

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
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Shapers & Shakers

Young people's voices in the world of Artificial Intelligence

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Executive Summary

The Study “Shapers & Shakers – young people's voices in the world of Artificial Intelligence” aims to offer an insight into the world of Artificial Intelligence and how it impacts young people and the larger youth sector. It provides an overview on the agency of young people in shaping Artificial Intelligence (AI), without claiming to be an exhaustive radiography of all practices and processes. It builds on the work of the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership and Council of Europe’s Youth Department in the field of AI and youth and offers a knowledge base for organisations interested in getting engaged in decision-making processes on AI.

AI has been used as a concept since the 1950s. Nevertheless, the interest for this technology has increased exponentially starting with 2017, when the first AI governance processes were initiated at international level. Currently there are initiatives to develop policies or regulatory frameworks, which impact Europe by four main international organisations – European Union, Council of Europe, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the UN system. Multi-stakeholder dialogue has been a central element in all four organisations’ approaches, yet the role of civil society and youth organisations has been quite marginal.

In this context, the study provides a perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by young people and youth organisations in navigating the AI world. On the one hand it points out the main topics that connect AI and youth, the main institutional or alternative spaces where young people can shape AI policies and technologies. On the other hand, it provides a series of best practices and recommendations on how stakeholders could contribute to improving the current situation.

The study takes a balanced approach to AI governance, addressing both the potential positive and negative impact of AI technologies on young people and their fundamental rights. It acknowledges that there is an untapped potential in using AI technologies for good, but that there are also numerous risks that still need to be grasped by the wider youth sector. Last but not least, *Shapers & Shakers – young people's voices in the world of Artificial Intelligence* can be used as a discussion-opener for those who want to be actively involved in the processes of democratising AI, either through advocacy or literacy initiatives.

Methodology

The study carried out desk analysis of public policies in the field of Artificial Intelligence, documentation of public consultations organised on the topic, mapping of social movements and good practices focused on youth or civic engagement in shaping AI policies and technologies. In addition, the desk review has been complemented with qualitative methods, carried through a focus group and interviews organised with youth workers and representatives of youth organisations, in the framework of the Symposium “Navigating Transitions: adapting policy to young people's changing realities” (Tirana, June 2022). Last but not least, the conclusions and recommendations formulated in the study have been

developed after discussions with an expert group of European stakeholders, organised by the Youth Partnership (Brussels, December 2022).

Abbreviations

AI Artificial Intelligence

AI HLEG Artificial Intelligence High Level Expert Group

CAI Committee on Artificial Intelligence

CAHAI Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence

CCJ Advisory Council on Youth

CMJ Joint Council on Youth

CSO Civil Society Organisation

EU European Union

ITU International Telecommunication Union

NGO Non Governmental Organisation

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UN United Nations

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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1. Introduction

This study aims to offer an insight into the world of Artificial Intelligence and how it impacts young people and the larger youth sector. It maps the main spaces and practices in which young people are (or are not) involved in shaping Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance processes and AI technologies, by looking at institutional and alternative spaces designed for shaping AI policies. The study is not an extensive radiography of all initiatives in which young people can voice their opinion, but is a starting point for the organisations interested in connecting the dots between youth and AI and that want to start their journey on this topic. Young people's agency in shaping the world they live in is not a new topic, yet, when looking at the new digital technologies, they have been too often seen as consumers rather than legitimate stakeholders who can shape both AI policies and technologies. In this context, the study aims to bridge that gap, offering both a reality check and a direction for the future initiatives.

The study builds on the work done by the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership through the organised events such as the Symposium "[Navigating Transitions: adapting policy to young people's changing realities](#)" (Tirana, 2022), Symposium' [Young people, social inclusion and digitalisation](#)' (Tallinn, 2018), the ensuing project with a Youth Knowledge Book and a study on the topic and related research published by the Youth Partnership.

Moreover, it builds on the work of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe in the field of AI and youth, including the [Declaration on youth participation in AI governance](#) (2020), the conclusions of the two Seminars "[Artificial Intelligence - How can youth take part?](#)" (2020) and "[Artificial Intelligence and its impact on young people](#)" (2019).

The Declaration on youth participation in AI governance specifically calls for "safeguarding and promoting quality and meaningful youth participation in all AI governance processes, recognising and positioning young people as rightful stakeholders that stand on the same level as AI experts and private representatives".

The need to connect more actively youth participation and AI processes comes at a time when AI debates are intensifying across the globe, with various international organisations and national governments looking at creating frameworks for AI use and deployment. In these circumstances, the next decades are expected to require the involvement of more stakeholders and citizens. Empowering young people to engage in AI governance through spaces to engage needs to be an integral part of such participatory processes, considering that young people are the generation using mostly the Internet and digital technologies – worldwide 71% of young people aged 15-24 use the Internet (going above 90% in the most developed countries), compared with 57% of the total population ([ITU, 2020](#)).

At the same, research on the topic, such as "We and AI — Living in a Datafied World: Experiences & Attitudes of Young Europeans" ([Goethe-Institute Germany, 2022](#)), shows that among the younger generations, the perception of AI is somewhat positive, while the majority "underestimate the dangers of digital data collection and analysis". This argument is supported by previous findings of the [2017 Special Eurobarometer](#) "Attitudes towards the impact of digitisation and automation on daily life", which highlights that young people aged 15-24 (70%) and 25-39 (68%) are more likely to have a positive attitude towards AI, compared to those aged 55+ (51%).

1.1. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Since the term AI was coined in 1955, the concept has been used in different ways, with no universally-accepted definition, either from a technical or legal perspective. Public understanding of AI ranges from apocalyptic visions that the world will be ruled and controlled by robots and super intelligent powers, to more pragmatic ones, in which AI is powering most of the technologies used today (social media platforms, search engines, news feeds, smart home devices, public platforms used by governments). In this context, for the purpose of this paper, the following definition has been used: AI is

"a set of sciences, theories and techniques whose purpose is to reproduce by a machine the cognitive abilities of a human being. Current developments aim, for instance, to be able to entrust a machine with complex tasks previously delegated to a human" (Council of Europe).

Recent AI definitions also include references to Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL) – referring to the capacity of machines or systems to improve their performance over time based on large volumes of data and the use of mathematical models. The use of specific technical terminologies might create additional challenges for wider audiences in understanding the complexity of AI, what constitutes or not an AI technology. This also shows that the definition of AI is still an open discussion, and the ones used depend on the context.

This study refers to AI as a broader umbrella term for all technologies pertaining to AI, regardless of their complexity of tasks or level of autonomy. The intention is to demystify the main aspects of AI, making it more accessible to non-technical communities.

1.2. Governance of Artificial Intelligence

The developments and use of AI technologies can bring significant benefits and opportunities, leading to the overall improvement in the quality of citizens' life. Nevertheless, the possible misuse of AI, and the associated risks and harm when not deployed and managed responsibly and transparently, has led various stakeholders to address the importance of a governance framework which could mitigate the adverse effects of AI technologies.

While there is not yet a consensus on what an AI governance model could be, multiple public initiatives have been launched since 2017. Even if there is wide support for a balanced approach between innovation, economic development and respect for human rights, each governance model has different priorities, depending on its initiator. Public debates diverge between legally binding instruments and self-regulatory measures. Currently, both the Council of Europe and the European Union are working on legally binding instruments.

Governance is understood as "the structures and processes designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, the rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation. Governance also represents the norms, values and rules of the game through which public affairs are managed in a manner that is transparent, participatory, inclusive and responsive" (UNESCO). In this context, while leading institutions working on this topic have not agreed on a definition of AI governance, for this paper, and in line with most current debates, it could be described as "the set of policies, instruments and structures of participation that promote the deployment and use of AI through transparent, explainable and ethical principles and approaches" (definition proposed by the author).

Based on the [research by the Council of Europe's Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence \(CAHAI\)](#), in November 2021 there were about 506 documents from across the world addressing AI governance, proposing policies, frameworks, principles, guidelines or approaches on how to regulate AI or educate citizens about its implications.

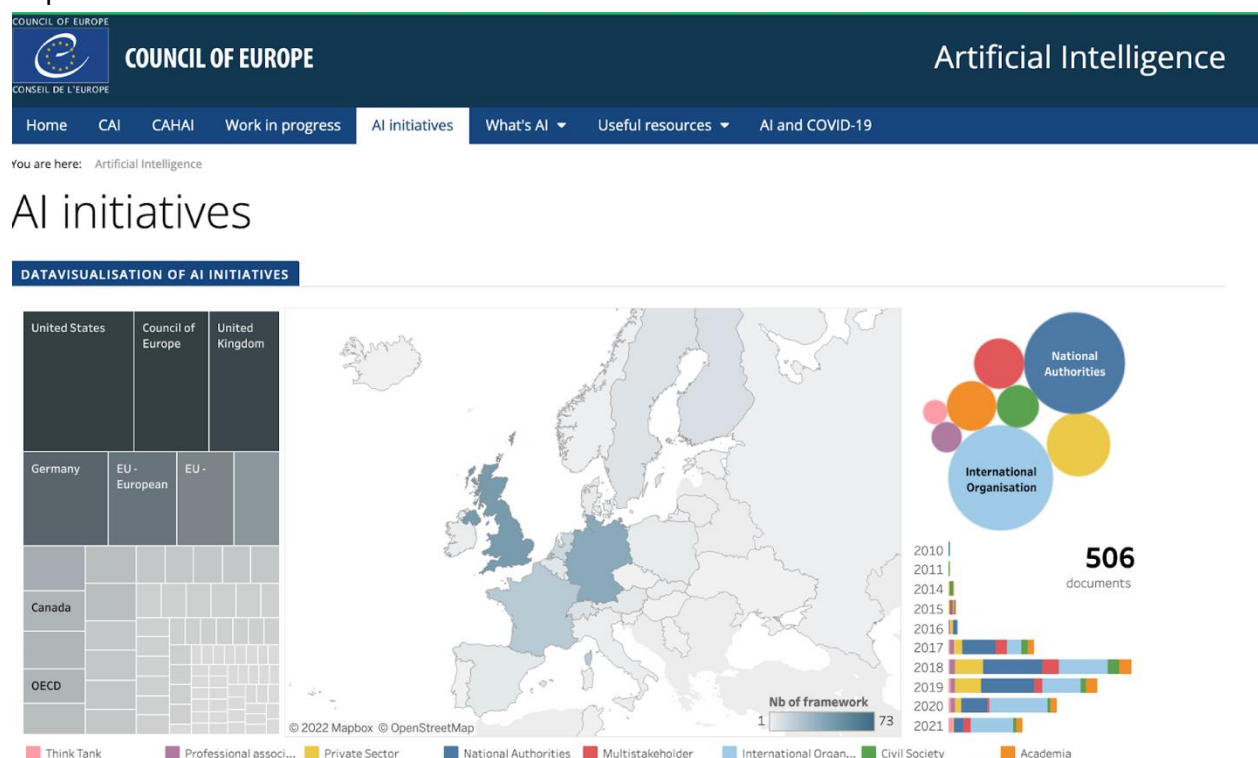


Fig. 1. [Data visualisation of all AI documents and frameworks](#) (The map does not represent a political or administrative division of countries. Source: Council of Europe)

