU initiative on virtual worlds: a head start in the next technological transition | Shaping Europe’s digital future \(europa.eu\)](#)

2. TASKS

The group's tasks shall be:

1. to assist the European Commission Directorate-General for Communication Networks, Contents and Technologies (DG CONNECT) in the preparation of strategic initiatives and legislative proposals in the field of internet governance, and to establish cooperation and coordination between the Commission and Member States or stakeholders in implementing Union policies on internet governance; this includes:
 - (a) supporting the development of strategies and objectives for Union and Member States' participation in international initiatives with a primary focus or significant impact on Internet Governance, such as the Declaration for the Future of the Internet;
 - (b) helping to devise strategic options for the promotion of Union interests in Internet Governance, including in relation to establishing the Union position in international policy and technical fora and coordination bodies, such as the contribution to the multistakeholder approach of Internet Governance in international fora (such as the Internet Governance Forum, Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, Internet Engineering Task Force) ;
 - (c) addressing important new policy and technical Internet developments or relevant cross-cutting themes, in areas such as internet security and openness, internet standards, internet access and connectivity, emerging Internet technologies (including virtual worlds, blockchain and Web 4.0), protection of geographical indications and intellectual property rights, and assessing their possible implications for Internet Governance;
 - (d) providing input on global Internet Governance issues as regards virtual worlds and Web 4.0⁵, as well as support the creation of a technical multi-stakeholder forum to address certain aspects of virtual worlds and Web 4.0 beyond the remit of existing internet governance bodies and liaise with the Expert Group on the transition to Web 4.0 and Virtual Worlds in relation to these topics.
2. to bring about an exchange of experience and good practice in the field of Internet Governance;
3. to assist DG CONNECT in the preparation of delegated acts;
4. to assist DG CONNECT in the early preparation of implementing acts in the areas referred to above, before submission to the relevant committee in accordance with Regulation (EU) N°182/2011.
5. to work closely with the multistakeholder community through regular exchanges.

3. CONSULTATION

DG CONNECT may consult the group on any matter relating to Internet Governance.

⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, An EU initiative on Web 4.0 and virtual worlds: a head start in the next technological transition COM(2023) 442/final

4. MEMBERSHIP

1. Members of the group shall be competent Member States' authorities.
2. Member States' authorities shall nominate their representatives and shall be responsible for ensuring that their representatives provide a high level of expertise. They may decide to appoint different representatives for possible sub-groups.

5. CHAIR

The group shall be chaired by a representative of DG CONNECT.

6. OPERATION

1. The group shall act at the request of DG CONNECT, in compliance with the Commission's horizontal rules on expert groups⁶ ('the horizontal rules').
2. Meetings of the group shall, in principle, be held virtually or on Commission premises, depending on the circumstances.
3. DG CONNECT may convene joint meetings of the group with other groups to discuss matters falling within their respective areas of responsibility.
4. DG CONNECT shall provide secretarial services. Commission officials from other departments with an interest in the proceedings may attend meetings of the group and its sub-groups.
5. In agreement with DG CONNECT, the group may, by simple majority of its members, decide that deliberations shall be public.
6. Minutes on the discussion on each point on the agenda and on the opinions delivered by the group shall be meaningful and complete. Minutes shall be drafted by the secretariat under the responsibility of the Chair.
7. As far as possible, the group shall adopt its opinions, recommendations or reports by consensus. In the event of a vote, the outcome of the vote shall be decided by simple majority of the members. Members who have voted against or abstained shall have the right to have a document summarising the reasons for their position annexed to the opinions, recommendations or reports.

8. SUB-GROUPS

DG CONNECT may set up sub-groups for the purpose of examining specific questions on the basis of terms of reference defined by DG CONNECT. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the horizontal rules and shall report to the group. They shall be dissolved as soon as their mandate is fulfilled.

9. INVITED EXPERTS

DG CONNECT may invite experts with specific expertise with respect to a subject matter on the agenda to take part in the work of the group or sub-groups on an *ad hoc* basis.

⁶ C(2016) 3301, Article 13.1

10. OBSERVERS

1. Competent authorities from EFTA countries may be granted an observer status, in compliance with the horizontal rules, by direct invitation.
2. These authorities appointed as observers shall nominate their representatives.
3. Observers' representatives may be invited on a case-by-case basis by the Chair to take part in the discussions of the group and sub-groups and provide expertise. However, they shall not participate in the formulation of recommendations or advice of the group and sub-groups.

11. PROFESSIONAL SECRECY AND HANDLING OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

The members of the group and their representatives, as well as invited experts and observers, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/443⁷ and 2015/444⁸. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission may take all appropriate measures.

12. TRANSPARENCY

1. The group and its sub-groups shall be registered in the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register of expert groups').
2. As regards the group and sub-groups composition, the following data shall be published on the Register of expert groups:
 - (a) the name of Member States;
 - (b) the name of observers.
3. All relevant documents, including the agendas, the minutes and the participants' submissions, shall be made available on the Register of expert groups. In particular, DG CONNECT shall publish the agenda and other relevant background documents in due time ahead of the meeting, followed by timely publication of minutes. Exceptions to publication shall only be possible where it is deemed that disclosure of a document would undermine the protection of a public or private interest as defined in Article 4 of Regulation (EC) N° 1049/2001⁹.

12. MEETING EXPENSES

1. Participants in the activities of the group and sub-groups shall not be remunerated for the services they offer.
2. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by participants in the activities of the group and sub-groups shall be reimbursed by the Commission. Reimbursement shall be

⁷ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/443 of 13 March 2015 on Security in the Commission (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 41).

⁸ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

⁹ These exceptions are intended to protect public security, military affairs, international relations, financial, monetary or economic policy, privacy and integrity of the individual, commercial interests, court proceedings and legal advice, inspections/investigations/audits and the institution's decision-making process.

made in accordance with the provisions in force within the Commission and within the limits of the available appropriations allocated to the Commission departments under the annual procedure for the allocation of resources.

Done in Brussels, on 21/03/2024.
