



DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

BENIN
COUNTRY REPORT

2024

Executive Summary

In comparison to the 2023 Londa report, there were less alarming violations recorded against journalists in the digital rights sector in Benin. However, the government continued to use threats of civil defamation to place limits on free expression. Legislation remains repressive with restrictions regarding freedom of expression. For instance, journalists continued to be regular victims of digital rights violations. Benin Republic is one of the first African States to pass a Digital Code. Despite the great strides, the country has been facing challenges resulting in a shrinking civic space. The West African nation should also reconsider its position and amend provisions of the Digital Code that unnecessarily restrict freedom of expression and digital rights. This study adopts eight qualitative indicators to assess issues affecting digital rights and inclusion in Benin.



Introduction

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For a long time, Benin has been actively pursuing digital transformation initiatives, aiming to harness the power of technology for social and economic development. Under the government's leadership, the digitalisation of public services underlines this ongoing modernisation in the country. Digitalisation has introduced new technologies into government Ministries, allowing government officials to quickly process citizens' requests and provide them with timely and satisfactory service. The introduction of these technologies helped to reduce queues of citizens waiting to consult or request public services. To simplify and facilitate citizens' access to public services and improve the quality of governance, Benin has also developed a national online platform for the provision of public services. This platform helps, on one hand, to inform users about the conditions of access to public services online. On the other hand, the platform gives the possibility to make online requests for digitalised services provided by the public administration.

Significant progress was also made regarding the growth of mobile networks. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of SIM cards connected to the networks of MTN, Celtis, and Moov Africa increased by 12.3%.⁷⁶ This widespread mobile connectivity empowers Benin citizens to access essential services, conduct financial transactions and participate in the digital economy. Despite the actions undertaken in this sector, important challenges remain.

The mobile market is currently characterised by a triopoly, resulting in insufficient competition and low investment levels.⁷⁷ This affects the quality and coverage of mobile services in all the regions of the country. Moreover, current taxation policies are counterproductive, imposing high tax burdens on operators without incentivising investments in infrastructure.

The unintended consequence of such action is that it pushes more people offline and increases barriers to getting online. In addition, it also limits freedom of expression and access to information. A similar result applies to the Digital Code because there are growing fears in Benin over this legislation being used to stifle the spread of dissenting opinions.

Adopted in 2018, the Digital Code is supposed to, amongst other things, fight misinformation and hate speech⁷⁸. However, because of its coercive measures, this legislation poses a danger to the journalism profession, especially to those working online.

⁷⁶ See Ecofin Agency 'Benin's Mobile Landscape' (2023) <https://www.ecofinagency.com/telecom/2304-45434-benins-mobile-landscape-16-3m-sim-cards-8-5m-unique-subscribers-in-2023-arcep> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

⁷⁷ See Idem

⁷⁸ See Lutte contre la désinformation en Afrique : pour une autre approche face à l'inefficacité des lois <https://africacheck.org/fr/fact-checks/medialiteracy/lutte-contre-la-desinformation-en-afrique-pour-une-autre-approche-face> (accessed on 23 November 2024).

Internet access

According to the Resolution on the Right to Freedom of Information and Expression of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, access to the Internet is increasing rapidly across the African continent⁷⁹. This is also the case in Benin, where connectivity continues to improve. For instance, Benin has deployed about 2,500 km of optic fiber cable, which has contributed to improving the quality and availability of the network.⁸⁰ Regarding mobile internet, the Benin Post and Communications Regulatory Authority (ARCEP-Benin) notes 6,987 million mobile internet subscribers, with a mobile telephony penetration rate of 55.4% in 2023, compared with 42.1% in the previous year⁸¹. Out of a population of 12,915,002, an estimated 10,955,778 people are now potentially able to have internet access through mobile devices⁸² and 24,113 of these have internet access through fixed lines.⁸³ According to the GSMA's Connectivity Index, Benin has made undeniable progress, moving from a score of 29.91 to 40.06 in the period from 2017 to 2024.⁸⁴ Compared with Senegal (45.72), Cape Verde (53.99), Côte d'Ivoire (48.09), Kenya and Mauritius (66.93), which are relatively more advanced in terms of mobile connectivity, Benin needs to invest more in infrastructure to be able to rank among the advanced African countries in terms of internet connectivity⁸⁵.