Data analysis by stakeholders who published them (eg. International organisations, national authorities, private companies, civil society organisations), shows that the national governments and international organisations have produced the largest number of documents so far, with just a small proportion coming from civil society organisations (CSOs). None of the 27 papers created by CSOs come from a youth organisation. It is encouraging to see that most governance initiatives originate with public authorities which have such responsibilities. In the next sections, the study looks at how youth participation is reflected in some of these initiatives.

1.3. Youth Participation in AI Governance

For this paper, youth participation is defined as

"having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society." (Preamble [Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life](#))

Ongoing debates suggest that the role of young people in AI governance is yet to be developed. Current processes do not often identify young people or youth civil society as a specific stakeholder. Where there are references to this group, it is mostly in association with skills development, jobs of the future or included as part of general civil society organisations, with much less focus on the impact of AI on youth rights or the role of youth in shaping AI governance.

2. Understanding the main topics that connect youth with the AI agenda

Why do we need to discuss AI in the youth sector? At first sight, connecting youth and AI can be challenging, largely because AI was originally a field associated with the technology communities and the private sector - ICT specialists or technology companies. Since 2017 it has become a field of interest for many more, including public institutions, academia, and civil society organisations. The variety of stakeholders grew once there was a clearer understanding of the benefits and challenges of AI technologies for society. However, the youth sector still struggles to find its place in this ecosystem, as it is not often included among the core stakeholders (Norquist L., 2018). Before going deeper into governance aspects, it is important to understand how AI and youth are connected and what are the major topics of interest for the youth sector.

One of the milestones that triggered public interest was the 2016 Cambridge Analytica scandal which showed how personal data shared through social networks could be used to

influence elections. For the first time, Internet users became more aware that data privacy, micro-targeting and filter bubbles are elements that go beyond personal choices (e.g. how you choose to spend your free time on social networks) and can have an impact on larger societal issues (e.g. fair elections; freedom of speech, discrimination).

AI purpose has been debated from two perspectives: (1) such technologies can bring positive effects and augment the quality of life, (2) they can create harm and negatively impact fundamental rights. This dual perspective translates into the two ways people have related to technology since its early beginnings - the techno-optimists (those who see technology as a solution to solve all major social and environmental problems) and the luddites (those opposing technology and questioning its relevance).

This section keeps a balanced perspective on AI, by underlining the potential benefits and risks that AI technologies can bring to young people and the youth sector. It is not an exhaustive analysis but a starting point for the discussion on why participation in AI governance is relevant. The prerequisite for participation and youth agency is first to understand why such technologies need to be known and what is the actual impact on the society young people live in.

AI as an enabler - Usually discussed under the concept of AI or automation for good, AI has been identified as a contributor to larger social needs. Benefits include replacing repetitive and lower-value work and allowing more time for more meaningful tasks and more tailored interaction. More specifically, youth and other civil society organisations can benefit from such technologies by investing in AI solutions that could take over some bureaucratic tasks - from extracting, copying, and inserting data, filling in forms, and completing routine analyses and reports. More advanced technologies can go even further and support interpreting text, engaging in chats and conversations, and analysing large amounts of data to get insights about the work done, trends and potential new directions of programmes/projects. Yet such technologies are mostly not affordable for sectors with limited resources.

AI's benefits have been largely discussed in other fields as well:

AI in the field of education – offering tailored content and personalised learning approaches, supporting the work of educators.

AI as assistive solution – supporting with adapted tools and technology people with health impairments or disabilities in their social integration and increasing quality of life.

AI in youth services – where chatbots and other AI systems could complement the work of youth and social workers. Enabling a larger flexibility for vulnerable youth to get access to services which otherwise depend on the presence of a human being.

At a larger societal scale, AI technologies are expected to contribute to efficiency and improved quality of health and public services systems.

AI as a challenge for youth and fundamental rights - Research published in recent years showcases an increasing number of situations in which AI technologies, that have not been fully tested, not built on solid ethical/legal standards, or used without the consent of the beneficiaries, have created social harm, especially by perpetrating historic biases. Situations of relevance for the youth sector and young people can be summarised in the following categories:

AI's impact on freedom of speech and freedom of association - The unseen and pervasive nature of algorithms and micro-targeting on most web platforms (from social networks, search engines, news aggregators or entertainment services) has amplified the power of filter bubbles and increased polarisation. It questions to what extent individuals are free to choose the content and interactions they want. Being exposed to only a certain type of information or political ideology has shown how this can influence personal attitudes to certain social groups, participation in elections, political preferences or even participation in public gatherings. The more technology companies have understood these (unforeseen) consequences and have tried to address them, in many cases by deploying algorithms to evaluate possible harmful content, the more challenges they have created - such as arbitrary censorship of content, deleted accounts and additional challenges for online platform users. The use of AI in such contexts remains a challenge, as most users do not have a full understanding of how AI works (algorithms on such platforms can change the way they function at any time without notice) or even be aware that such technologies filter their interactions. In such context of dynamic change, literacy efforts also have their limitations.

AI's impact on social rights - There are several situations where the deployment of AI technologies has proven to have potential or even cause actual harm to people's rights, often due to discovered biases in such technologies. In many of these instances, the challenge comes from how specific technologies are used - such as risk assessment or Automated Decision Making systems - which have as a central feature the role of assessing data and inferring a certain result, finally making a decision or suggesting a certain level of risk or trust. Examples of such application of technologies can be found in

- 1) employment - recruitment technologies that allow employers to decide which candidate is more suitable by analysing data (eg. content of CV, performance in a recorded interview), or technologies used by employers to monitor the activity of their employee (with or without their consent);
- 2) education - grading or evaluation tools that can be used by teachers and schools either ongoing or for final exams; or tools that decide which school or type of studies a young person should pursue;

- 3) policing - technologies used by law enforcement authorities to decide on the type of punishment a (potential) offender should receive;
- 4) welfare services - technologies that decide which individual should receive certain social benefits or the value of those benefits (e.g. for unemployment, family or housing support);
- 5) social credit scores - the broader use of technologies in a country or a community that allows public authorities to monitor how citizens respect rules and decide which kind of rewards or punishments they should receive.

While there are many other uses, (involuntary) pre-existing biases that transform the AI technology from a neutral player to a perpetrator of social biases have been discovered, often related to discrimination based on race, gender or social status. The main argument for AI technologies is that they can decrease costs and eliminate human subjectivity (i.e. bias), yet, such technologies are based on existing datasets and repeat or enhance historical records of perpetrated social prejudices. This aspect of AI deserves much more attention as many other causes and challenges have already been identified. Nonetheless, the most critical point for the youth sector is that these technologies have been so far less visible to the society or persons involved. Since they have the potential to further increase social inequalities, monitoring and addressing such situations deserve additional efforts from both youth advocates and youth workers.

AI and the future of work - The connection of AI with the future of work has been one of the most explored topics. On the one hand, there is agreement that AI will shape future job offers, significantly impacting young generations and the competences that will be required. On the other hand, this topic generates controversies around the so-called social contract - how are the new educational systems and working conditions going to be; what is the impact on social rights when more individuals will be replaced by machines; what are the measures that could lead to a more qualitative and meaningful life, among others. Some discussions on the future of work push for more reforms in the educational and larger social system, sustained by an enthusiastic outlook. On the other end, considering that AI and automation will replace the most repetitive and low-skilled jobs, it also raises questions about the situation of young people, who are often found in precarious jobs, especially in their early professional years. Looking at the economic and health crises' impact in the past decade, this topic continues to be a priority.

AI and data privacy - The right to privacy has been one of the most debated digital rights in recent years. The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) offered partial solution to the new challenges created by new digital technologies. Nevertheless, privacy remains an ever-relevant discussion since many AI technologies - such as surveillance, facial recognition and many other technologies have become ubiquitous; either when they are used

transparently, for reasonable purposes (such as safety in schools or public spaces) or when used without the explicit consent of the person. All these raise questions about the society young people will live in, to which extent they will feel free to express themselves knowing how closely they are followed or to which extent they can have a say in accepting the use of such technologies.

AI and mental health - Extensive exposure to social networks, online video games or other entertainment technologies has put the spotlight on new ways in which AI can impact negatively both the health and the mental health of young people. The excessive use of online platforms combined with the filtering role of algorithms has led to increased negative body image, depression or even suicide. Moreover, bullying has transposed and grown online into cyberbullying as a complex phenomenon in itself. Studies show that girls are disproportionately affected by such technologies.

While many other examples and topics of interest can connect AI and youth, the list above highlights major points of interest for the youth sector. AI is built and centred around data. Data is the resource that fuels all AI technologies. For technologies to function or improve their performance, they need more data. This is particularly relevant to young people, as a group of early and frequent users of the Internet and technologies, who implicitly become the data source which feeds many of the private AI technologies - from social network platforms to smart home products, to video games and many others. Young people, youth work practitioners, educators, service providers and youth policy need to understand and pay attention to the implications of this this (in)voluntary sharing of data and its possible consequences.

