LONDA

DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

ETHIOPIA
COUNTRY REPORT
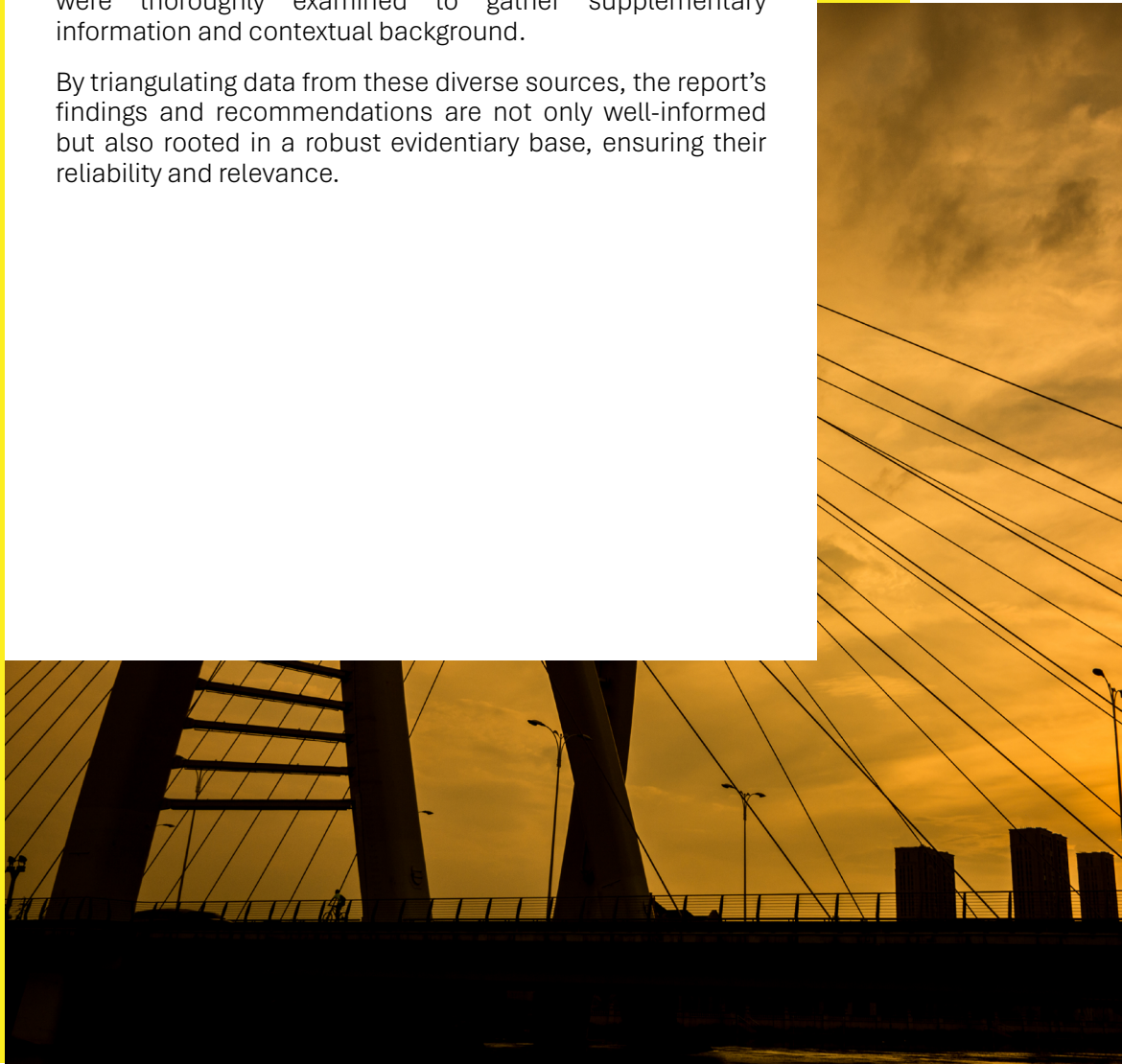
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Executive Summary

