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Internet Access

EU: Nordic countries are top digital performers but EU digital divide remains

- The European Commission has published (26 Oct) the International Digital Economy and Society Index for 2018, a survey comparing the digital performance of EU member states with those of 17 non-EU countries.
- The survey covers five areas: connectivity, human capital & digital skills, use of Internet by citizens, integration of technology, and digital public services, and scores several EU countries highly, placing Denmark in first position, ahead of the Republic of Korea and Finland, with four other Member States in the top ten: the Netherlands, the UK, Sweden, and Luxembourg.
- Despite these high scores, more work must be done to bridge the digital divide emphasised the EU's Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya Gabriel: "Our Member States are among the best global performers. But more needs to be done to run and lead this fierce international competition, notably to improve the performance of all Member States and address the digital divide within the EU."

EU: Council working party to discuss Broadband in the EU Member States

- The Council Working party on Telecommunications and Information Society is due to meet on November 8 to discuss the ECA Report on Broadband in the EU Member States and the draft council conclusions that are being developed in response to this report.
- The conclusions not that "broadband coverage has improved across the EU, but not all of the Europe 2020 targets will be achieved in time".
- Among other things the conclusions invite the European Investment Bank to "focus its support through EFSI and the Connecting Europe Broadband Fund on small and medium size projects in areas where public sector support is most needed.

EU: Europacable calls for Europe to focus on the roll-out of fibre infrastructure

- Europacable, the association of European wire and cable producers spoke at a training session of the European Broadband Competence Offices Network in Vienna on 30 October.
- Speaking on Europacable's behalf, Antoni Bosch, Prysmian VP for Telecom Solutions, claimed that Europe was lagging behind on fibre roll-out and needed investment in deep fibre networks to be competitive in the 21st century.

Trust

GLOBAL: Internet is becoming less free, says global report

- Fake news, mass data collection and the challenge to democracy posed by authoritarian states have made the Internet less free, a decline now entering its eight consecutive year, says a new report by Freedom House.
- The Freedom on the Net report is a comprehensive study of Internet freedom in 65 countries, covering 87% of the world's Internet users. Of the 65 countries assessed, 26 have witnessed a decline since June 2017, compared with 19 that registered net improvements to Internet freedom.
- The biggest declines took place in Egypt and Sri Lanka, followed by Cambodia, Kenya, Nigeria, the Philippines and Venezuela.
- The report cites the risks tied to online disinformation "poisoning" the public sphere and the mass collection of personal data breaking down traditional notions of privacy, as well as countries moving towards China's model of digital authoritarianism as among the factors contributing to the decline in freedom.

EU: AI could create new inequalities, warns report by Alan Turing Institute

- The report by the UK's Alan Turing Institute "Data science, artificial intelligence and the future of work" provides an overview of the recent literature on AI, highlighting rising inequalities as the emerging challenge and job-creation as the opportunity for the future world of work.
- Inequality between countries is highlighted by several studies, citing the divergence between early and late adopters of automation and robotization technologies, but also worsening social inequalities within the countries if the profits become concentrated in the hands of a few actors instead of being reinvested into the production process.
- Other concerns include new forms of stress in the workplace fuelled by algorithmic – rather than human – management of a company's reputation on digital platforms, while digital surveillance of working practices may introduce new forms of discrimination or harassment. Disenfranchised persons (minorities or the poorest citizens) could also face greater risks tied to the current lack of labour regulation for non-standard jobs and the diminishing role of the employer as a provider of social protection.

- The report lists policies advocated by the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank to help manage the transition to the future world of work, including more social policies like greater redistribution, stronger collective bargaining, fiscal measures like greater redistribution and more digital taxation, and stronger regulation of global supply chains and digital platforms to increase their liability.

- Meanwhile, opportunities will include new jobs with a stronger emphasis on cognitive skills, wider market access, more transparent governance models, and improved workplace technologies.

EU: Do not rush to regulate AI, says EU expert group

- The Chair of the EU's High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, Pekka Ala-Pietilä, has warned the EU not to rush to regulate AI. In an interview with Politico, Ala-Pietilä said it was important not to regulate AI prematurely as it could create impediments.

- The High-Level Expert Group, which was created to support the Commission's work and thinking on AI, is currently working to draw up ethical principles to guide the deployment of AI technologies.

- The group is also expected to deliver a report on policy and investment in AI in Europe.

GERMANY: German NGOs call for push on ePrivacy

- Sixteen German NGOs have written to the German Economic Affairs Minister, Peter Altmeier, to advocate a quick implementation of the ePrivacy Regulation.

- The letter (in German) follows reports that the data protection proposals will not be finalised before the European Parliament elections next May.

- The signatories call for five measures to be taken, calling on Germany's government, first and foremost, to update its telecoms laws to better account for digital devices. Beyond supporting the EU's ePrivacy Regulation, the letter calls for more help in guaranteeing manufacturing principles such as "privacy by design" and "privacy by default"; better protecting German users against "tracking walls"; and preventing the mass surveillance and retention of data by public authorities or corporations.

- The letter was signed by the Internet Society's German chapter as well as Deutsche Vereinigung für Datenschutz e.V (DVD), Digitalcourage e.V, and Digitale Gesellschaft e.V.

UK: Current legislation on online abuse is insufficient, says the Law Commission

- The UK's legal advisory body concluded this week that existing abuse and offense laws must be consolidated to help the public and policing authorities understand when online posts are illegal.

- The Law Commission said it was unclear whether the 1988 Malicious Communications Act would cover content posted on public forums, and that the

2003 Communications Act did not cover communications sent over "private networks".

- For the Law Commissioner for Criminal Law David Ormerod, this was evidence that the UK's criminal law "was not keeping pace with technological change".
- The report proposes a further legislative review to consider these issues and will now be examined by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which will decide whether new legislation is needed in the coming months.