

SALTO DIGITAL RESOURCE CENTRE

AI & PARTICIPATION

BUILDING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION
IN THE AGE OF AI

society - civic engagement - Agency - Democracy





This material supports Erasmus+ projects and educational institutions in addressing AI, participation, and digital literacy in teaching and learning. Although it does not constitute an official guideline, it presents curated considerations to support high-quality education addressing AI and digital participation.

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Artificial Intelligence and Participation

The European Union supports the empowerment of all people as active citizens and members of democratic societies. In the age of artificial intelligence, participation in democratic life is increasingly shaped by digital environments, where tackling disinformation has become a central element of digital and media literacy.

Alongside traditional democratic participation, it is also important to promote diverse forms of civic engagement, such as volunteering, online activism, and learners' agency. AI and the broader digital transformation open new opportunities for participation and influence, but they also require new competences. To strengthen civic agency in the age of AI, individuals need new skills, such as AI literacy, digital communication, and critical thinking.

Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps projects can support participation by empowering individuals to engage actively in democratic life and society, while also providing learning opportunities in digital skills, AI literacy, and critical thinking.

1 Digital Participation in the Age of AI



Digital participation refers to individuals' and communities' meaningful involvement in society through digital technologies such as the internet and social media platforms. It includes access to information, opportunities to influence public decision-making, engagement in democratic life, and participation in civil society through online channels. In the context of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), digital participation is directly linked to the Digital Transformation Priority and the Participation Priority. Projects are encouraged to promote active citizenship and empower learners to become digitally competent individuals who can interact ethically, responsibly, and creatively with emerging technologies.

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the conditions for digital participation. AI-driven systems now curate information, shape public discourse, generate content, and facilitate or hinder civic engagement in ways previously impossible. While AI offers powerful opportunities for enhanced communication, collaboration, and inclusive participation, it also introduces new challenges related to transparency, information reliability, cognitive biases, and democratic resilience. This material examines how AI is reshaping democratic and public participation, why information and media literacy are crucial in this new environment, what active citizenship means in the age of AI, and what new competencies learners and educators need. It concludes with reflective questions for schools, teachers, youth workers, and Erasmus+ projects to consider when fostering responsible and inclusive digital participation.

A horizontal banner featuring the silhouettes of nine individuals in professional clothing. The silhouettes are semi-transparent, allowing mathematical formulas and diagrams to be seen through them. The formulas include $H(p) = -\sum p(i) \log p(i)$, $E = mc^2$, $\log(xy) = \log x + \log y$, $\sin^2 \theta + \cos^2 \theta = 1$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x) = \frac{1}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(y) = \frac{1}{y}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(xy) = \frac{1}{xy}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^2) = \frac{2}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^3) = \frac{3}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^4) = \frac{4}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^5) = \frac{5}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^6) = \frac{6}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^7) = \frac{7}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^8) = \frac{8}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^9) = \frac{9}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{10}) = \frac{10}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{11}) = \frac{11}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{12}) = \frac{12}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{13}) = \frac{13}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{14}) = \frac{14}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{15}) = \frac{15}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{16}) = \frac{16}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{17}) = \frac{17}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{18}) = \frac{18}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{19}) = \frac{19}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{20}) = \frac{20}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{21}) = \frac{21}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{22}) = \frac{22}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{23}) = \frac{23}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{24}) = \frac{24}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{25}) = \frac{25}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{26}) = \frac{26}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{27}) = \frac{27}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{28}) = \frac{28}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{29}) = \frac{29}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{30}) = \frac{30}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{31}) = \frac{31}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{32}) = \frac{32}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{33}) = \frac{33}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{34}) = \frac{34}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{35}) = \frac{35}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{36}) = \frac{36}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{37}) = \frac{37}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{38}) = \frac{38}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{39}) = \frac{39}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{40}) = \frac{40}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{41}) = \frac{41}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{42}) = \frac{42}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{43}) = \frac{43}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{44}) = \frac{44}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{45}) = \frac{45}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{46}) = \frac{46}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{47}) = \frac{47}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{48}) = \frac{48}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{49}) = \frac{49}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{50}) = \frac{50}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{51}) = \frac{51}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{52}) = \frac{52}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{53}) = \frac{53}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{54}) = \frac{54}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{55}) = \frac{55}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{56}) = \frac{56}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{57}) = \frac{57}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{58}) = \frac{58}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{59}) = \frac{59}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{60}) = \frac{60}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{61}) = \frac{61}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{62}) = \frac{62}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{63}) = \frac{63}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{64}) = \frac{64}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{65}) = \frac{65}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{66}) = \frac{66}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{67}) = \frac{67}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{68}) = \frac{68}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{69}) = \frac{69}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{70}) = \frac{70}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{71}) = \frac{71}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{72}) = \frac{72}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{73}) = \frac{73}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{74}) = \frac{74}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{75}) = \frac{75}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{76}) = \frac{76}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{77}) = \frac{77}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{78}) = \frac{78}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{79}) = \frac{79}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{80}) = \frac{80}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{81}) = \frac{81}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{82}) = \frac{82}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{83}) = \frac{83}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{84}) = \frac{84}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{85}) = \frac{85}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{86}) = \frac{86}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{87}) = \frac{87}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{88}) = \frac{88}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{89}) = \frac{89}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{90}) = \frac{90}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{91}) = \frac{91}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{92}) = \frac{92}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{93}) = \frac{93}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{94}) = \frac{94}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{95}) = \frac{95}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{96}) = \frac{96}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{97}) = \frac{97}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{98}) = \frac{98}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{99}) = \frac{99}{x}$, $\frac{d}{dx} \ln(x^{100}) = \frac{100}{x}$.