This report highlights recurring internet shutdowns causing economic and social disruptions, and the enactment of Ethiopia's Personal Data Protection Proclamation amid enforcement concerns. Recommendations stress the need for robust enforcement of digital rights laws, targeted interventions to bridge the digital gender gap, and alignment with international human rights standards to foster a more inclusive and equitable digital landscape. Thematic areas include internet access and affordability, freedom of expression, gender-based digital violence, data protection, and regulatory frameworks. The report employs a desk research methodology, synthesising data from government, civil society, media, and topic-specific sources to provide a comprehensive analysis of the digital rights landscape in Ethiopia in 2024. In addition, this report uses PIN's TheScore Index to assess digital rights in Ethiopia. Key sources of information include government websites, which provide official data and policy documents essential for understanding the regulatory and institutional framework. Different reports from civil society organisations offer insights into this report showing ground-level realities and challenges. Additionally, media articles serve as a rich repository of events, trends, and public opinion, further enriching the report's analysis. Finally, websites relevant to the specific topics under investigation were thoroughly examined to gather supplementary information and contextual background.

By triangulating data from these diverse sources, the report's findings and recommendations are not only well-informed but also rooted in a robust evidentiary base, ensuring their reliability and relevance.

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Introduction

Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa and as of 2024, the country's population is estimated to be approximately 129.7 million.[296] In recent years, Ethiopia has faced a turbulent political and social landscape marked by conflict in different parts of the country. These challenges have impacted digital rights, including internet shutdowns, issues of freedom of expression, access to information, and online censorship. On December 25 2024, the Authority for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO), the government agency responsible for regulating Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Ethiopia, suspended two human rights organisations: Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCo) and Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC), accusing them of engaging in activities deemed "not politically neutral" and "acting against national interests."[297] Earlier in November of the same year, ACSO suspended the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD), the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE), and Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR).[298] Although these organisations received letters on December 12 2024, indicating that their bans had been lifted, CARD and LHR were notified on December 18 2024, that their suspensions were reinstated due to alleged non-compliance with ACSO's regulations.[299][300] This decision by ACSO can be legally challenged as no evidence was presented by the Authority in the letter they sent to the suspended CSOs and the CSOs were suspended with no warning. CARD has formally requested a written explanation from ACSO and is prepared to appeal the decision to the Authority's Governance Board, in accordance with the law[301]. This has raised concerns about the shrinking civic space and its implications for human rights advocacy.

In 2024, Ethiopia's digital rights environment was characterised by both advancements and challenges. Despite increasing internet penetration and mobile coverage, systemic barriers such as affordability, gender disparity, and recurrent internet shutdowns persist. Meanwhile, legislation like the Personal Data Protection Proclamation[302] 2024 marks progress, though gaps in enforcement and government overreach remain concerns. According to TheScore Index, Ethiopia exhibits a "mildly compliant" status, underscoring critical areas for improvement to uphold digital rights effectively.

296   UNFPA World Population Dashboard, 2024: https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/ET; Date accessed January 9, 2025

297   Addis Standard; EHRCO, EHRDC latest rights groups suspended by Civil Society Authority, citing 'deviation' and alleged 'lack of independence'; https://addisstandard.com/ehrco-ehrdc-latest-rights-groups-suspended-by-civil-society-authority-citing-devia-tion-and-alleged-lack-of-independence/; Date accessed January 9, 2025

298   Capital; CSO Authority responds to ban on three organizations https://capitalethiopia.com/2024/12/02/cso-authority-re-sponds-to-ban-on-three-organizations/ ; Date accessed January 9, 2025

299   Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) Press Release: https://www.cardeth.org/CARD-Reimposi-tion-Suspension ; Date accessed January 9, 2025

300   Lawyers for Human Rights Press Release: https://lhrethiopia.org/press-release-amharic/ ; Date accessed January 9, 2025

301   A Brief Statement on the Reimposition of Suspension on the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD): https://www.cardeth.org/CARD-Reimposition-Suspension ; date accessed Feb 7, 2025

302   Personal Data Protection   Proclamation; Proclamation No. 1321 /2024 https://eca.et/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/person-al_data_protection_proclamation_No_1321_2024.pdf ; Date accessed January 3, 2025

Internet access

In 2023, state-owned telecom operator, Ethio-Telecom, reported a significant number of data and internet users, reaching 33.9 million. Additionally, fixed services subscribers numbered 853,600, while fixed broadband subscribers totaled 618,300[303]. Over the past decade, mobile internet access has seen considerable improvements, with 3G networks covering 98% of the population and 4G coverage at 33%[304]. However, this data by the state-owned telecommunications operator is higher than the report by DataReportal, which stated that there were 24.83 million internet users in Ethiopia in January 2024, with the internet penetration rate standing at 19.4% of the total population at the start of the year[305].