In Benin, where mobile internet has shown continued growth, providers have had to upgrade from 2G to 3G to 4G, and now, 5G. This constant upgrade calls for investment, which has to be refinanced from time to time. If executed efficiently this mix of investments could contribute to lowering prices in a context where mobile data price remains a challenge. The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, a public-private partnership established in 2010 by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the governments of Rwanda and Mexico, recommends that 1GB of data should cost no more than 2% of gross national income percapita⁸⁶.

Source : CableUK research Unit (2024)

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is one of the fundamental human rights enunciated in the Constitution of Benin⁸⁷. The right to freedom of expression is protected by Article 23 and Article 24. In Benin, a country long regarded as an emerging model of democracy, public freedoms have deteriorated considerably in recent years, in contrast with the decade 1990-2000. This is mainly due to repressive laws. By law, libel, sedition, slander, or blasphemy are for instance considered as criminal offenses in Benin. Articles 454, 455 and 456 of Law No. 2018-16 of the Benin Penal Code define offenses of provocation and sedition committed through press and audiovisual communications, the penalties

79 See African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms (2024) <https://africaninternetrights.org/sites/default/files/African-Declaration-English-FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 25 November 2024) Crystal News 'Chiffre d'affaires MTN, Moov et Celtis en 2023' (2023). <https://www.crystal-news.net/benin-chiffre-daffaires-mtnmoov-et-celtis-en-2023/#:~:text=Ce%20chiffre%20d'affaires%20est,334%2C894%20milliards%20de%20francs%20CFA> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

80 See Info du Moment 'Rapport sur l'usage d'Internet au Bénin' (2024) https://infodumoment.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/01.Rapport_Usage_Internet_Au_Benin_ISOCBJ_SCG-2.pdf (accessed on 25 November 2024).

81 See ARCEP 'Rapport d'activités 2023' <https://arcep.bj/larcep-benin-publie-son-rapport-dactivites-2023/> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

82 See <https://arcep.bj/telephonie-mobile/> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

83 Idem

84 See Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA)'s Connectivity Index (2023) <https://www.mobileconnectivityindex.com/index.html#year=2023&zonsocode=BEN> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

85 See Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA)'s Connectivity Index 11 (2023) <https://www.mobileconnectivityindex.com/index.html#year=2023&zonsocode=BEN> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

86 See Make broadband affordable [https://www.broadbandcommission.org/advocacy-targets/2-affordability/#:~:text=By%202025%2C%20entry%2Dlevel%20broadband,National%20Income%20\(GNI\)%20per%20capita](https://www.broadbandcommission.org/advocacy-targets/2-affordability/#:~:text=By%202025%2C%20entry%2Dlevel%20broadband,National%20Income%20(GNI)%20per%20capita) (accessed on 23 November 2024).

87 See Benin Constitution https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Benin_1990 (accessed on 23 November 2024).

for which range from a fine of 200,000 CFA or six months imprisonment to a fine of 10,000,000 CFA or five years imprisonment⁸⁸. Moreover, Article 553 of the Digital Code stipulates that direct incitement to rebellion by means of, or on an electronic communication network, or computer system is punishable by six months' imprisonment and a fine of 2,000,000 to 10,000,000 CFA Francs. Former Director General of the National Police, Louis Philippe Houndegnon, was arrested on 13 November 2024 and is being prosecuted for incitement to rebellion and harassment by electronic means⁸⁹. This kind of legislation is worrying because freedom of expression and access to information are fundamental rights protected under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (especially Article 9)⁹⁰. As a State Party to the African Charter, Benin should create an enabling environment for the exercise of freedom of expression and access to information by avoiding acts that curtail the enjoyment of freedom of expression and access to information.

Many journalists and human rights activists continue to be subjected to intimidation in Benin Republic. Pesce Hounyo, a journalist with Reporter Médias Monde, has been summoned by the country's media regulator, the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC).⁹¹ The summons followed the transmission of a show, in which the journalist criticised the merger operation of the Gendarmerie and the police in Benin⁹². Similarly, over the past two years, Elvio Zinzindohoué has received at least a dozen summonses from the police.⁹³ Against all procedures, some of these summons were issued by telephone. He responded to two of the summons, but finally decided to move to France. It is important to underline that these acts are in contradiction to the principles of the ACHPR Declaration.

State parties to the African Charter are compelled to create a thriving independent media environment, which refrains the practice of banning independent media practices. Unfortunately, the intimidations observed in Benin are raising some concerns related to the use of the Digital Code to restrict freedom of the press and freedom of expression. Vague interpretations of this piece of legislation have already led to the arrest of several journalists in the country.