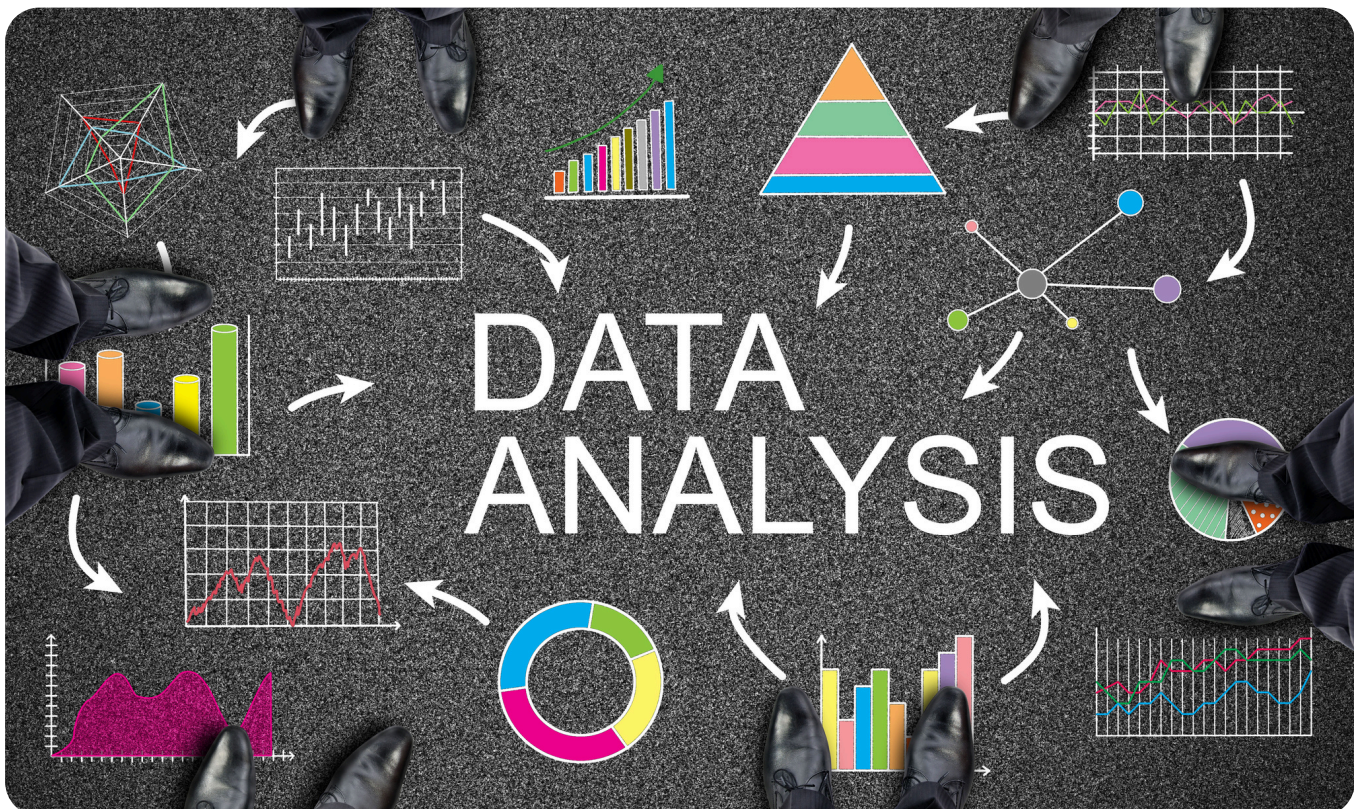
AI also changes public participation by introducing automated interfaces into communication between citizens and public institutions. Many public services now rely on chatbots, virtual assistants, and automated decision-support systems to streamline administrative processes. These tools can make public services more accessible by allowing citizens to interact with institutions at any time and without unnecessary bureaucracy. However, they can also reduce transparency if individuals do not understand how decisions are made or why certain information is requested. When automated systems replace human interaction, there is also a risk that opportunities for meaningful discussion or personalized guidance decrease.