Regarding internet accessibility, the total number of accessible 4G cities increased from 300 to 424, and the number of 5G stations to 189.[306] Of all internet usage mechanisms, cellular/mobile networks are the most preferred type of internet connection, followed by Wi-Fi hotspots and fixed broadband internet[307]. The number of internet users, defined as Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) cards connected to mobile internet, grew to over 40 million users with at least a 3G+ connection. However, removing barriers and stimulating additional demand could result in 7.9 million new mobile internet users by 2028[308].

The gender gap in smartphone usage was also assessed, revealing that 20% of men and 15% of women use smartphones in Ethiopia[309]. This disparity indicates the need for targeted interventions to close the gender gap in digital access. Despite this, a portion of both men (30%) and women (26%) who use mobile internet identified handset affordability as a significant barrier, according to the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) mobile gender gap report[310]. Additionally, a local study suggested that the higher usage among males compared to females could be attributed to factors such as socio-cultural norms, where female access restrictions to public spaces are a factor or disparities in digital literacy[311]. Though there is an affordability challenge, Ethio-Telecom adjusted its prices for data packages, which have risen by an average of 18% following macroeconomic adjustments.[312]

Internet accessibility is also important for upholding the principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[313], especially Article 19, which guarantees freedom of opinion and expression, and Article 27, which ensures cultural rights. The Internet provides a critical platform for exercising these rights by enabling the free exchange of information and participation in cultural activities. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[314]

303   Ethio telecom 2022/23 Annual Business Performance, July 2023: https://www.ethiotelecom.et/ethio-telecom-2022-23-annual-business-performance/ ; Date accessed October 28, 2024

304   Ethio telecom 2023/2024 Annual Business Performance Report, July 2024: https://www.ethiotelecom.et/ethio-telecom-2023-2024-annual-business-performance-report/: Date accessed October 27, 2024

305   "Digital 2024: Ethiopia," DataReportal, February 23, 2024, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-ethiopia.: Date accessed October 2, 2024

306   Ethio telecom 2023/2024 Annual Business Performance Report, July 2024: https://www.ethiotelecom.et/ethio-telecom-2023-2024-annual-business-performance-report/: Date accessed October 28, 2024

307   Asrat Seyoum, Asmerate Hailesilasse, Menychle Meseret. (2024). Equitability of Access to the Internet in Ethiopia. Research Report, The Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy/ CARD: https://www.cardeth.org/equitable-access-to-the-internet-in-ethiopia: Date accessed October 28, 2024

308   GSMA; Driving Digital Transformation of the Economy in Ethiopia, October 2024, https://www.gsma.com/about-us/regions/sub-saharan-africa/gsma_resources/digital-economy-ethiopia-report; Date accessed November 5, 2024

309   GSMA; The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2024, May 2024, https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2024.pdf; Date accessed November 5, 2024

310   GSMA; The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2024, May 2024, https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2024.pdf; Date accessed November 5, 2024

311   Asrat Seyoum, Asmerate Hailesilasse, Menychle Meseret. (2024). Equitability of Access to the Internet in Ethiopia. Research Report, The Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy/ CARD: https://www.cardeth.org/equitable-access-to-the-internet-in-ethiopia; Date accessed October 28, 2024

312   Shega News, October 2024, shega.co; Date accessed November 10, 2024

313   Universal Declaration of Human Rights: https://www.ohchr.org/en/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf; Date accessed October 20, 2024

314   Sustainable Development Goals: https://sdgs.un.org/goals

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emphasise the importance of internet access, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure, and SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, highlighting the internet's openness role in achieving these global goals.