More examples about the impact of AI can be found in the various reports and recommendations published by the [Council of Europe](#), [European Parliament](#), with other more specific resources looking into the impact on children or young people - [Memorandum on Artificial Intelligence and Child Rights](#) (UNICEF and UC Berkley and Human Rights Centre), [Youth and Artificial Intelligence: Where We Stand](#) (Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society).

ChatGPT a case study

The technology behind [ChatGPT](#) (created by the USA-based company, OpenAI) is described as a Large Language Model. In short it describes the potential of the tool to interact with individuals based on its capacity to anticipate the next sequence of words. Such technologies are also known as General Purpose AIs (GPAI) as their use can be applied in various contexts and for different goals. They are also categorised as Generative AIs, considering the capacity of such tools to generate new content based on short inputs –

text, images, videos. [DALL-E](#) or [Midjourney](#) are two other tools in the category, specialised in generating visual content.

Based on the approach taken previously, **ChatGPT** can be seen **as an enabler**. Whether used as a stand-alone tool or as a tool integrated in other platforms or products, its [benefits](#) for the youth sector could include: creative uses for communication and (self)expression - creating content that otherwise would require specialised skills, e.g. generating a press release based on short paragraph; a social media catchy announcement; a communication strategy for the organisation; productive uses - summarising reports/presentations, transforming a document into a PowerPoint presentation, generating inventories or identifying trends and priorities based on organisational documents or the online presence; interactive uses – using the chat functionality and its capacity to produce “human-like” text, such tools could be integrated to provide online services etc.

ChatGPT as a challenge for young people and the youth sector. Besides its many benefits, the tool comes with many risks. While it can bring benefits, the lack of understanding of its limitations or capacity to critically reflect on its outputs can generate new challenges. On the one hand, when using ChatGPT as an online tool (connected to Internet) or integrated in a search engine, it can pose a number of challenges by: producing content that sounds credible, but still generating mis/disinformation and completely inventing events that have never happened, at times leading to [radicalisation](#); raising [privacy concerns](#) – with the possibility to use it freely, many individuals can choose to share internal sensitive documents that include personal identifiable data (e.g. teacher or doctor using his personal records to generate a recommendation). Such tools do not offer sufficient safeguards for securing data and cases have shown that identifiable data can be discovered, creating risks for individuals but also for organisations. Considering the novelty and excitement of such tools, but also due to the lack of organisational strategies on ethical use of AI technologies, some [surveys](#) already point out that the majority of employees do not communicate to leadership for which tasks they use it.

Other challenges related to the use of generative AIs have been linked to: their capacity to [manipulate](#), especially due to their capacity to sound quite assertive and imitate human language, in some cases leading to extreme (for now isolated) cases such as [suicide](#); their capacity to generate malicious content, including deepfakes (synthetic media - visuals and audio media that imitate real humans, giving the feeling they are genuine while possibly promoting ill-intended messages), [harmful content](#) for children or for other audiences.

This brief case study shows how the same technology needs a dual perspective. The growing use of tools as ChatGPT in such a short time has raised additional questions on the use of AI technologies at large scale and their impact on society and individuals using them. While developing AI technologies can bring multiple benefits, as many stakeholders have already called for more attention on how to develop and deploy them and the urgency for

a governance system that ensures sufficient safeguards. Two open letters have been published during 2023 – one from the [international community](#), including prominent names in technology, and another [initiated by the Belgium academia community](#).

3. State of Play: Mapping international organisations and formal spaces of participation in AI governance processes

The main international organisations and institutions having a focus on AI policies and governance frameworks are Council of Europe, European Union (EU), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations system (UN), particularly through bodies such as UNESCO, UNICEF or International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Starting with 2017, all four organisations have initiated processes related to AI governance, including setting up expert groups and consultative bodies and proposing specific sets of laws or recommendations for standards in the field of AI. Considering the vast implications of AI technologies, these processes are complex and often dealt with at expert level. In this context, the role of civil society, and the youth sector, in particular, is not yet crystalised, and as the analysis shows, for the moment, it is relatively marginal. This section aims to document key processes and documents that can be further explored and used by the youth sector. AI governance is not just one process but a wider societal interest, with implications for human rights, economy or innovation, which is currently discussed at the international and national levels, but not yet defined how it will function.

Current debates on AI governance go into two main directions:

- 1) competitiveness – with governments all over the world looking to maintain or develop their competitiveness, hence the debates focus on elements such as the deployment of AI technologies in the business and public sector, support for private companies, investments in research and innovation, retaining and attracting specialised talent;
- 2) ethics, justice and human rights – more recently advanced, based on findings from academia and civil society organisations, which increased interest from public institutions as well. In recent years an increasing number of organisations started new initiatives focused on how to regulate AI and protect citizens, democracy, social justice and human rights from the misuse of AI technologies.

Even though the two dimensions of AI debates are not contradictory, they have sometimes led to blockages, as stakeholders are struggling to find the right balance between innovation and regulation, economic interest and human rights.

Based on the literature review of public documents, this section offers insights into the work of four international organisations tackling AI through more comprehensive approaches and some national AI initiatives. The review aims to 1) offer an overview of the existing AI processes, including key milestones and documents; 2) identify what are the spaces and

structures for participation; 3) analyse the youth dimension in each process, including the documents that guide the youth sector and how they reflect the impact of AI and digital technologies; specific opportunities for youth participation in AI governance, where and if they exist.

3.1. Council of Europe and AI

The Council of Europe, as the European organisation working to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law has been exploring a possible regulatory framework related to AI's impact on human rights. At the centre of the Council of Europe's AI agenda is the respect for fundamental rights and the development of capacity-building opportunities for stakeholder using or developing AI. It is also the first organisation that engaged directly with the European youth sector in its AI-related processes. In addition to the various Recommendations related to the use and development of AI, the [work in progress page](#) of the Council of Europe mentions ongoing work on “a [Framework] Convention on the design, development, and application of Artificial Intelligence systems based on the Council of Europe’s standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and conducive to innovation, in accordance with the relevant decisions of the Committee of Ministers – CAI”.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence ([CAHAI](#)), active between 2019-2021, and its successor the Committee on Artificial Intelligence ([CAI](#)), active between 2022-2024, is the first space created in the Council of Europe framework to advance debates on AI, explore and develop a possible legal framework on AI. In addition to representatives of the 46 member states, the CAI/CAHAI brought as observer members representatives of the private sector, civil society, research and academic institutions – including the [Joint Council on Youth \(CMJ\)](#) that brings together the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ). During its mandate, CAHAI organised one of the widest [multi-stakeholder consultations on the elements of a legal framework on AI](#) - including a total of 260 contributions, 31% coming from CSOs. Despite the high number of CSOs contributions, when looking in detail at the inventory of organisations, it can be observed that the European Youth Forum (the largest European umbrella organisation representing young people) is the only youth organisation which has submitted such a contribution.

Complementary to the formal process for defining an AI legal framework, the Council of Europe's main document guiding the youth sector - [Resolution CM/Res\(2020\)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030](#) explicitly connects the youth sector with the work of the Council of Europe on Internet governance and Artificial Intelligence and proposes as one of the strategic areas "improving institutional responses to emerging issues affecting young people's rights and their transition to adulthood, such as but not limited to, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, Artificial Intelligence, digital space, increased mobility and new forms of employment".

In terms of structures for participation in AI processes, the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), as an observer member of the CAHAI and CAI, has been the main body through which youth priorities were voiced. CMJ has also been engaged in the preparation process for the multi-stakeholder consultations.

Compared to all the other international organisations, it seems that the Council of Europe is the only structure in which the presence of youth voices and traditional youth NGOs is specifically visible, both through public consultations and formal processes. At the same time, it is worth noting that even when this exists, it is in the role of observer.

3.2. European Union and AI

Starting with 2017, the European Union (EU) has shown great interest in understanding the impact of AI on the economy and society at large, with many processes led by the European Commission and the European Parliament. As indicated in the EU documents, its approach is designed around three steps: 1) setting out the key requirements for trustworthy AI; 2) launching a large-scale pilot phase for feedback from stakeholders; 3) working on international consensus building for human-centric AI. In 2018 the EU adopted the first dedicated strategic documents - the Strategy [Artificial Intelligence for Europe](#) and the EU [Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence](#), and is currently in the process of finalising the proposal for the EU AI Act. The EU AI Act is expected to be the first major regulation on AI in Europe, so far without precedent at global level, to be adopted in 2023. Its main aim is to harmonise rules among EU Member States by addressing fundamental rights and defining the type of risks associated with AI.

The [High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence \(AI HLEG\)](#) 2018-2022, was set up by the European Commission to facilitate dialogue with other stakeholders and get input on AI. It included 52 members, selected through an open call, with the majority representing academia, industry associations, institutions, technology companies and a few civil society organisations – the most notable of them being the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Access Now and AlgorithmWatch. Youth organisations were not part of this structure, neither as formal members nor as observers.

Another space for discussing AI issues in the EU is the [European AI Alliance](#), described as a multi-stakeholder forum for engaging in a broad and open discussion on all aspects of AI development and its impact on the economy and society. The Alliance has no formal structure, and individuals or legal entities can join it by creating an online account on the designated platform. Annual Assemblies are organised to support the community and facilitate dialogue between EU bodies and members of the Alliance.

In addition to the two structures, the European Commission has also launched a public consultation on the White Paper on AI and the Report on the safety and liability implications of [Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things and robotics](#) (February and June 2020). Considering that this was the largest EU online [consultation on AI](#), the distribution from the 1 270 responses was as follows: 31% individual EU citizens, 18% private companies, 13% industry organisations, 13% academia, 11% civil society organisations (CSOs), 6% public authorities. Out of the 11% CSOs, none represented the youth sector.

