



Recommendation 1586 (2002)¹

The digital divide and education

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Digitalisation introduces a new risk of dividing those who can afford access for the purposes of education and research from those who cannot. The Parliamentary Assembly believes in ensuring fair access to digital material for educational and other socially necessary purposes.
2. In the age of printing, society developed a balance between the need to reward intellectual property owners for the use of their works, and the need for society to make some of these works available to a larger public.
3. In the digital age, this balance has to be re-established and legislation adopted, both nationally and internationally, to take account of the technological developments.
4. Access to information is essential for education and research. It is also a basic requisite for democracy, as this relies on the participation of informed and enlightened citizens.
5. Copyright questions related to digital material available on the Internet are being addressed by the European Union. Unesco, together with the International Telecommunication Union, is preparing two world conferences (to take place in 2003 and 2005) to develop an international convention on the conditions for public access to material on the Internet.
6. The Council of Europe has itself begun to address these questions, notably the Assembly in [Recommendation 1332 \(1997\)](#) on the scientific and technical aspects of the new information and communications technologies and [Resolution 1191 \(1999\)](#) on the information society and a digital world, and the Committee of Ministers in its Declaration of May 1999 on a European policy for new information technologies.
7. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
join forces with other international bodies that are currently considering access to digital material on the Internet in order to establish the public service principle in the digital environment and in particular to develop norms for the use of such material for educational and other socially necessary purposes;
give particular consideration in drawing up such norms to:
 - a. *providing citizens with a certain amount of basic information as a public service;*
 - b. *limiting access only for reasons of privacy, confidentiality, security and law-enforcement;*
 - c. *providing public access points staffed by trained personnel;*
 - d. *developing special tools to help access for the disabled in concrete terms;*
 - e. *harmonising, clarifying and making user-friendly national and international copyright legislation applying to digital material;*
 - f. *encouraging the production of culturally and pedagogically suitable digital material;*
 - g. *facilitating quality appreciation of digital information;*

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 18 November 2002 (see [Doc. 9616](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mrs Isohookana-Asunmaa).



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ensure that these norms are properly and equally applied in member states.