Data Protection and Privacy

The adoption of Law N°2009-09 related to the protection of personal data in Benin makes the country one of the first in West Africa to put in place a coherent legislative framework in this field.⁹⁴ This framework regulates the collection, storage, processing and use of personal data, while at the same time establishing the responsibilities of the players involved in their various functions.⁹⁵ It is within this framework that the West African nation is developing various GovTech initiatives, such as the establishment of a digital platform to manage child care and protection centres. For this to be viewed as a praiseworthy move, authorities should make sure their digital services safeguard children's personal information and comply with data protection laws. The same concerns should be raised regarding the video surveillance policy, which was adopted in 2017 by the government in response to growing insecurity in Cotonou and other cities⁹⁶. These systems

88 See Loi n° 2018-16 portant code pénal

<https://assemblee-nationale.bj/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/le-nouveau-code-penal-2018.pdf> (accessed on 23 November 2024).

89 See Former Benin Police Chief Detained On Rebellion Charge <https://www.barrons.com/news/former-benin-police-chief-detained-on-rebellion-charge-daeb5f30> accessed on 21 November 2024)

90 See African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Accelerating_an_Equitable_Transition_A_data_driven_approach_2024.pdf (accessed on 25 November 2024).

91 See Olofoto 'Médias au Bénin – La journaliste Pesce Hounyo convoquée à une instruction à la HAAC' <https://olofofo.info/medias-au-benin-la-journaliste-pesce-hounyo-convoquee-a-une-instruction-a-la-haac/> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

92 See Fusion Police-gendarmerie au Bénin : l'ex-DGPN Philippe Houndegnon relève des limites de la réforme https://www.banouto.bj/societe/article/20240730-fusion-police-gendarmerie-au-benin-l-ex-dgpn-philippe-houndegnon-parle-d-un-echec-cuisant#google_vignette (accessed on 25 November 2024)

93 See Afrique sur 7 'Au Bénin, le journaliste Elvio Zinzindohoué est toujours menacé' <https://www.afrique-sur7.fr/au-benin-le-journaliste-elvio-zinzindohoue-est-toujours-menace> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

94 See DLPiper Data Protection <https://www.dlapipe-dataprotection.com/index.html?t=law&c=BJ> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

95 See Case Guard 'Innovative legislative framework for privacy in Benin' <https://caseguard.com/articles/an-innovative-legislative-framework-for-privacy-in-benin/> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

96 See Les équipements de vidéo surveillance en déploiement à Cotonou <https://24haubenin.info/?Demarrage-de-la-video-surveillance-dans-les-villes> (accessed on 25 November 2024)

are designed to reinforce public security measures, in particular, the fight against organised crime through prevention, investigation, recording and prosecution of criminal offences, as well as the enforcement of criminal sentences and security measures.

To ensure the safety of people and property in Benin, the cameras installed in the economic capital, Cotonou, collect data from the public. Currently, these surveillance cameras are installed on strategic roads in the economic capital.⁹⁷ While these surveillance cameras are currently being tested only in Cotonou, the government also plans to install them in public places to ensure the security of all citizens of the country. It is important to highlight that though surveillance cameras are used for their various benefits, they also have potential drawbacks. In the context of security, technocentrism is the tendency to view technology as a central component for addressing complex issues and driving transformative changes. However, a key weakness of this concept is that it manifests an excessive focus on the use of technology through the adoption of technological tools without adequately considering the broader social context. Thus, technological solutionism sees economical, political and other problems as being amenable to being solved through new technologies or new applications of technology. While the government's actions in setting up these video surveillance systems are to be appreciated, care must be taken to avoid new forms of seizure of power. Thus, this could give rise to new forms of power in contravention of the ACHPR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa.⁹⁸ According to this Declaration of Principles, State parties shall ensure that any law authorising targeted communication surveillance provides adequate safeguards for the right to privacy, including due process safeguards and proactive transparency on the nature and scope of its use.