The main document guiding the youth sector is the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#), adopted in December 2018. Whereas the Strategy does not have an explicit reference to AI, it recognises the impact of emerging technologies on young people. It proposes to "explore and promote the use of innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation, e.g. digital democracy tools and facilitate access to support youth participation in democratic life and engage young people in an inclusive way, whilst being aware that some young people do not have access to the internet and digital technologies, or the skills to use them". The Strategy is complemented by two other documents that frame the importance of digital technologies for young people, youth sector at large and education: (1) [Conclusions on Digital Youth Work](#) (2019), highlight the role of digital literacy and youth work to "allow for experiential learning in a non-formal setting and to involve young people in activities to strengthen their digital competences and media literacy. Youth work can also engage young people who are at risk of being left behind in a digitalised society"; and (2) the [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027](#) including two specific actions connected to AI: action 6 [Ethical guidelines on the use of AI and data in teaching and learning for educators](#) and [action 8](#) Updating the [European Digital Competence Framework](#) with new examples related to AI and data skills.

An initiative from the youth sector supporting the readiness of youth workers and youth work organisations to navigate the digital transition, including from an AI perspective, is the [Digital Youth Work Strategic Cooperation between National Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps](#) (DYW SNAC). Building on the Conclusion on [Digital Youth Work](#) and [Smart Youth Work](#), one of the [actions is dedicated to building competence frameworks and assessment tools](#) for 1) digital competences of youth workers and 2) digital capacities for youth work organisations. Grounded in the principles of critical digital literacy the proposed tools aim to strengthen the strategic approach to digital transformation in the youth sector, by putting a strong emphasis on ethical approaches and digital rights.

While the EU has a comprehensive approach to AI – from a human rights and skills perspective but also from an economic and innovation one, when looking at structures for participation in AI processes, young people and youth organisations do not seem to have a clear role, unless the debate is centred around education.

Based on all the current documents, the AI HLEG was the most important formal structure connected to AI debates and policies in the EU, and it did not include any youth organisation. Similarly, the [online consultation on the AI White Paper](#) does not contain any input from young organisations, even if some of the respondents explicitly pointed to this group and formulated additional recommendations such as: "working with civil society bodies in order to examine the needs of the citizens/consumers/elderly/youth/women", or "interdisciplinary collaboration, research, participation (to include youth)".

3.3. United Nations and AI

Under the United Nations (UN) system, several initiatives on AI, have been developed, including projects dedicated to children's rights, to explore the benefits and limitations of this emerging technology. In 2019, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) developed the first global standard-setting instrument on the ethics of Artificial Intelligence (legally non-binding).

The High-level [Panel on Digital Cooperation](#) (2018-2019), convened by the UN Secretary General, was the first leading platform to connect the UN agenda with the impact of new digital technologies and their wider impact on society and human rights. [Composed of 20 members](#), with many high profile public persons, it also included a few CSO representatives, the most notable being the Wide Web Foundation and Oxfam GB, without any representative of a youth organisation or platform. Following the work of the Panel, the Report [Road map for digital cooperation: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation](#) is the guiding document defining the overall framework and key areas on which the UN aims to focus when dealing with digital issues, among them: achieving universal connectivity by 2030; ensuring digital inclusion for all, including for the most vulnerable; ensuring the protection of human rights in the digital era; and supporting global cooperation on Artificial Intelligence.

UNESCO is the first UN body to adopt with its member states the very first global standard-setting instrument on AI - the [Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence](#) (2021). The comprehensive process behind the Recommendation has references to the engagement of the CSOs in the process. Still, it is not clear youth organisations were involved. The Ad Hoc Expert Group (AHEG) appointed to draft the Recommendation is defined as a group of 24 renowned specialists, none of whom come from the youth civil society. In 2022, UNESCO has published the [Multistakeholder AI development: 10 building blocks for inclusive policy design](#), a guidance for all stakeholders who are designing AI processes. This document has significant value since it pinpoints as one of the main stakeholders young people, youth organisations and experts working with young people: "Empowering and including young people adds an intergenerational perspective and enhances trust in public and private institutions. Young people are front-runners in adopting new technology and bringing fresh ideas to the table.

Being part of the debate allows youth to get acquainted with the trade-offs and dilemmas faced by policymakers".

UNICEF, even if addressing children under 18 years, is one of the few organisations advancing participation in AI governance. [AI for Children](#) and [Generation AI](#) are initiatives led by UNICEF with the support of a broad partnership aiming at "outlining the opportunities and challenges, as well as engaging stakeholders to build AI-powered solutions that help realise and uphold child rights". In this context, UNICEF has organised consultations and produced a series of resources and reports on the impact of AI on children's rights. The [Policy Guidance on AI for Children](#) (2021) can also be an inspiration for the wider youth sector, being centred around three cumulative perspectives for a child-centred AI policy or system deployment:

- Protection (do no harm) – children need to be protected from any harmful and discriminatory impacts of AI systems and interact with them in a safe way;
- Provision (do good) – the opportunities that AI systems bring to children of all ages and backgrounds – such as to support their education, health care and right to play – need to be fully leveraged when it is appropriate to use AI systems;
- Participation (include all children) – children are given agency and opportunity to shape AI systems and make educated decisions on their use of AI and the impact that AI can have on their lives. All children should be empowered by AI and play a leading role in designing a responsible digital future for all.

All UN initiatives are marked by sizeable multi-stakeholder consultation processes, each looking to engage Member States directly, other relevant stakeholders, and individual citizens.

As multiple UN agencies have engaged in AI-related debates, there is not a single overarching process but rather several initiatives that contribute to the UN efforts to advance AI governance. The most recent process related to AI – the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI – is the first and most comprehensive on this topic, even if it is not a legally binding instrument.

From a youth perspective, UNICEF is the body which has the strongest focus on connecting children and teenagers with AI by providing guidance to all stakeholders interested in developing or using AI technologies.

The two guiding documents developed by UNESCO [Multistakeholder AI development: 10 building blocks for inclusive policy design](#) and UNICEF [Policy Guidance on AI for Children](#) can be used as key tools to further support and advocate for youth engagement in formal AI governance processes.

3.4. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and AI

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has a prominent work on AI since 2016, with its Committee on Digital Economy Policy (CDEP) being the main driver and building on the results of various digital-related projects, such as [Going Digital](#), [Next Production Revolution](#) or Future of Education and Skills 2030: Conceptual Learning Framework – a document mainly focusing on [Education and AI: preparing for the future & AI, Attitudes and Values](#). Most importantly, the [OECD recommendation - ethical principles on AI](#) was one of the first documents adopted by national governments on the topic and were used as a reference in many national processes of setting AI frameworks.

Since 2020, OECD has been the secretariat of the [Global Partnership on AI](#) (GPAI) - a multi-stakeholder initiative, where in addition to government representatives, it also engages a Multistakeholder Expert Group (MEG) which can be joined by experts from science, industry or civil society, organised around four main working groups: responsible AI, data governance, future of work, innovation and commercialisation. Based on the [2022 MEG report](#), most of its members are representatives of academia, think tanks or technology specialists. It also includes Algorithm Watch, one of the few organisations working on digital rights.

The organisation has a specific focus on economic growth policies while at looking to ensure that AI is approached in a wider social context. The spaces created by the OECD to shape AI are mostly centred on the participation of governments, international organisations, academia and think-tanks, and the private sector. CSO presence is rather weak, with no formal role for youth organisations.

It is still important to take stock of one of the publications OECD has issued on youth, the Communication guide on "[Engaging young people in open government](#)". It specifically encourages member states to use a diversity of channels to engage young people, including by involving youth councils. National open government initiatives are relevant in the context of AI as, in addition to supporting government transparency, they strongly promote the publication and reuse of public data (information about policies, public budget etc.) - resources that civil society organisations can use to create their own AI-powered tools to monitor and influence decision making.

Traditionally, the OECD does not have a youth policy or a guiding document for the youth sector, and overall, it is not a structure involving youth organisations directly. Still, many of its events, especially those focused on skills and education, have invited youth organisations and young people to join the debate. Current processes on AI governance do not indicate any involvement of the youth sector, and no other plans suggest a dedicated approach in the future.

However, based on the policy proposals and resources developed, including the above-mentioned document "Future of Education and Skills 2030", readiness for AI in the OECD

context considers the development of youth skills, attitudes and values for this new AI-powered world.

3.5. National Governments – brief overview

National authorities in many countries started developing strategies and policies to promote and regulate AI even before an international approach was agreed. National approaches have a strong focus on economic competitiveness that results in priorities related to the business environment, research, innovation and talent retention or attraction. A reason for this might be because AI strategies are often led by ministries in charge of economy or business affairs. Youth ministries do not seem to be relevant actors in shaping or implementing such strategies.

A short review shows that despite concern around ethics and citizens' protection, the focus is still on the economic and innovation dimensions. Moreover, youth or young people are not often mentioned, and the youth sector at large does not seem to be a stakeholder group yet.

Some examples on AI development at the national level include the following:

December 2017 – Finland was the first country in the European Union to publish a national AI vision, with the involvement of a dedicated government steering group, under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. "Finland's [Age of Artificial Intelligence Turning Finland into a leading country in the application of Artificial Intelligence](#)" identifies, among others, eight key actions concerning AI and other dimensions such as competitiveness, use of data and adoption of AI, talent retention and attraction, uses in the public sector, public-private partnerships, investments.

November 2018 – Germany adopted a [Federal Strategy on AI \(updated in 2020\)](#), focusing on securing its competitiveness, accelerating investments, and boosting research and development while ensuring that AI development is socially responsible.

2018 – United Kingdom – published the [AI Sector Deal Policy Paper](#) (updated in May 2019). The paper positions AI and data in the Industrial Strategy, with a focus on the business sector, but at the same time emphasises the importance of robust thinking and policy around AI ethics. The UK has already adopted a [Digital Strategy](#) in 2017, which addresses in more detail other priorities too, including the digital skills dimension.

2019 – Estonia adopted its national Artificial Intelligence strategy "[AI Kratt strategy](#)" focused on four pillars: boosting AI in the government, AI in economy, skills along with research and development, and the legal environment. One of the main objectives was to have at least 50 cases of using Artificial Intelligence in the public sector in Estonia by 2020, building on previous national efforts in the field. Even if the national strategy does not give a clear

indication of the role of civil society, it mentions various measures to develop “responsible development and sustainable management of AI solutions, methodology for impact assessment” and initiatives for public awareness on AI.

