

ESC Priorities for Unicode Version 16.0 & Beyond

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Introduction 🖐️

The ESC has outlined a number of priorities for future emoji releases to address pain points related to the experience using emoji and interoperability of these characters.

This document provides the UTC with an update on these goals as well as a future goals which may require a large number of code points, sequences, or changes to emoji intake processes.

Goals may change over time; however, this gives a view of the past and future aspirations of the Emoji Subcommittee to execute on encoding a stable emoji set that can operate at the speed of language in digital spaces.

Background 🔥

Of the six goals set out in the 2019 and 2020 priorities documents, all goals have been achieved or part of active workstreams. The status of these prior goals is as follows:

1. Gender Inclusive emoji (eg Artist, Person With Probing Cane, Princess, etc.)
 - a. ☒ Added in Emoji 12.1
2. Mixed tone support for multi-person groupings (Kiss, and Couples With Hearts)
 - a. ☒ Added in Emoji 13.1
3. Mixed tone support for Handshake
 - a. ☒ Added in Emoji 14.0
4. Tone support for Families
 - a. ☒ Redesign of family emoji to appear as symbols will be updated in 15.1
5. Emoji direction sequences (eg orientation / left-right)
 - a. ☒ Small set of direction sequences will be included in Emoji 15.1. The ESC is conducting follow up research before moving forward with more variations.
6. Color variation sequences (examples: black cat, lime)
 - a. ☒ The addition of black cat (Emoji 15.0) and Lime (Emoji 15.1) are underway. No additional color variations are currently active.
7. Modifying the presentation of emoji to reduce variation of interpretation
 - a. ☒ Face with Open Eyes and hand over mouth added in Emoji 14.0
8. Moratorium on Flag emoji
 - a. ☒ Instituted as policy in 2021

Future Goals 🌐

The ESC is prioritizing work streams to support how the general public use emoji to ensure they are useful and globally relevant. **The optimal path forward fixes old issues without creating new ones. This follows priorities set out in [L2/19-101](#).**

Areas the Emoji Subcommittee will be prioritizing for Emoji 16.0+ include the following categories:

(1) Addressing Incomplete Sets of Emoji

- Gender and tone inconsistencies
 - Focus on collections of emoji rather than one-off additions
 - Evaluate closing the intake on some categories
 - Ex. If multi-gender and multi-tone inconsistencies are resolved, ESC could consider pausing intake on “people” emoji for a temporary period of time.

(2) User Experience pain points

- As operating systems become more dynamic in their color theming (ex. Light mode/darkmode), the ESC is looking at guidelines and appropriate technologies that aid in improving the legibility of emoji.
 - Ex. Heavy Mathematical symbols are quite dark and the palette could be swapped.

(3) Exploring New Additions at Scale

- Emoji Directionality
 - Before more directionality sequences are added, we need to further understand user needs as it relates to linguistic functions. For example: syntactic word order, script direction, and semantic/pragmatic functions that are contextually UX dependent (sender and receiver of text messages).

Emoji 16.0 🌟

The intake cycle for proposals for new emoji to be considered for Unicode Version 16.0 ended at the end of July 2022. Shortly after, the UTC announced a delay for Unicode Version 16.0. Thus, the Emoji Subcommittee temporarily delayed the intake of Emoji Version 17.0 proposals until April 2024. During this time we are focused on the following areas:

Gender Inconsistencies [[L2/20-196](#)]

- Acknowledge there are three [remaining gender inconsistencies](#) for the following emoji:
 - 🕺🕴 Woman/Man Dancing (currently investigating)
 - 🧑🏻 Woman in Headscarf (no work underway)
 - 🧑🏻 Woman Breastfeeding (no work underway)

Note: These are the last remaining “people” emoji that do not have an affordance to opt-out of gender.

Multi-Tone Inconsistencies [[L2/20-196](#)]

With the exception of the previously-noted multi-person toned emoji ([L2/20-114](#)), there are a some people emoji that do not have tone support. These include:

- Bunny Ears (currently investigating)
 -  People With Bunny Ears
 -  Women With Bunny Ears
 -  Men With Bunny Ears
- Wrestling (currently investigating)
 -  People Wrestling
 -  Women Wrestling
 -  Men Wrestling

Note: These are the last remaining “people” emoji that do not have tone support. If additional sequences are added, Emoji 16.0 would be the earliest release that could include such changes.

Emoji Directionality [[L2/22-275](#)]

[A small set of emoji were identified with strong directionality](#) that as of Emoji 15.1 will be able to display in both directions. For Emoji 16.0 we are identifying the next group informed by a blend of frequency of use, uniform directionality, and conversational function. Small working groups have been tasked with looking at Animals, Objects, Hands, Activities, and Transportation.

No determination has yet been reached about whether adding directionality for these emoji is justified. If these are considered for new direction support, Emoji 16.0 would be the earliest release that could include such changes.

Emoji 17.0 (2025+)

As we hit the limitations of the value of new sequences, the emoji subcommittee is reconsidering holding a higher benchmark for future additions into the Unicode Standard.

Areas of focus include:

1. Requiring empirical evidence of use, with citation
2. Emphasizing a need for compatibility
3. General focus on improving user experience with existing emoji lexicon

Note: Some areas within this document may involve public consultation (PRI) at the appropriate time. Emoji groupings and priorities included in this document are not an exhaustive list of possibilities. Recommendations and timelines may change over time.