Censorship and content moderation

Compared with 2023, Benin has made remarkable progress this year, regarding legal control of what can be accessed, published or viewed online⁹⁹. For instance, Benin authorities have stepped up their efforts to put an end to fraudulent online activities. As part of a partnership with various social network operators and the National Centre for Digital Investigations, around 170 Facebook accounts and 400 TikTok accounts linked to fraudulent practices were deactivated in June 2024¹⁰⁰. Despite this encouraging record, the country needs to make more efforts regarding legal control of what can be viewed online. Recently, one cyber criminal who is currently in prison was still able to run a massive organised crime enterprise targeting many victims beyond the borders of the country¹⁰¹.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Emerging Technologies

By 2027, Benin is betting on AI to lead in the West Africa region, driving growth in strategic sectors through innovative applications and fostering a skilled workforce¹⁰². To this end, the government has adopted a National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence and Big Data, valid from 2023 to 2027¹⁰³. This strategic decision is part of the Government Action Programme which identifies digital technology as a tool for accelerating the structural transformation of Benin's economy. To achieve the objectives in the AI sector, various initiatives are being implemented by the authorities. One example is the organisation of the Salon de l'Entrepreneuriat Numérique et de l'Intelligence

97 See 24h au Benin 'Demarrage de la videosurveillance dans les villes' <https://24haubenin.info/?Demarrage-de-la-video-surveillance-dans-les-villes> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

98 See African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (The Declaration) <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/902> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

99 See Londa 2023- Bénin Rapport sur les droits numériques et l'inclusion en Afrique <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Benin-Londa-Report-FR.pdf> (accessed on 25 November 2024).

100 See Bénin: 570 comptes TikTok et Facebook désactivés par le CNIN https://beninwebtv.com/benin-570-comptes-tiktok-et-facebook-desactives-par-le-cnin/#google_vignette (accessed on 20 November 2024).

101 Il continue ses arnaques depuis sa prison, je détruis tout son business https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2d_lqFensQ (accessed on 14 November 2024).

102 See Intelligence artificielle : Le Bénin se hisse en 5e place en Afrique subsaharienne <https://accicavie.org/intelligence-artificielle-le-benin-se-hisse-en-5e-place-en-afrique-subsaaharienne/> (accessed on 13 November 2024).

103 See Développement de l'Intelligence artificielle au Bénin: Un fort engagement du gouvernement à tous les niveaux <https://lanation.bj/numerique/developpement-de-lintelligence-artificielle-au-benin-un-fort-engagement-du-gouvernement-a-tous-les-niveaux/> (accessed on 13 November 2024).

Artificielle (Digital Entrepreneurship and Artificial Intelligence Fair). This event aims to promote digital entrepreneurship with a particular focus on the strategic, socio-economic, political and ethical challenges of Artificial Intelligence in Benin. According to the “Global Index on Responsible AI”, Benin is leading in West Africa for Responsible AI¹⁰⁴.

However, regarding Benin’s aspirations in the Artificial Intelligence sector, authorities should adopt an ethical frame regarding the use of AI within the society. It is also important to proceed with an update of the institutional and regulatory framework for AI deployment. It is recommended that Benin balance high-tech innovation with human-centred thinking in order to produce responsible AI technology and ensure that future developments of AI remain under control. In addition, the State should play a decisive role in raising awareness on the potential downsides related to the use of AI among the citizens and explore how to manage its risks.

Digital inclusion

The lack of robust and affordable broadband has pushed the government to explore discussions with satellite network Starlink. As such, the Benin government has approached Starlink’s space technology to improve internet access in areas with poor coverage and boost digital inclusion.¹⁰⁵ Starlink’s network has several advantages over its competitors. It is easier to operate, and the data arrives steadily with low latency and impressive speed even in remote areas to remote locations that were previously unreachable. Because of these competitive advantages, Starlink does not have fixed rates. Instead, the company intermittently raises its prices and on its website it is indicated that Starlink may adjust prices over time to reflect market conditions resulting sometimes in an increase in the monthly service plan cost. For example, Starlink unexpectedly and unilaterally announced that it would double rates for its subscribers in Africa. Following public pressure, the company temporarily reversed the decision. Later, Starlink indicated in a statement that it would implement the price hike once it resolves the regulatory challenges it has to face. According to Starlink, the service will cost 30,000 FCFA (\$48.66) per month, with a one-off hardware cost of 400,000 FCFA (around \$650) and a shipping and handling charge of 15,000 FCFA for individuals¹⁰⁶. However, for the United Nations, affordable internet is where 1GB of mobile broadband data is priced at 2% or less of the average monthly income.