Based on [EU data](#), as of February 2022, 23 Member States and Norway have published their national AI strategies, and four others are in progress.

It is not yet clear to which extent youth organisations and young people have been involved in the development of AI national strategies in European countries, if at all. Nevertheless, most strategies prioritise the investment in digital skills and public awareness of the impact of AI.

From the literature review, one example stood out, even if not directly connected with an AI strategy, the Canadian [Digital Youth Advisory Committee \(Digital YAC\)](#). The Digital YAC, created in 2017, brought together 14 young people aged 16 -20 for a one-year (volunteer-based) mandate. A new selection process was organised every year. The role of Digital YAC was to contribute to government’s consultations on digital issues and offer advice on public digital platforms and services. Public information does not indicate clearly if such a practice has been continued.

The UNICEF policy brief "[National AI strategies and children](#)" that analysed 20 national strategies, looking for key search terms such as child, children, minor, youth, young, student, primary, secondary, high school and education, concluded that even if there are strong references to digital skills and education, there are very few ones related to the impact of AI - in relation to inclusion, data protection or digital rights.

Adding to the many international initiatives, one digital platform stands out for stakeholders interested in having an overview of existing AI policies - [Globalpolicy.ai](#). It is a digital cooperation initiative between all major international organisations (Council of Europe, EU, OECD, UN bodies, among others) where citizens and policy makers can access updated information on global AI policy initiatives. The platform is organised around three focus areas: (1) Responsible development and use of trustworthy and ethical AI, (2) AI aligned with human rights and democracy, and (3) AI for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

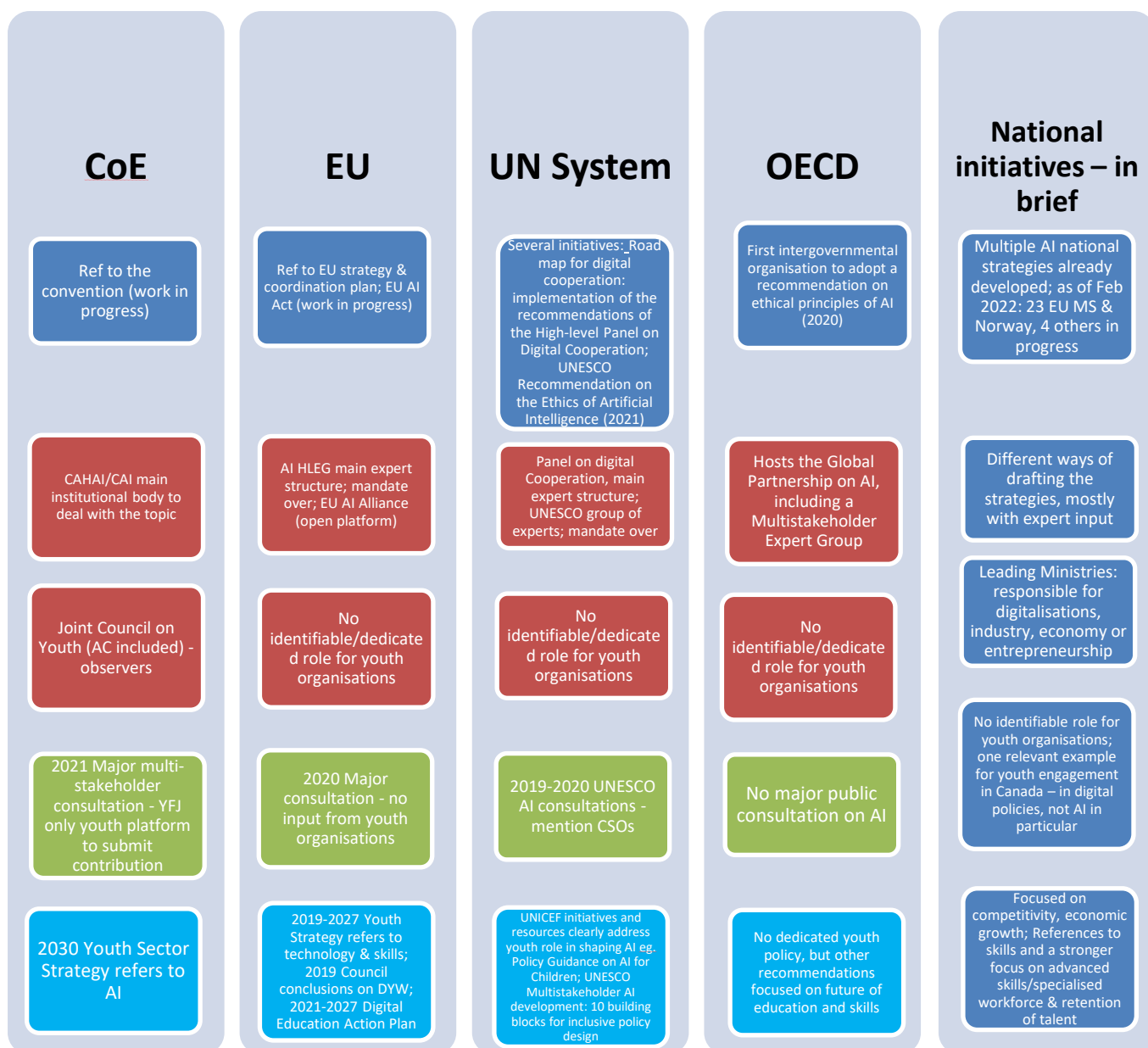


Fig. 2. Overview of the four international AI governance processes

4. Additional spaces, movements and structures that shape AI

In addition to the formal AI governance processes and formal expert groups or consultation started at international and national levels, several other initiatives show young people's interest in shaping AI technologies and related policies. Although young people and youth civil society organisations appear to be less active in the formal process described in the section above, the initiatives mapped below show an interest in the topic and efforts to contribute to the broader social debate around the implications of AI. Some of the initiatives also point to the diversity of youth groups active on this topic, even if they do not necessarily come from traditional youth organisations or groups that do not even define themselves as youth-led or youth-representative organisations.

From the very beginning, it is essential to notice the different ways in which young people can be involved. This section makes a distinction between participation to shape AI debates and related policies and participation to shape AI technologies.

4.1. Young people shaping AI debates and related digital policies

a. Movements and organisations shaping AI debates

Campaigns and movements organised around the topic of facial recognition - New youth movements engaged in defending digital rights focusing on "facial recognition" and "biometric mass surveillance" - a technology that can be used to monitor all public presence of individuals and identify unique personal traits that can later be used to inform other decisions (e.g. monitor and punish people that join protests). [ReclaimYourFace](#) is one of the most active European movements advocating for the ban of these technologies: "we question why these sensitive data are being used and raise the alarm on the impact on our freedoms in public spaces". They have a strong presence both through online media and through direct dialogue with members of the European Parliament. The movement is globally present too, with similar objectives being pursued through campaigns like [Big Brother Watch](#) in UK or [Ban the Scan](#) in New York, United States of America. Digital and human rights activists initiated most of these campaigns.

Campaigns and movements organised around the topic of copyright - During the 2016-2018 public debates on the EU Copyright Directive a strong youth reaction was felt, especially around two proposed articles: article 13, also named the "meme ban" or the #UploadFilter being harshly criticised for the obligation that it might have created for online platforms to remove copyrighted content, thus considered to be possibly harming for many digital content creators; and article 11 also named the #LinkTax which was asking platforms such as news aggregators to remunerate publications/publishers when using snippets of their articles. Article 13 particularly mobilised many young Internet users, young vloggers or influencers who feared that online platforms would ban their content and their freedom of expression would be limited, since memes and other visuals based on copyrighted images are used for online expression. The campaign was mostly visible through the [#SaveYourInternet](#) platform and hashtag, mostly engaging digital rights organisations. The final [EU Directive](#) adopted in 2019, which managed to address many of the challenging points, has particular relevance since it was one of the central moments when young internet users showed an explicit interest in digital policies.

Young European Federalists (JEF) is a traditional youth organisation that, even if not directly visible in formal AI governance processes and structures, has shown particular interest in working on the topics of Internet and AI governance. The organisation's Political committee on internal European policy drafted a thematic recommendation "[Calling for an ethical and efficient EU policy framework on Artificial Intelligence](#)". Furthermore, in 2021-2022 with the

support of the European Youth Foundation, the organisation organised a [pan-European project on Internet governance](#), looking, among others, at the role of young people in the current processes.

[AlgorithmWatch](#) is one of the most active organisations on AI. They are most closely involved in formal processes of setting up AI legislation and in the various movements that advocate for digital rights, including ReclaimYourFace. Founded in 2017, it is described as a "non-profit research and advocacy organisation committed to watching, unpack and analysing Automated Decision-Making (ADM) systems and their impact on society". Although they are not defined as a youth-led organisation or organisation advocating for youth rights, most of their members are young professionals. The organisation stands out at the European level, working almost exclusively on the issue of AI and human rights.

Algorithmic Justice League is one of the first movements and later organisations focused on the bias in AI technologies and their impact on civil rights. Initiated by a young graduate of the MIT Media Lab in 2016, and rooted in her own accidental research of how AI technologies are generating biased results (either based on gender or race), [Algorithmic Justice League](#) has become a strong advocate for digital rights, by combining research and art. The organisation has gained more international momentum after launching the movie [Coded Bias](#).

b. Institution-led initiatives contributing to youth engagement in AI and Internet Governance

Youth Department of the Council of Europe is focusing on connecting young people with AI and wider Internet and digital governance issues. It has organised several initiatives to advance youth involvement with AI. Among them, the [two dedicated seminars](#) in 2019 and 2020, concluded with the first [Declaration on Youth Participation in AI Governance](#); the Expert group on AI literacy proposed tools and resources on AI literacy for the youth sector and the 2022 [Training Course on AI literacy with young people](#). Moreover, the 2022 [Democracy Here | Democracy Now](#) campaign and [Youth Action Week](#), organised by the youth sector of the Council of Europe with the aim to revitalise democracy and build mutual trust between young people, democratic institutions and processes, included among its three central objectives - youth participation in digital transformation, including AI and Internet governance. The efforts by the Youth Department between 2019-2022 show the potential of connecting young people with AI and the interest through thematic activities. Nevertheless, most participants do not belong to traditional youth organisations (youth or student councils or standard youth organisations). The groups are diverse and include young people with legal or technical backgrounds, human rights defenders, educators in formal education or entrepreneurs.