No country in Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced as severe internet shutdowns as Ethiopia over the years[315]. Since 2016, there have been at least 26 incidents of shutdowns in response to conflict, communal violence, and political turmoil[316]. These shutdowns have resulted in significant economic losses, totaling $1.59 billion, and have impacted 29 million internet users. The most recent internet shutdown was enacted in the Amhara regional state on August 3rd 2023, due to clashes between federal military forces and Fano fighters, which led to the declaration of a state of emergency. Internet services resumed across the Amhara region nearly a year later, on July 14th 2024[317]. This shutdown resulted in the loss of USD 130 million [318].

Internet shutdowns in Ethiopia violate the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter). Article 9 guarantees the right to receive information and freedom of expression, which are directly infringed upon by these shutdowns. Additionally, Article 24 emphasises the right to a satisfactory environment conducive to development, which is hindered by the economic and social disruptions caused by prolonged internet blackouts and conflicts. These rights are fundamental to ensuring citizens can access information and participate in societal activities.

Similarly, these shutdowns contravene the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[319]. Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of expression and access to information, which includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information through any media. The shutdowns prevent individuals from exercising this right, restricting their ability to communicate and access information. Furthermore, Article 21 of the ICCPR ensures the right to peaceful assembly, which is severely affected by the state of emergency that was enacted in August 2023 and expired on June 3 2024[320].

Freedom of expression

The Ethiopian Constitution[321], under Article 29, asserts the Right of Thought, Opinion, and Expression, and Article 30 guarantees the Right of Assembly, Demonstration, and Petition as democratic rights. These rights align with Article 19 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[322] and the African Charter [323], which focus on freedom of expression.

Beyond the Londa 2023 Ethiopia report[324], the detention of journalists and activists continued

315   Addis Standard news: https://addisstandard.com/ethiopia-tops-sub-saharan-africa-in-economic-losses-from-internet-shutdowns-new-study/ ; Date accessed Feb 6, 2025

316   Access Now: Shrinking Democracy, Growing Violence, May 2024, 2023-KIO-Report.pdf; Date accessed October 26, 2024

317   Addis Standard News: Internet services resume across Amhara region after near year-long shutdown, July 2024, https://addisstandard.com/internet-services-resume-across-amhara-region-after-near-year-long-shutdown/ ; Date accessed October 26, 2024

318   Top10VPN, Government Internet Shutdowns Have Cost $53 Billion Since 2019, May 2024, https://www.top10vpn.com/research/cost-of-internet-shutdowns/ ; Date accessed October 28, 2024

319   International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Adopted in December 1966; accessed on Jan 6, 2025: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights

320   Ethiopia: UN Human Rights Chief calls for sustained efforts to halt violations and abuses, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/06/ethiopia-un-human-rights-chief-calls-sustained-efforts-halt-violations-and; Date accessed on January 8, 2025

321   Constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995, https://www.fsc.gov.et/Digital-Law-Library/Federal-Laws/ArtMID/1179/ArticleID/152/Constitution-of-the-Federal-Democratic-Republic-of-Ethiopia-Proclamation-no-11995-%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%A2%E1%89%B5%E1%8B%AE%E1%8C%B5%E1%8B%AB-%E1%8D%8C%E1%8B%B4%E1%88%AB%E1%88%8B%E1%8B%8A-%E1%8B%B2%E1%88%9E%E1%8A%AD%E1%88%AB%E1%88%B2%E1%8B%AB%E1%8B%8A-%E1%88%AA%E1%8D%90%E1%89%A5%E1%88%8A%E1%8A%AD-%E1%88%95%E1%8C%88-%E1%88%98%E1%8A%95%E1%8C%8D%E1%88%A5%E1%89%B5-%E1%8A%A0%E1%8B%8B%E1%8C%85-%E1%89%81-11987; Date accessed October 28, 2024

322   International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights; Date accessed October 28, 2024

323   African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981, https://achpr.au.int/en/charter/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights/; Date accessed October 28, 2024

324   Londa report, 2023: https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Londa-2023-1-1.pdf; Date accessed on January 6 2025

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into 2024. Since the declaration of the state of emergency in Amhara in August 2023, at least nine journalists have been detained, with five still in custody[325]. In addition to journalists, former government officials and members of parliament have also been detained in light of the state of emergency. Several civil society actors, human rights defenders and journalists were forced into exile because of intimidation and threats. For instance, on September 17, Belay Manaye, a journalist and founder of Ethionews online media, and Beqalu Alamirew, a journalist and founder of Alpha media, reportedly fled the country illegally but safely after being released from detention in June 2024 because they were threatened to life by security forces[326]. In addition, security forces have increased intimidation, harassment, and threats against prominent Ethiopian human rights organisations, further stifling civil liberties[327][328].