4



Generative AI has dramatically lowered the threshold for producing civic content. It is now possible for individuals or groups with limited technical skills to create persuasive visuals, texts, videos, and advocacy materials. In the context of Erasmus+ or youth participation projects, this can empower young people to develop campaign materials, produce multilingual communication outputs, or articulate their ideas in creative ways. At the same time, malicious actors can use the same tools to generate large volumes of misleading information, deepfake videos, or synthetic messages that may influence public opinion or manipulate democratic processes.

On the other hand, AI also opens new possibilities for collective intelligence and co-creation. Public institutions and communities can use AI to analyze large volumes of citizen feedback, visualize complex data for community planning, or create platforms that engage local stakeholders in decision-making. These developments support new forms of democratic innovation and align well with the aims of Erasmus+ to foster participation, empowerment, and collaboration across sectors.



3

Why AI Literacy and the Ability to Recognise Disinformation Matter?



In the age of AI, the ability to critically evaluate information has become essential for democratic participation. Disinformation is increasingly multimodal, complex, and difficult to recognize without specific literacy skills. AI amplifies the speed and scale at which misleading information can be produced and spread. This includes synthetic text, images, audio, and video that can mimic authentic content so convincingly that even trained individuals may have difficulty detecting manipulation.

Because AI can generate tailored messages for targeted groups, disinformation campaigns can be personalized to exploit the emotional or psychological vulnerabilities of specific audiences. This creates a powerful mechanism for influencing public opinion, increasing polarization, and eroding trust in institutions. Learners who do not understand how AI-generated content works or who lack the ability to verify sources may become particularly vulnerable to manipulation.



Digital information literacy is therefore both a cognitive skill and a civic competence. It includes the ability to evaluate the credibility of sources, assess the intentions and motives behind specific messages, and understand the economic and political incentives driving the production of information. Equally important is the capacity to recognize emotional manipulation. Many forms of disinformation rely on triggering strong emotional reactions, such as fear or anger, which can override critical thinking. Learners must understand how these emotional strategies work and how cognitive biases shape their interpretation and sharing of information.

In the context of Erasmus+ projects, strengthening digital information literacy contributes to democratic resilience. Schools, youth organizations, and training institutions have a central role in creating learning environments where learners can critically reflect on information, examine different viewpoints, and practice responsible digital behavior. By understanding how AI systems shape their information environment, learners become better equipped to participate meaningfully and responsibly in society.

4

Active Citizenship in the Age of AI



Active citizenship traditionally refers to individuals' involvement in democratic processes, engagement in community life, and contribution to societal well-being. In the age of AI, this concept evolves as digital technologies shape both the opportunities and responsibilities of civic participation. Citizens can now engage more effectively in civic initiatives regardless of geographic location, language barriers, or physical limitations.

At the same time, active citizenship in the AI era requires new forms of ethical responsibility. Citizens must understand how AI systems operate, what data they collect, and how algorithmic decisions can affect fairness, transparency, and equal participation. Without a basic understanding of these mechanisms, individuals may not fully comprehend how digital systems influence their autonomy, privacy, or rights. In democratic societies, it is vitally important that citizens can critically question AI-enabled systems and advocate for ethical, transparent, and inclusive practices.

Digital environments enable citizens to participate not only as consumers of digital services but also as contributors to their development. Individuals can provide structured feedback on public AI systems, contribute to open data initiatives, or participate in consultations on digital policies. In this sense, active citizenship becomes more participatory and collaborative.