In addition to its direct work on Youth and AI, the Council of Europe youth sector is recognised as a stakeholder that has actively supported youth participation in Internet Governance processes and supported the youth organisations to be active on the topic. Since 2018 it has

organised annual youth delegations to join both the EuroDIG and Global IGF. It has hosted a number of events and study visits dedicated to the topic in the two European Youth Centres, while the European Youth Foundation has included Internet Governance among its funding priorities.

UN - Internet Governance Forum - among general spaces and structures for dialogue and participation, the UN convened the first [Internet Governance Forum \(IGF\)](#) in 2006 – a multi-stakeholder platform for policy dialogue that aims to inform and inspire those interested in the topic, without having a decision-making mandate. Since then, the IGF convenes annually and engages stakeholders in debates around emerging technologies and their implications. IGF chapters have been created at regional ([EuroDIG](#)) and national level, including a series of Youth Initiatives that have started to gain momentum. Nevertheless, practices across countries differ significantly, in some cases casting doubts on their participatory approach and inclusiveness.

One of the most significant practices that have emerged at the European level is the YOUTHDIG, a yearly pre-event to the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) aimed to foster active participation of young people (ages 18-30). The event does not have a specific focus on young people traditionally engaged in youth organisations or representation of youth interests. Still, it has a wider audience defined as "newcomers in Internet Governance, those who do not have any prior experience and want to learn something new or those who work on a specific subject area (e.g. AI, cybersecurity, law, art, communications, biology, medicine, or other) and want to broaden their understanding on how digitalisation or Internet policies would impact their fields.". In addition to the learning dimension of the event, the [Youth Messages](#), drafted by the participants to the YOUTHDIG have become a tradition and an opportunity where youth priorities (including in connection with AI) can be captured annually and further promoted in the European and Global IGFs.

EU - Better Internet for Kids (BIK) - an integral part of the [BIK strategy](#), updated in 2022 after ten years since the first one, is the [BIK Youth programme](#), including the BIK Youth Panels organised annually in the context of the Safer Internet Forum and the BIK Youth Ambassadors. The programme offers a space for young people (under 18) to be active at both national and European levels on issues related to a safer/better Internet. Many of the Youth Ambassadors are supported in joining the European and global IGF to increase the impact of their work.

4.2. Young people shaping technologies and society

The pervasive nature of AI technologies and the widespread use of technology among young people calls for additional analysis of how young people and youth civic organisations are involved in designing the products or platforms they use. The role of young people in the world of AI is not, and should not be, limited to that of basic consumers but be expanded to that of meaningful creators of social solutions and technology.

a. Young people as co-creators of smart cities

If the most visible debates around AI governance take place at the international and national level, where legislation and macro policies are created, their actual implementation of both policies and technologies happens at local level. In this context, the engagement of young citizens in developing smart cities becomes increasingly important. Smart cities as a concept is built around the integration of technologies in the way the cities function, from sensors that monitor the quality of air, traffic intensity to automation of public services, all having a strong focus on collecting and using data, implicitly a strong AI feature. In this context, it is relevant to look at how municipalities engage or could engage young people in co-designing these developments.

Amsterdam a brief overview - Based on current literature review, it is hard to tell how European countries specifically involve young people or youth organisations in their smart city strategies and implementation bodies. Nevertheless, one of the countries that are advanced in smart city initiatives and are actively promoting citizen engagement is the Netherlands, with Amsterdam occupying a central role. [Amsterdam Smart City](#) platform is described as "an open innovation platform that brings together innovation professionals from governments, companies, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations to shape the city and region of the future". Moreover, in 2020 Amsterdam launched an [algorithm register](#) which allows citizens to have an easy overview of what are the AI-powered municipal services, including information about how it functions and what could be potential ethical implications (e.g. how data is stored, or if there is human oversight).

Amsterdam is also one of the founders of the [Cities Coalition for Digital Rights](#), today gathering more than 50 cities, which counts the piloting of the Digital Rights Governance Framework in the cities of Brussels Dublin, Sofia, and Tirana; as well as the Global Observatory of Urban Artificial Intelligence (GOUAI), including the Atlas of Urban AI which maps ethical urban AI initiatives.

[City of Saskatoon Smart Cities Challenge Proposal](#) - Under an initiative of the Canadian government, municipalities were invited to submit proposals on how to improve the lives of their residents through innovation, data and connected technology. As one of the selected winners for the initiatives (winning a \$10 million budget to implement the proposal), the Canadian city Saskatoon placed at the centre of its proposal young people as the beneficiaries and active agents of change. Part of their initiative is setting up a Youth Advisory Group (15-25 years old) to be involved in all stages of the initiative, which ultimately aims to create a collaborative technology hub comprised of multiple software platforms that young people, family members, service providers and institutions will be able to use in real-time, based on defined uses.

[UN Habitat - People-centred smart cities flagship programme](#) - is one of the UN initiatives calling for and working on more inclusive approaches in developing smart city initiatives. It has also launched a guide on [Shaping Co-creation & Collaboration in Smart Cities](#) among its many instruments. The resources created under the flagship programme can serve as inspiration for all those looking to expand their practices.

b. Hackathons, civic labs and games as a space to co-create with young people

Either for supporting smart city initiatives or for wider empowerment of young people to shape AI technologies, the list below showcases some successful practices that can serve as inspiration when designing co-creative practices with young people.

[Teens in AI](#) - Teens in AI is a movement officially launched at the UN's AI For Good Global Summit with the mission to improve diversity and inclusion in Artificial Intelligence. It primarily aims to offer young people aged 12-18 early exposure to AI for social good, rooted in ethical principles. Through its different programmes (accelerators, incubators, hackathons) supports diverse youth groups, not just with technical skills, to explore a future in technology and AI through collaborative, hands-on learning experiences. Its core objectives include developing ethical AI technologies with the support of mentors and experts in different fields. The movement is an example of how to invest in the next generation of responsible young innovators. At the same time, it is a valuable exercise to expand the understanding of how AI technologies work, even to young people who are not interested in becoming ICT professionals.

[Youthful cities](#) is a Canadian social enterprise with a tradition of generating "data-driven solutions to make cities better for everyone". One of their focuses is also engaging young people in co-designing processes through residential Labs or hackathons. [30Lab](#) is the framework under which most initiatives of this kind happen, described as "a pop-up innovation lab for 30 local young urban influencers to come together over a series of four workshops to create innovative solutions on resilient city systems". The young co-creators have the chance to develop their ideas with the support of mentors, present them in a public forum and gain seed funding, after which they can get additional help to implement their solutions.

[Canadian Open Data Experience {CODE}](#), an event organised in 2014 by the Government of Canada, brought together over 900 technology developers, students, and open data enthusiasts from across Canada in a 48-hour hackathon. Working under the theme of "Solving Problems and Increasing Productivity Through the Use of Open Data", the participants were invited to use the available public data sets to create new products - in total, more than 100 applications were created.

Gaming and Gamification as a tool for co-design - One of the solutions meant to incentivise youth participation on issues that have not been traditionally open to them (e.g. such as urban

planning or smart cities) is the use of the environments where young people already spend a considerable time - online games. [Block by Block Foundation](#) is an organisation tapping into this potential and has created a new methodology to engage young people, as well as other social groups, by using one of the most popular online games, Minecraft. The participants can use the game's environment to redesign, co-imagine and plan how specific places in their community could look. With the support of the programme, organisations or informal groups can have their community mapped and integrated into a Minecraft game, allowing them to work on concrete ideas. Since such initiatives are usually implemented with the support of local decision makers or institutions interested in transforming their ideas into reality, participants gain a sense of fulfilment since it is not just an ideation game.

What the future wants is an exhibition co-developed with young people to explore the impact of technology. Initiated by Tactical Tech, a Berlin based organisation, and implemented with the involvement of 200 young people, aged 13 to 18 years old, the [interactive exhibition](#) explores young people's perspectives on technology, by responding to the questions "What is it like to grow up in a digital world? How does it impact you? And in your digital future, what would you like to change and what would you like to protect?". The organisation describes this process as a [co-creation of a public education intervention](#), as young people are invited to reflect on the impact of technology and at the same time develop their critical thinking through curiosity.

Maker spaces, a movement dating back to 2005, are not only an opportunity exclusively for young people, but also a possibility to engage bigger audiences with creating technology. Maker spaces bring a great added value in educating young people on how technologies work, empowering them to co-create their small AI-powered projects (from software applications to robots). Often seen as a learning opportunity for STE(A)M education (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) they can achieve bigger purposes. The 2020 Guide "[Setting up makerspaces in youth work organisations](#)" created by the National Youth Council of Ireland can serve as an inspiration.

Complementing all the above practices, focused on the actual engagement of young people, *AI ethical advisory boards of companies* deserve a special attention. As debates about AI governance have intensified during the past years, even before the major human-rights international organisations started working on the topic, many of the companies active in developing AI technologies have recognised the importance to engage wider social groups in their design process. This brief literature analysis does not allow for an in-depth understanding of how advanced the practices are (e.g. to which extent all technology companies set up such structures, who is part of them, what is the selection procedure of such boards, or even what their role is). Youth stakeholders should pay more attention to these structures and become relevant players in them – either by claiming a role in the existing ones, or proposing the creation of such structures within other companies and organisations. Companies such as DeepMind (now a division of Alphabet, Inc.) mention the

creation of the [Ethics and Society](#) as an internal platform to engage scientists, practitioners and citizens. IBM also mentions and [AI Ethics Board](#) “as a central, cross-disciplinary body to support a culture of ethical, responsible, and trustworthy AI throughout IBM”. Even if existing data does not allow for a precise identification of all the organisations or target groups involved, these initiatives are dominated by representatives of academia, think tanks and other specialists with specific backgrounds in technology or law. Youth sector stakeholders should claim their place in them.