Ethiopia enacted the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation in March 2020. Since the Londa 2023 report two people have now been charged using the proclamation. Muhiyadin Mohamed Abdullahi was detained from February 13 and sentenced to two years imprisonment on May 2 2024, for spreading false news and hate speech.[329] Somali Region Journalists Association later announced that Muhiyadin was released from jail on June 10 2024[330]. Another individual, Tadios Tantu, was sentenced to six years' imprisonment under the same law with specific charges of "disseminating hate speech", "inciting violence" and "obstructing the movement of the Defense Force" in October 2024[331].

Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence (TFGBV) remains a significant issue in Ethiopia, forcing women to withdraw from public spaces and limiting their participation in public life, both online and offline. Numerous women have recounted experiences of physical assaults, detention, and having to flee the country following threats of TFGBV.[332],[333] Women and girls are subjected to more hate speech, including gendered stereotypes and mockery, than men and boys[334]. Femicide is on the rise in Ethiopia, with various cases documented across the country. The case of Heaven Awot, a seven-year-old girl who was repeatedly raped and murdered by her landlord, garnered widespread attention with over 325,000 people signing a petition issued by Article 35. Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) organised a press release and candlelight vigil on August 23 2024, at Elilly Hotel, which was interrupted by security forces and was forced to stop[335]. In Ethiopia, the LGBTQIA+ community endures significant challenges, including institutionalised persecution and societal violence. Even minor nonconformities, such as wearing skinny jeans or having colored hair, can lead to false perceptions of being gay, resulting in social ostracisation and physical violence. Many individuals face doxxing, where their identities are exposed online through disinformation

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325   Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia: Halt Crackdown Against Human Rights Groups, June 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/18/ethiopia-halt-crackdown-against-human-rights-groups; Date accessed October 28, 2024

326   Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Fleeing prolonged media crackdown, Ethiopian journalists struggle in exile, June 18, 2024, https://cpj.org/2024/06/fleeing-prolonged-media-crackdown-ethiopian-journalists-struggle-in-exile/ ; Date accessed October 28, 2024

327   Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia: Halt Crackdown Against Human Rights Groups, June 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/18/ethiopia-halt-crackdown-against-human-rights-groups; Date accessed October 28, 2024

328   Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Urgent Press Release, May 25, 2024

329   Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Ethiopian journalist Muhiyadin Mohamed Abdullahi faces up to 5 years in prison on false news charges, March 12, 2024, https://cpj.org/2024/03/ethiopian-journalist-muhiyadin-mohamed-abdullahi-faces-up-to-5-years-in-prison-on-false-news-charges/; Date accessed October 30, 2024

330   Somali Region Journalists Association (SRJA): https://web.facebook.com/SRJAethiopia/posts/pfbid0vFNBXZ9PXa5zmGVpWx-DukuR8qznNxxkECYfPqRA7uyicTbfvNqLiMPQANxxaHVaxl; Date accessed October 30, 2024

331   Borkena, Court sentenced Tadios Tantu to over six years in jail without parole, October 25, 2024, https://borkena.com/2024/10/25/court-sentenced-tadios-tantu-to-over-six-years-in-jail-without-parole/; Date accessed October 30, 2024

332   France 24, 'Normalised and invisible': online abuse targets Ethiopian women: https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240529-normalised-and-invisible-online-abuse-targets-ethiopian-women; Date accessed January 19, 2025

333   GenderIT, Technology Facilitate Violence: The Fourth Battlefield Amid the Escalation in Ethiopia, https://genderit.org/feminist-talk/technology-facilitate-violence-fourth-battlefield-amid-escalation-ethiopia? ; Date accessed January 9, 2025

334   The Centre for Information Resilience (CIR), Research on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia Summary Document, May 2024, https://www.info-res.org/_files/ugd/587f01_849a90c2a17d4526b0fc69b049b8946a.pdf ; Date accessed October 30, 2024

335   Ethiopia Insider,   , August 23, 2024, https://ethiopiainsider.com/2024/14112/? Date accessed October 30, 2024

rumors, leading to home invasions and assaults, forcing some to flee for their safety[336][337].