Universal Service Funds

In order to promote investment in territories which are not covered by the Internet, Benin has adopted the universal access principles and is using the Universal Service Fund in marginalised communities. In this context, the Universal Service Fund serves as a tool to close the connectivity gap as authorities plan to connect an additional eighteen municipalities to fibre-optic networks throughout the country. This ambition is a part of the government’s broader goal to expand high-speed internet access to all 77 municipalities nationwide. In these new 18 municipalities, the deployment of fiber optics intends to strengthen the national backbone, which already connects 50 municipalities via approximately 2,550 kilometers of fiber. The government aims to extend this network to a total of 3,300 kilometers. Additionally, nine municipalities will be connected through alternative technologies using the Universal Service Fund. These efforts are part of a larger project to deploy high-speed and ultra-high-speed internet across Benin. This initiative, with an estimated cost of 207 billion CFA francs (\$330.63 million), is a cornerstone of the government’s Action Plan¹⁰⁷.

By using the Universal Service Fund, Benin has the potential to significantly enhance telecommunications coverage, and internet access, nationwide. Despite the country’s progress in using the Universal Service Fund to build public digital infrastructure, there is still a challenge

¹⁰⁴ See Le Bénin : Leader en Afrique de l’Ouest pour l’IA Responsable

<https://acedafrica.org/le-benin-leader-en-afrique-de-louest-pour-lia-responsable-selon-le-global-index-on-responsible-ai-2024/> (accessed on 14 November 2024).

¹⁰⁵ See Niger Grants Starlink License, Seeks to Expand Internet Coverage and Quality

<https://www.ecofinagency.com/telecom/3010-46088-niger-grants-starlink-license-seeks-to-expand-internet-coverage-and-quality/> accessed on 13 November 2024).

¹⁰⁶ STARLINK de Elon MUSK autorisé au Bénin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9KLfWM7pE> (accessed on 14 November 2024).

¹⁰⁷ See Transformation numérique des collectivités locales

<https://beninrevele.bj/projet/122/transformation-numerique-collectivites-locales/> (accessed on 12 November 2024).

around accountability, clarity, and transparency on how these funds are used. There is a general lack of public disclosure when it comes to accounting for money collected and disbursed through the Universal Service Fund in Benin.

Access to information using digital platforms

In Benin, access to information is a fundamental right for all citizens, guaranteed by the Constitution. However, the administration has remained fairly opaque despite the adoption of the Constitution, and the first step towards greater transparency was not taken until 2015. Since 2015, freedom of information and access to administrative documents hse been governed by Law No. 2015-07 on Information and Communication¹⁰⁸. In reality, the implementation and enforcement of this law remains an issue. Articles 70-107 are particularly significant in this respect, as they are directly linked to access to information as defined in Chapter IV. This law specifies that all citizens have the right to access administrative documents. Furthermore, this law allows administrative or judicial sanctions to be imposed on public officials or bodies that fail to justify their refusal to disclose the information requested. However, the time limits for responding to requests are not clearly set out in the law; while public bodies only have five days to decide on the request, no time limit is explicitly stated for sending the requested documents. The Government Action Plan emphasises the need to modernise the administration and structure the country’s governance reforms on the basis of the principles of transparency, accountability and efficiency. While the modernisation of the administration using ICT can be observed, more efforts have to be made regarding administrative capacity, as Benin still struggles with a bureaucratic culture of secrecy, lack of training for civil servants, unfamiliarity with new legislation and various obstacles to online administrative openness.

Country	Population	Accounts specified in	Accounts per 100K Region
		requests	population

Report on Benin’s government requests for user’s data to Meta

Source: <https://surfshark.com/>

108 Loi n° 2015-07 du 22 janvier 2015 portant code de l’information et de la communication en République du Bénin.
See <https://sgg.gouv.bj/doc/loi-2015-07/> (accessed on 14 November 2024).