5. Opportunities and challenges in promoting young people’s participation in AI debates

This section builds on the findings from the documents and practices analysed above, as well as on the input received through the focus group organised within the Symposium “[Navigating Transitions: adapting policy to young people’s changing realities](#)” (Tirana, 2022).

5.1. Challenges and limitations

Synergies between youth and AI policies - There are no clear synergies between AI and youth policies. While youth strategies refer to digital technologies' role, very few mention AI specifically. From the AI perspective, legal documents and specific policies dealing with the topic have little or no references to young people or the youth sector. Most often, when youth and AI are connected it is in relation to digital skills and the future of work.

Formal spaces for youth participation in AI governance – Current spaces that public institutions have created to shape AI governance focus mostly on expert input and less on the engagement of all relevant stakeholders – by age groups or socio-economic status. Even if young people represent the largest majority among Internet and technology users, they are not singled out in these processes and have not been invited to join them as a specific type of stakeholder.

Involvement of traditional youth organisations in formal consultation processes – Based on existing data, there is no clear indication that youth organisations had a solid contribution to past consultations related to AI documents and frameworks. Most of the stakeholders in these processes include national governments, the private sector, academia and think tanks. Civil society organisations are mostly represented through organisations with specific AI expertise, consumer organisations, trade unions and occasionally, human, or digital rights defenders. Considering the asymmetrical powers, especially between those of technology stakeholders and civil society organisations or even academia, special measures are needed to even the playing field.

After analysing documents of each international organisations, it can be concluded that Council of Europe is the organisation which has involved most closely the youth sector in its processes by having the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), including the Advisory Council on Youth (AC), as an observer member of the CAHAI/CAI; moreover, its consultative process includes a

wide percentage of CSOs contributions, including that of the European Youth Forum - the largest European platform for youth representation.

The EU has not included youth organisations in the main expert group advancing AI debates and proposing policy recommendations – the High Level Expert Group on AI (HLEG AI). At the same time, during its first main public consultation on the White Paper on AI in 2020, no youth organisation submitted any input.

The UN and OECD have proposed a series of recommendations and created resources to support their member states to have a multi-stakeholder approach in their AI processes; nevertheless, it is not visible to which extent young people and youth organisations have contributed to the international process that they have led.

Inclusiveness of national AI processes – At the national level the institutions leading AI processes are often ministries of economy and industry, hence, the main directions seem to be more connected to economic growth and the business sector. The role of ministries in charge of youth or that of youth organisations does not seem to be explicitly mentioned. Mirroring international processes, national ones have the same tendency to connect youth with AI only when it is about digital competences, building new technical talent or retaining expertise.

AI policies and the youth sector at large – Considering the low engagement of the youth sector in both national and international processes, it may be assumed that there is a limited understanding and awareness of which are the institutions working on AI and where these policies are shaped. This challenge raises questions about how well informed youth organisations are about AI policies and processes in general.

Democratising AI - from a technical field to popular culture - Understanding that there is low youth engagement in the formal AI governance process, but that there are still other active stakeholders (including academia, private companies or more specialised digital rights organisations), it might be assumed that youth stakeholders have a fear of not mastering enough the topic and avoid participation. It is natural to expect that professionals with a technical, legal or even philosophical background can contribute easier and faster to international processes regulating AI. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that existing processes have not allowed sufficient time for wider audiences to join the debate and have meaningful contributions. Future initiatives require increased efforts, because any law that will be adopted at the international level will ultimately have to be implemented at the national and local levels.

Understanding the impact of AI technologies - While there is an agreement that AI technologies have positive and negative impact, current literature does not include enough specific examples. The impact of social networks and their algorithms on young people is among the best-documented fields; nevertheless, the interaction of young people with AI

technologies goes well beyond this. In this context, there is a need to collect concrete cases, especially on biases and discriminations by AI technologies. This becomes even more important in the context of limited research on AI impact versus the generally very positive image of AI technologies among young people. Such documentation and research will help increase reflection on broader social implications of AI.

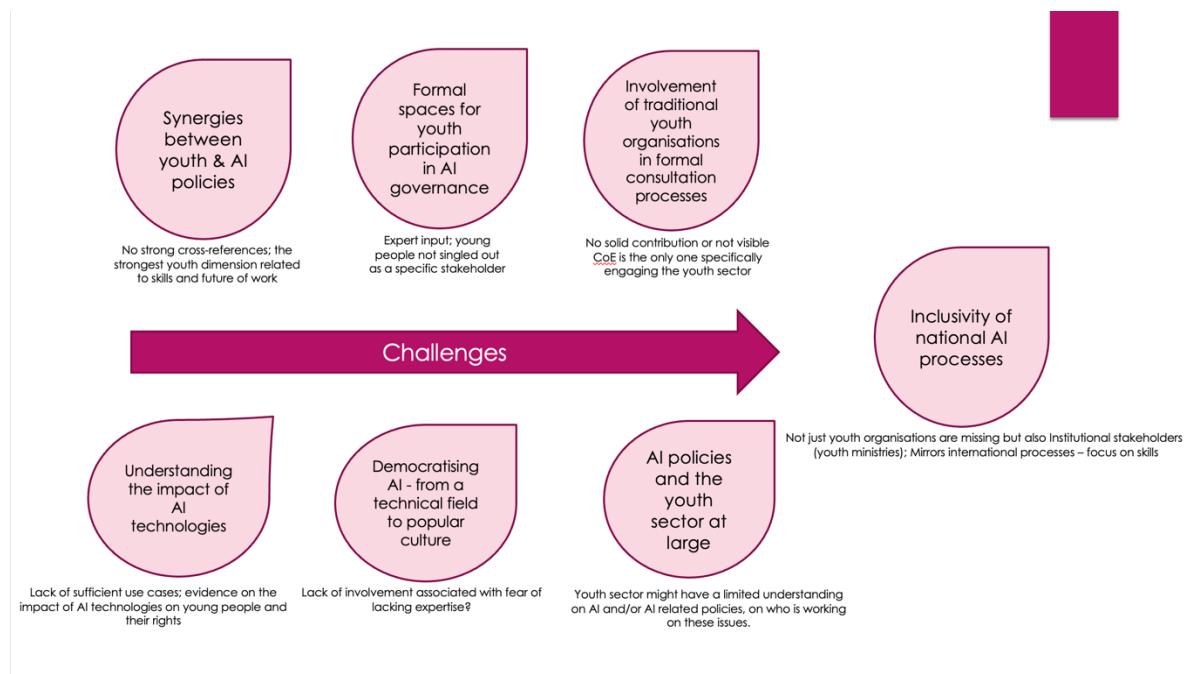


Fig. 3. Overview of challenges – youth and AI

5.2. Opportunities and avenues to be explored

AI competences and critical digital literacy – All existing documents, including most national AI strategies, have references to developing AI competences and jobs of the future – including advanced skills for experts or future engineers, but also basic AI literacy – thus, making AI education a priority for the youth sector too. While formal education focuses on advancing technical skills and creating more ICT experts, new resources are needed to support young people in understanding the everyday impact of technology. This calls for more non-formal learning opportunities as well as a more robust engagement of youth workers and other youth stakeholders with these topics. In short, AI and critical digital literacy resources and programmes are needed for youth multipliers (including youth leaders, youth workers, non-formal educators) and young people. This also calls for a reflection on the competences needed for these groups and who should develop such approaches.

AI and youth activism – There is a consensus that any AI strategy or framework should include ethical principles to protect citizens and their rights, youth organisations could have an important role in shaping the mechanisms through which these principles are implemented and monitored at the national and local level. Acting as human rights watchdogs and supporting young people to voice their problems when AI systems might interfere with their

lives. Traditional youth organisations (youth councils and similar umbrella organisations) need to define their role and agenda concerning which rights AI might impact.

Gaining momentum – AI standards, policies and laws – The recently adopted AI policies and legal instruments, such as the 2021 UNESCO's Recommendation on Ethics of AI, or the current work done by the European Union (AI Act, AI Liability Act and Digital Services Act) and Council of Europe (work on defining a legal AI instrument) allow the youth sector to easily position itself and understand what are the main AI aspects regulated.

While the UNESCO and the EU processes are closed or almost finalised, the Council of Europe allows more space for involvement, and the CAI offers a specific context to follow the topic. For the remaining open process, youth could mobilise either by engaging directly with bodies and representatives of international organisations or by approaching national governments that will ultimately have the last say in these processes. Using these moments to advance a youth agenda on AI could be beneficial for increasing the recognition of the youth sector as a valuable stakeholder, but it will also ensure a role in the national actions that will follow upon the adoption of these documents. This last part is where most efforts should be channelled because international regulation processes usually offer a generous framework in which national governments can implement the proposals. This opens an important door for youth organisations that want to ensure AI regulations' cover social rights. Finally, youth organisations should secure their role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of any AI strategy.

Gaining momentum – Youth policies and programmes – As identified, some major documents guiding the youth sector within the various national and international institutions reflect only lightly on the impact of digital technologies. Other initiatives that specifically put digital at the centre, such as the new EU Digital Education Plan or the extensive work done by the Council of Europe's youth sector, shows there is a momentum to connect better youth and AI. At the EU level, a particular focus could be put on the mid-term evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 as well as the two EU Youth Programmes (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps), to ensure that elements relating to the impact of AI on youth rights and opportunities are better covered. In the revised and next generation of strategies and programmes. The establishment of a new [SALTO Digital](#) is another opportunity for the European youth sector to advance new knowledge and practices.

Cooperation with local and national authorities – Starting in 2017, many national governments have adopted national strategies or action plans on AI. While it is not clear that the youth sector had any direct contribution, it is important for the sector to have a proactive role and claim a space in the debates related to AI. In this context, some ideas that the youth sector could explore include setting up digital youth advisory boards (at national or local level) – an inspiration can be the Canadian model for the Digital Youth Advisory Committee; contributing to established digital transformation councils or, in case they do not exist, initiate

dialogue platforms on digital and technology issues. Smart city initiatives should be especially followed as that is the most tangible place where the impact of AI can be seen, either through the presence of technology on the streets, in public spaces or through public services. Understanding that not all spaces that contribute to AI governance include the term Artificial Intelligence is equally important. That is why young people and youth organisations should react and get involved in debates around the topics of digital transformation, internet of things (IoT), smart cities, Internet, digital or AI governance.