In April 2024, a report from the Amharic-language service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) revealed that the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) was using an extensive "media army" to manipulate public opinion online. The media army network has been directed by the PP leaders via WhatsApp and Telegram groups often employing fake accounts to like and comment positively on the government's Facebook posts and attack government critics and media outlets, aiming to boost the government's and ruling party's online public image. Though the PP denied using of fake and paid accounts, Meta reported that it had removed a network of accounts and pages violating the company's fraudulent behavior policy by mass-producing comments to artificially increase the reach of Ethiopian government posts[338].

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Data Protection and Privacy

In April 2024, the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia ratified the Personal Data Protection Proclamation, 2024.[339] Despite this legislative milestone, several human rights and media institutions raised concerns regarding the appointment of the Ethiopian Communications Authority as the regulatory body responsible for overseeing data protection because it might lack the necessary independence and expertise to effectively enforce the new regulations[340]. This concern was highlighted during the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE)'s naming and shaming incident, where it posted pictures and names of people who had refused to return money transferred or withdrawn during a system glitch in March 2024.

In the same month, the CBE, the largest state-owned financial institution, posted pictures and names of individuals who had withdrawn or transferred large sums of money during the system upgrade glitch in its branch and website. This action, intended as a form of "naming and shaming," directly contravened the newly ratified Personal Data Protection Proclamation[341]. However, the CBE faced no repercussions for its actions, raising questions about the enforcement of data protection laws.

In response to this incident, rights groups Access Now and the Center for Rights and Democracy issued an official letter in May 2024 to the president of CBE, the governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia, the regulatory body overseeing commercial banks, and the Director General of the Ethiopian Communications Authority. The letter highlighted how the public disclosure of personal details violated the right to privacy as enshrined in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's (FDRE's) constitution, Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection 2014, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights[342]. Despite the seriousness of the situation, the CBE did not respond to the letter from the rights groups. However, in June 2024, the bank removed the photos and names of the individuals involved, citing that 99.13% of the money had been returned[343]. While this action was remedial, it did not address the underlying issues of accountability and the enforcement of data protection laws.

The Corridor Development Project in major cities of Ethiopia, such as Addis Ababa, is part of

336   Sifter Newsletter: https://sifter.substack.com/p/how-many-salaries-can-you-afford?r=38rapq&triedRedirect=true November, 12, 2024; Date accessed November 14, 2024

337   African Feminism: https://africanfeminism.com/ethiopian-lgbtqia-activists-remain-bold-amidst-heightened-violence/ February 2024; Date accessed November 10, 2024

338   BBC News Amharic,   '   '   , May 2024, https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cp6gnd20675o; Date accessed October 30, 2024

339   Fana Broadcasting Corporate, House endorses personal data protection bill, April 4, 2024, https://www.fanabc.com/english/amp/house-endorses-personal-data-protection-bill/ ; Date accessed October 27, 2024

340   The Reporter, Critics fear Comms Authority personal data dominion, impartiality in legislative wrangle, Jan 13, 2024, https://thereporterethiopia.com/38279/ ; Date accessed November 03, 2024

341   BBC, Commercial Bank of Ethiopia names and shames customers over bank glitch money, April 5, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68740796 ; Date accessed November 03, 2024

342   Access Now, Access Now and CARD letter to Commercial Bank of Ethiopia on the publication of customers personal data, June 2024, https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/open-letter-cbe-ethiopia/ ; Date accessed November 03, 2024

343   Commercial Bank of Ethiopia Facebook Page, https://web.facebook.com/combanketh/posts/pfbid02NedmCQxdKe8CUrzDA7LoaF-HWmiqqhe4Z77CpRU3rdWvwxQ1JfPcMdY9jiZ4KuvhAl?rdid=dRrI8Gu5CF6czqKC&_rdc=1&_rdr; Date accessed November 03, 2024

the country's smart city initiative. This project aims to modernise urban services, improve living standards, and drive urban development forward. As part of this initiative, the government is installing cameras to enhance security; where according to Addis Ababa Mayor these cameras will help monitor public spaces, reduce crime, and ensure the safety of residents[344]. Though security is important, it is crucial to ensure transparency in the procurement of the technologies by publicly disclosing contracts and establishing independent oversight. Engaging citizens through inclusive consultations and participatory decision-making to build trust ensures that smart city initiatives align with a human rights based approach.