The Score Index

Londa 2025 Key Indicators	ACHPR Declaration (P stands for Principle)	Score	Justification
Internet Shutdowns	P38(2)	4	After 2019, Benin refrained from shutting down the Internet because of pressure from civil society .
Inexistent laws, policies and other measures to promote universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful access to the internet	P37	3	Benin needs to revise the Bill on freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, submitted in 2012, which was at the time pending review by the Supreme Court, with a view to adopting legislation that will protect the rights of civil society. Also previous calls to bring its domestic law into compliance with international human rights standards persists. Benin is yet to fully reform its defamation legislation and the same goes for the Digital code .
False News Criminalisation	P22(2)	1	The digital code has caused the prosecution of a long list of journalists, bloggers and political dissidents of President Patrice Talon's regime. article 550-paragraph 3 of this code stipulates that anyone who creates or shares false information about a person on social media or any other form of electronic communication shall either be punished by one to six months imprisonment, a fine of 500.000 FCFA (US\$1803) to 1.000000 (US\$1606) or both
Sedition Legislation	P22(2)	1	Articles 454, 455, 456 of Law No. 2018-16 of the Benin Penal Code and article 553 of the Digital code create a chilling effect on media and civil society. The 3 articles are related to offenses of provocation and sedition committed through press and audiovisual communications, with penalties for which range from a fine of 200,000 CFA or six months imprisonment to a fine of 10,000,000 CFA or five years imprisonment.
Arbitrary Arrests and Harassments of the Media, HRDs and Citizens	P20(1) & (2)	3	While the Digital Code is presumably a positive development in Benin, this legislation has contributed to setting Benin on a path to a long list of arbitrary arrests and harassments of the Media, HRDs and Citizens
Data Protection Legislation.	P42	4	The Digital Code's rules on data protection and privacy establish an exception, whereby the Council of Ministers can authorise the transfer of personal data to a third State or an international organisation that does not provide adequate and sufficient protection, which may undermine digital rights in Benin and the goals of other sections of the Code.

States interfere and require the removal of online content by internet intermediaries	P38 and P39(4)	3	The government censored online content and there is a concern that the regulator and the Presidency have a lot of discretion over unilateral removal of online content by intermediaries which creates a sense of regulatory uncertainty
Invasion of Privacy of Communications	P41	3	Benin has been caught conducting surveillance and private communications interception thanks to the Pegasus Spyware
Failure by the government to proactively disclose and disseminate information digital technologies.	P29(3)	3	Public administration is still facing central implementation issues, such as under-trained staff, lack of resources or the dissemination and understanding of information among the population.
AI and Emerging Technologies national strategies	P39(6)	3	Benin adopted a National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence and Megadata for the period 2023-2027. However the country has delayed taking into account all international human rights standards.
Adoption of specific child laws, policies and measures promoting children's digital safety and privacy online	P37(5)	2	Benin established a digital platform for managing childcare and protection centres. However, it is important that the country introduce a regulatory provision governing the use of children's data on this platform, taking into account the achievements in terms of human rights.
Digital Inclusion	P37(3)	3	Benin has made significant strides in digitalization since 2016, with a vision to position itself as the digital service platform of West Africa. The digital sector is identified as the main area of growth in the Government's Action Program. Several reforms were adopted , including improvement in the digital infrastructure, establishment of specialized institutions, and creation of regulatory instruments. The creation of a dedicated Ministry of Technology and Digitalization underscores the government's commitment to digital inclusion but the digital divide remains very marked in urban areas and especially in rural areas.
TOTAL SCORE (up to 60)		33	

Performance appraisal

The government took some credible steps in promoting the free flow of information and ideas, in assisting people to make informed decisions and in facilitating and strengthening democracy in accordance with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information* in Africa. However, Benin needs to implement further improvements to align its policies with ACHPR Declaration principles.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the state of the digital ecosystem in Benin. The study also assessed major developments in the digital sector, the level of collaboration between the public sector and big tech firms, and existing skills in the digital sector. If digital technology continues to be seen as an opportunity to produce and share knowledge, while stimulating the emergence of new social interactions in Benin, more efforts need to be made to reach a better level of digital maturity. In general, the Benin government continued to demonstrate sustained efforts during the reporting period, but barely met the minimum standards as highlighted by TheScore Index.

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Recommendations

Government should:

- Adopt a national policy to further enhance access to digital technologies;
- Request social media companies to disclose more information about how they operate and how they amplify, restrict and remove content on their systems;
- Enshrine human rights standards in all the relevant laws;
- Revise the Digital Code to ensure it promotes digital rights;
- Engage all stakeholders in a national programme of training and awareness-raising for citizens regarding the use of the Internet and digital services provided by the government, promoting good use of the internet.
- Proactively disclose information on USF and any other information on government websites.

Private sector should:

- Strengthen commitments to the governance of privacy;
- Commit to resisting shutdowns requests;
- Implement robust human rights governance;

Civil Society Organisations should:

- Carry out periodic surveys on internet use in Benin, to advocate for improved Internet use and quality in the country ;
- Raise awareness on digital rights and advocate for policies and laws that advance digital rights;
- Advocate for digital rights protection in Benin;

Media organisations should:

- Fully integrate human rights principles in their programs, ensuring fact-checking and raising awareness of best practices online;
- Foster a resilient information space with broader civic education initiatives and digital literacy;
- Advocate for media freedoms.