In addition, AI has significant implications for inclusion. AI-based accessibility tools, such as speech recognition, automated captioning, and real-time translation, can support individuals with linguistic or physical barriers. These technologies can make democratic participation more accessible by providing support and enabling equal participation in multilingual or diverse groups. However, inequalities in access to digital resources or low levels of AI literacy can create significant gaps in participation.

5

AI Literacy and Critical Thinking: New Skills Needed for Participation

To participate meaningfully in an AI-mediated society, we need a new set of competencies often referred to as AI literacy. AI literacy is broader than technical understanding. It includes epistemic awareness—an individual’s ability to understand and recognize how AI changes the nature of knowledge, truth, evidence, and communication. For example, many learners may assume that AI-generated information is neutral and factual, even though generative models do not “understand” content in a human sense but rather predict likely patterns based on training data. Understanding this distinction is necessary for critical thinking.

Learners need a clear understanding of how AI-generated content is produced and of its limitations. They must recognize that text, images, and videos generated by AI may appear authentic but may not be accurate or truthful. Understanding the functioning of recommendation algorithms is also crucial, as these systems heavily influence the information individuals encounter daily. When learners and young people understand that algorithms curate their online environment, they are better able to question the apparent “naturalness” of what they see and to recognize that their information environment is constructed rather than neutral.





Critical thinking becomes increasingly crucial as learners must evaluate sources, identify unreliable or manipulative content, and verify information using independent methods. Fact-checking skills, knowledge of digital rights, and the ability to understand data privacy are required components of AI literacy. At the same time, learners must develop an understanding of bias and fairness. AI systems often reflect the biases in their training data, leading to unbalanced outputs and, at worst, to discriminatory ones. Recognizing such biases requires learners to reflect on ethical considerations, understand the limitations of machine learning models, and engage in discussions about fairness and justice.

In addition to cognitive skills, learners need intercultural and collaborative competencies. AI increasingly mediates communication and interaction in multilingual or cross-cultural contexts. Understanding how AI-enabled translation, summarization, or communication tools influence dialogue is essential for fostering mutual understanding and respectful communication.

Ultimately, AI literacy equips learners to recognize disinformation by understanding how synthetic content is created, why emotionally persuasive messages spread quickly, and how targeted narratives can influence individuals. When learners understand these mechanisms, they are better prepared to navigate digital environments responsibly and participate confidently in public life.

6

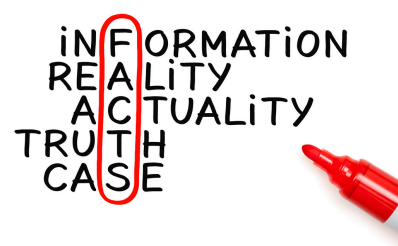
How to Address AI and Participation in Education?

Educational institutions and Erasmus+ projects can reflect on several key questions when considering how to integrate AI and digital participation into learning. One central question concerns *how educators can help learners understand the societal role of AI in shaping public opinion and influencing democratic processes*. This includes reflecting on what learners need to know about algorithmic curation, data-driven personalization, and the effects of information bubbles on civic discourse.

Educators and learners may also consider how AI and digital tools can enhance democratic engagement in digital environments. Digital collaboration tools and online civic initiatives offer opportunities to integrate participation into everyday learning. Teachers and youth workers can reflect on how to create meaningful learning and training activities that involve virtual debate, digital campaigns, or collaborative problem-solving related to real societal challenges.

A further set of reflections concerns digital information literacy. Educators should consider *how they systematically teach source evaluation, critical thinking, and recognition of misinformation and manipulation*. They may reflect on whether learners understand the emotional techniques used in disinformation and on how AI influences what they see online. This includes discussions of cognitive biases, the role of emotions in decision-making, and strategies for verifying claims using reliable, independent sources.

In terms of inclusion, educators must reflect on how AI tools can support learners with diverse participation needs. This may include considering how speech recognition in mobile phones, translation tools, or adaptive learning systems can support participation and equal opportunities. At the same time, educators must remain aware of inequalities in access to digital devices, connectivity, or supportive learning environments, and consider how to ensure that all learners benefit from AI-supported activities.



Questions to Consider:

1. How can we support learners' digital participation and agency in everyday learning?
2. How can we help learners understand how AI shapes their information environment?
3. How can we support civic engagement and participation in education or youth work?
4. How do we teach learners to recognize misinformation, emotional manipulation, and cognitive biases?
5. How can we discuss data privacy, fairness, and the societal impacts of AI with learners?
6. How do we ensure equal participation for learners with limited digital access or low Digital literacy?

Resources and More Information

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