Digital Inclusion

Ethiotelecom has announced a comprehensive strategy for the 2024/25 fiscal year, focusing on significantly enhancing telecom coverage and capacity. The plan includes constructing 1,298 new mobile sites, expanding 4G service to 500 additional cities, and introducing 5G service to 15 more cities. To bridge the digital divide, 331 rural connectivity solutions and 165 mobile network sites will be established, totaling 496 sites, to improve network coverage in 1,000 rural kebeles. Ethio Telecom aims to increase its subscriber base by six percent, targeting 83 million customers, and boost revenue by 74.7% to 163.7 billion birr by the end of the fiscal year[345].

In 2023, Ethiopia enacted the Ethiopian Digital Identification Proclamation No. 1284/2023[346]. The National Identity (ID) Program (NIDP) is responsible for implementing this foundational legal ID. The program issues a 12-digit unique identifier, known as the Fayda ID, to all residents of Ethiopia. This ID serves as a tool for service delivery and Know Your Customer (KYC) processes in both the public and private sectors. The NIDP ensures the quality of its enrollment through biometrics and authentication services, aiming to register 90 million residents by 2028.[347] Exclusion of service for people with no national ID is announced by different service providers. For instance; Ethio Djibouti Railway SC has announced the launch of its online booking platform for public passenger transport services, starting in February 2025 where all travel bookings will now require Fayda, the national ID[348]. Additionally, beginning January 1, Ethiopians must present a Fayda national digital ID to open a bank account at branches in the capital and banks nationwide must comply with Fayda standards by January 2026, while those in major cities face an earlier deadline of July 1, 2025.[349]

The Universal Service Fund (USF) is under establishment[350], yet, the Ethiopian Communications Authority enacted the universal access and service framework in 2022.

344   Ethiopian News Agency Generations Would be Proud of City's Corridor Dev't, Says Mayor - ENA English, 2024; Date accessed November 01, 2024

345   Ethiotelecom press statement: https://www.ethiotelecom.et/%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%A2%E1%89%B5%E1%8B%AE-%E1%89%B4%E1%88%8C%E1%8A%AE%E1%88%9D-%E1%8B%A82017-%E1%89%A0%E1%8C%80%E1%89%B5-%E1%8B%93%E1%88%98%E1%89%B5-%E1%8A%A0%E1%88%98%E1%89%B3%E1%8B%8A-%E1%8B%A8%E1%89%A2/?lang=am ; Date accessed February 6, 2025

346   Ethiopian Digital Identification Proclamation (2023) https://ethiodata.et/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Ethiopian-Digital-Identifica-tion-Proclamation-No.-1284_2023-1.pdf, Date accessed November 03, 2024

347   https://id.gov.et/worldbank

348   Birrmetrics News: https://birrmetrics.com/ethio-djibouti-railway-launches-passenger-service-requires-national-id/

349   Capital Market Ethiopia, National Bank of Ethiopia Mandates National ID for Banking, https://www.capitalmarketethiopia.com/national-id-must-for-banking-ethiopia/ ; Date accessed January 10, 2025

350   Universal Service Funds in Africa, GSMA, October 2023 https://www.gsma.com/about-us/regions/sub-saharan-africa/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/USF-Africa.pdf; date accessed on January 8, 2025

Conclusion

This report provides a comprehensive assessment of the digital rights and inclusion landscape in the country. It highlights both progress and persistent challenges. Key findings indicate improvements in internet coverage and the enactment of critical legislation such as the Personal Data Protection Proclamation, 2024. However, systemic issues like internet shutdowns, technology facilitated gender based violation, and limited enforcement of regulatory frameworks undermine these advancements. Ethiopia's classification as "mildly compliant" in the Londa Score Index underscores the need for targeted reforms to align national practices with international human rights standards and foster a more inclusive digital environment.

