



SYMPOSIUM CALL FOR PAPERS

Privacy and Data Protection in Africa



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BACKGROUND

Privacy and data protection have become increasingly critical in the digital era as states worldwide accelerate digital transformation. The rapid adoption of digital technologies, the expansion of e-governance, and the digitisation of services have led to an unprecedented collection, processing, and storage of personal data. While these developments offer immense opportunities, they also pose significant concerns regarding data security, privacy breaches, and the protection of individuals from intrusive surveillance and misuse of personal information by both state and non-state actors.

Africa is no exception to these challenges. The continent is witnessing a rapid shift toward digitalisation, with data-driven technologies becoming central to governance, commerce, and social services. However, the legal and institutional frameworks required to protect privacy and personal data have not kept pace with this shift. Recognising these challenges, the African Union adopted in 2014 the [Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection](#) (Malabo Convention), which came into force in 2024 after securing the required 15 ratifications, marking a significant milestone in strengthening data protection across the continent. [The African Union Data Policy Framework](#) introduced in February 2022, also provides further guidance on data governance within Africa's digital economy. At the national level, progress has also been made. As of February 2025, [40 African states](#) have enacted data protection laws to regulate the collection, processing, and use of personal data, reflecting a growing commitment to safeguarding individuals' privacy in the digital space.

Despite this progress, significant challenges remain. The Malabo Convention, though a positive step, took more than nine years to come into force, and [some of its provisions now require updates to reflect the evolving nature of digital technologies and data usage](#). Furthermore, its effective implementation will depend on the development of a clear and measurable strategy to ensure its integration into domestic legal frameworks. At the national level, fifteen African countries still lack privacy and data protection legislation, leaving millions without legal safeguards against data misuse. Even among countries with data protection laws, many frameworks fail to fully align with international human rights standards, while others suffer from weak enforcement due to inadequate institutional capacity and regulatory mechanisms. Moreover, fragmented and, at times, contradictory regulatory approaches across the continent hinder the creation of a cohesive and effective data governance ecosystem. In addition, the competing demands of digital trade, national security, and individual privacy rights present complex regulatory dilemmas.



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These and other normative and implementation challenges underscore the urgent need for a coordinated and human rights-compliant approach to privacy and data protection across Africa. Given the increasing reliance on digital services in sectors such as finance, healthcare, and governance, there is a pressing demand for evidence-based policy solutions. In this regard, academia and research communities play a crucial role in identifying legal and policy gaps, analysing best practices, and proposing innovative solutions to strengthen Africa's privacy and data protection landscape.

This project seeks to contribute to these efforts by fostering scholarly dialogue and generating research-based insights that inform policy and practice. As digitalisation continues to expand, bringing both opportunities and risks, it aims to ensure that Africa develops privacy and data protection frameworks that uphold fundamental rights while fostering digital innovation and economic growth.

About the symposium and objectives

The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria invites African experts and practitioners in the area of privacy and data protection to submit abstracts for a symposium and book project. This symposium seeks to provide a platform for both established and emerging scholars to engage in critical, evidence-based discussions on privacy and data protection issues across the continent. Papers presented at the symposium will undergo a rigorous expert review process and, upon approval, will be published as chapters in a dedicated book, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on privacy and data protection in Africa.

The project aims to achieve the following key objectives:

- **Advancing knowledge and informing policy:** The project aims to generate high-quality research that influences key stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society organisations, and the broader academic community. The findings will contribute to advocacy, legislative reforms, capacity building, and public awareness initiatives aimed at strengthening privacy and data protection systems at both national and regional levels.
- **Fostering collaboration and scholarly engagement:** The symposium will also serve as a platform for scholarly collaboration. It will bring together African researchers to exchange ideas, build professional networks, and collaborate on future projects. By addressing existing research gaps and promoting interdisciplinary dialogue, the symposium will play a critical role in shaping the future of privacy and data protection laws and policies across Africa.

ELIGIBILITY

- Open to African researchers and practitioners, including early-career researchers, academics, students, policymakers, and professionals working in privacy, data protection, big data, information technology, and human rights law in Africa.
- Submissions must focus on privacy and data protection within the African context.

THEMES AND AREAS OF FOCUS

Authors are free to explore any theme within the broader topic of privacy and data protection in the African region. Possible areas of focus include:

- Country-specific analyses of privacy and data protection laws, policies, and practices.
- Comparative studies examining how different African states approach privacy and data protection.
- Regional perspectives, including assessments of frameworks established by African Union (AU) organs and Regional Economic Communities (RECs).
- Privacy in the age of big data and emerging technologies.
- Cross-border data flows
- Challenges and opportunities in African privacy and data protection frameworks.
- The intersection of privacy, data protection, and other fundamental human rights in Africa.
- Privacy and data protection in the digital economy.
- Privacy and data protection and socio-economic rights.
- Privacy and data protection and civil and political rights.
- Privacy and data protection in relation to specific groups (children, women, persons with disabilities, refugees and migrants, etc)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Interested applicants are invited to submit an abstract of 300–500 words outlining their research focus, methodology, and key arguments to Henok Ashagrey at henok.kremte@up.ac.za, copying hlengiwe.dube@up.ac.za, by 7 May 2025. The abstract should be in English and must not exceed 500 words.
- In addition to the abstract, applicants should submit:
 - ✓ A short CV (not exceeding 3 pages).
 - ✓ A short biography (maximum 250 words), including their institutional affiliation and relevant research experience.

IMPORTANT TIMELINE

- **Notification of selected abstracts:** Successful applicants will be notified by **30 May 2025**. Applicants who do not receive such notification by this date should consider their abstracts as not selected.
- **Final paper submission:** Authors of selected abstracts are required to submit their full draft papers by **30 July 2025**.
- **Symposium:** Selected scholars will present their papers at the symposium, which is currently scheduled for **11-12 September 2025**. It will be held either online or in-person, in Pretoria or another African city, depending on logistical considerations.
- **Publication:** Following the symposium, participants will be expected to revise and resubmit their papers, incorporating feedback received during the symposium, within **one month**. Revised papers will undergo a further **double-blind peer review** before they are eligible for publication.

We look forward to receiving your abstracts and engaging in insightful discussions on this critical subject

For more information, please contact:

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