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Recommendations

The Government:

- Prioritise the protection of digital rights by ceasing the use of internet shutdowns during conflicts, which undermine freedoms of expression and access to information. It should adopt transparent policies regarding internet governance.

- Though Ethio-Telecom is implementing different initiatives to curtail internet accessibility of rural and women communities, authorities should implement subsidy programs for smart phones and internet access targeting women and marginalised groups. This should be coupled with digital literacy campaigns to empower women and address socio-cultural barriers.

- Review and amend laws like the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention Proclamation of 2020 to ensure they align with international human rights standards.

- End arbitrary detentions of journalists and activists and provide robust protections for free speech.

- Establish an independent and adequately resourced data protection authority to oversee compliance with the Personal Data Protection Proclamation of 2024, investigate violations, and hold perpetrators accountable.

- Expedite the operationalisation of the USF through policy to expand connectivity in underserved areas, ensuring equitable access to digital services for all.

- Proactively disclose information on policies affecting digital rights and technologies, fostering public understanding and participation in digital governance.

Civil Society Organisations should:

- Civil society organisations should focus on litigation and advocacy to challenge internet shutdowns, freedom of expression violations, and weak data protection measures.

- Produce evidence-based research to support their campaigns.

- Form coalitions at local level and join,regional and international coalitions to amplify advocacy efforts, access resources, and promote accountability for digital rights violations.

- Civil society should push for the establishment of an independent Personal Data Protection Commission to ensure impartial enforcement of the data protection law.

The Private Sector should:

- Telecommunications and social media companies should partner with stakeholders to enhance digital literacy, particularly in underserved regions, while ensuring safe online spaces through effective content moderation in local languages.

- Telecommunications operators should actively contribute to the USF and work towards

- expanding coverage to unconnected regions.
- Telecommunications companies should let service seekers know the reason for internet shutdowns.

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Londa 2025 Key Indicators	ACHPR Declaration *(P stands for Principle)*	Score	Justification
Internet Shutdowns	P38(2)	1	Internet shutdowns have been used in Amhara region during 2024
Inexistent laws, policies and other measures to promote universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful access to the internet	P37	2	The country still hasn't passed the law around USF though there is a strategic framework
False News Criminalisation	P22(2)	1	Journalist Muhiyadin Mohamed Abdullahi was arrested on February 2024, and charged under Ethiopia's hate speech and disinformation law. Authorities accused him of spreading false news and hate speech via his Facebook page
Sedition Legislation	P22(2)	2	Criminal code states criminalization of false accusation of government officials
Arbitrary Arrests and Harassments of the Media, HRDs and Citizens	P20(1) & (2)	1	Because of the imposition of state of emergency different media personnel, HRDs, and citizens who identify as a specific ethnic group were imprisoned
Data Protection Legislation.	P42	3	The proclamation was enacted in 2024 though there are limitations in the proclamation
States interfere and require the removal of online content by internet intermediaries	P38 and P39(4)	2	Though the government didn't recently ask for removal of content from many social media platforms, TikTok received 86 requests from Jan-June 2024 and YouTube was also asked to take down contents in 2021.
Invasion of Privacy of Communications	P41	1	HRDs and HROs staff were targeted and their office and devices were confiscated
Failure by the government to proactively disclose and disseminate information digital technologies.	P29(3)	1	Citizens were unaware of internet shutdowns in Amhara regional state and who imposed it.

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AI and Emerging Technologies national strategies	P39(6)	2	The state is using emerging technologies minimally and is not yet included in national strategies
Adoption of specific child laws, policies and measures promoting children's digital safety and privacy online	P37(5)	3	Though there is no specific laws to promote children's digital safety, the data protection proclamation gives greater emphasis to children's data privacy
Digital Inclusion	P37(3)	2	State-owned telecom company, Ethiotelecom, is trying to expand to unconnected regions to promote digital inclusion
TOTAL SCORE (up to 60)		21	

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PARADIGM
INITIATIVE