Bridging the information and data gap – The impact of AI technologies – from Automated Decision Making algorithms used by social media platforms and many others – on the everyday life of citizens is not yet fully understood. Current academic research and civil society reports still do not capture all challenges young people face when interacting with these technologies. In this context, the youth sector could be essential in gathering specific data and information, especially when looking at AI's impact on youth rights and the most disadvantaged youth groups, which could later feed into the bigger AI policy processes.

Youth as a digital and AI catalysts – Accepting that young people might not have played a significant role in shaping AI policies, they still represent the largest share of Internet and technology users. In this capacity, they can act as promoters for deploying responsible AI technologies in both public and private sectors, especially for technologies with a purpose of social good. While many debates focus on how to mitigate possible risks of AI, it is important to be aware that the technology also has benefits that should be further explored. For this purpose, young people could act as catalysts that support public institutions, NGOs, youth workers and youth services to take stock of this opportunity and use AI for better purposes (e.g. offering tailored services, efficiently planning and using public funds, enhancing communication with citizens and outreach to new groups). Examples included in this paper - from hackathons to the use of games or maker spaces - can be used as inspiration to support the creative spirit of young people in shaping AI technologies.

Youth leaders and youth workers as critical supporters of AI technologies – Considering that AI technologies bring both benefits and challenges it is important to engage youth leaders and youth workers as promoters of responsible AI. On the one hand, the adoption of new technologies in the youth sector is still low and often received with reluctance. On the other hand, both young people and educators have low digital skills – these two elements can lead to even more negative reactions towards AI technologies, especially once the awareness on possible negative impact of AI increases. Nonetheless, it is important to invest sufficient resources in building a culture which embraces technology while staying critical to how it is used.

Cooperation with private technology companies – As youth organisations and young people try to find their way in the maze of Artificial Intelligence, technology companies are natural stakeholder for any debate related to AI technologies. As creators of these technologies, they

also have a responsibility for the society in which their products are used. As it has been noted, AI ethics boards have started to become a practice at least within the well-known AI companies. In this context, youth stakeholders are invited to initiate a connection with these companies for two reasons: (1) to contribute to a democratised culture of AI, even if not in an expert capacity, young people and professionals working with young people can have an informed say on the products and services developed (especially when they are the main intended users); (2), to work together to develop AI solutions for the youth sector. Despite the enthusiasms of youth organisations to develop their own digital platforms, most often, the processes require costly resources and expertise that is not often accessible. That is why a collaboration with the private sector, which has access to expertise but also large datasets, can be used for greater social impact. Government incentives should foster such cooperation.

A new curriculum for (digital) citizenship? – Dealing with specific issues, such as the impact of new technologies, in isolation from other civic initiatives, might seem tempting and easier. As the youth sector will work to define what new competences are needed to navigate the AI-powered world, both for youth educators and young people, long term efforts will be needed to redefine education for (digital) citizenship. New technologies bring something specific to address separately. Their impact is not temporary. That is why a wider social discussion is needed to understand how citizens relate to technology, what possible new social norms can be created, what could be the new mechanisms to support citizens in dealing with these technologies.

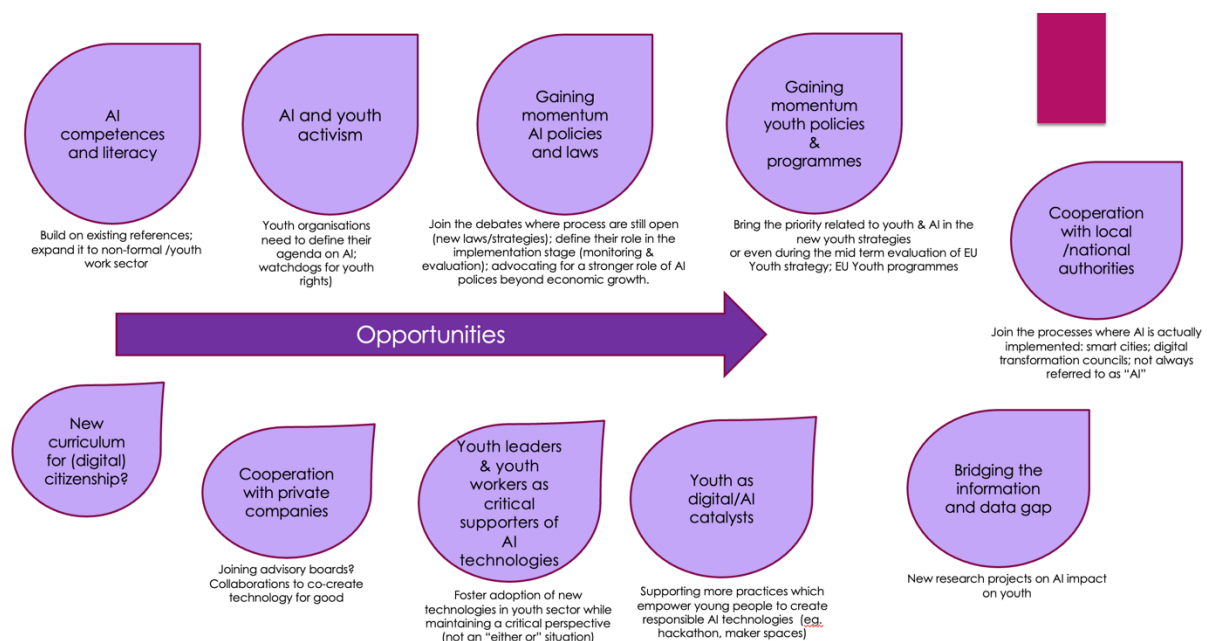


Fig. 4. Overview of opportunities – youth and AI

6. Recommendations for stakeholders

This section builds on the opportunities and challenges identified previously and aims to provide actionable points for various stakeholders – from those part of the youth ecosystem, to decision makers and private companies. References to international organisations include the Council of Europe, the European commission, as well as European umbrella organisations working in the field of human rights, youth or digital transformation. Even when not specifically mentioned, all proposed measures need joint efforts and openness for cross-sectoral collaboration, since advancing AI in the youth sector needs diverse voices and types of expertise.

Type of intervention	Proposed measures	Level of implementation	Main stakeholders
Policies	Update European and national youth strategies and policies to include references to the impact of AI technologies on young people. Such policies need to address, inter alia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access of young people to social and economic rights - Access to mechanisms of redress (how easily can young people access or use a certain mechanism when negatively impacted by AI technology) - Cross-sectoral approach, ensuring that youth policies address the AI impact; digital and AI policies include stronger references to the impact of AI on young people as a specific social group. 	European and national.	European and national decision-makers (ministries responsible for youth, education or social portfolios; ministries responsible for digital transformation); Youth-led organisations; Youth work organisations.
	Set up advisory, consultative and decision-making processes that include young people and youth organisations, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure that within specialised consultative bodies (e.g. smart cities, digital transformation councils) youth representatives have a designated place; - open new dialogue platforms led by young people, where 	European and national	European and national decision makers; European and national youth leaders; European and national youth umbrella organisations.

	<p>the impact of AI is analysed through the needs and views of young people;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue, where youth and civil society organisations work on an equal footing with other stakeholders (e.g. private companies). 		
	<p>Support co-designing initiatives where young people and citizens have an opportunity to contribute to decisions on how technologies are developed and deployed – both in the public and private sector. Such initiatives could include engagement when choosing a certain technology as part of the smart city policy; engagement in designing and testing a digital public service before it is publicly launched; engagement in advisory boards of technology companies before a certain technology is publicly used and participation in permanent monitoring structures of implementation of AI technology.</p> <p>Developing future-proofed policies, based on research and foresight to prepare the overall society and next generations for increased adoption of AI technologies.</p>	European, national, local	European decisionmakers; National decisionmakers; Local decisionmakers (including city managers); Technology companies; Youth groups and youth organisations.
Funding	Design national and local granting programmes or new actions under European structural funds that allow youth and civil society organisations to implement activities related to the impact of AI; capacity building related to AI and critical digital literacy.	European, national and local	National decision-makers; Private donors; European decision makers (when setting the priorities for the EU structural funds).
	Ensure that the EU youth programmes (Erasmus + & European Solidarity Corps) support under the digital priority projects building digital competences, and those building young people and youth	European	European decision makers; National Agencies for Erasmus+ and ESC; National decision makers.

	organisations' engagement in AI governance (policies & technologies).		
	Organise dedicated project labs for potential beneficiaries of the EU Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps or the European Youth Foundation that focus on the digital priority. Include examples of how AI can impact youth rights and where good practices from advocacy or participatory projects and campaigns are shared.	European and national	National Agencies for Erasmus+ and ESC; European Youth Foundation; Youth and civic organisations
	Increase funding for maker spaces and development of responsible technologies, in both formal and non-formal technologies, for non-technical audiences (e.g. students with a background in humanities; beneficiaries of youth centres and youth work).	National and local	National and Local decision makers; Youth work organisations; Educators and school staff.
Research	National and European in-depth analysis on how national AI strategies and policies address the needs of young people.	European and national	European and national decisionmakers; Academia; Experts and researchers.
	Understanding the impact of AI on the rights of young people (going beyond use of social media). Including a mapping of the AI technologies that have the greatest potential to create a positive and/or negative impact on youth rights.		
	Analysing how data about young people is collected and used in digital public services.		
Youth Services	Develop new services to support young people when faced with risks of AI (from online hotlines to online reporting and support platforms or youth centre-based services).	National and local	Youth work and youth service organisations; National and local decision makers.

Guidelines & curricula	Support the implementation of the competence frameworks and assessment tools developed through the DYW SNAC– for youth workers and youth work organisations.	European and national	National and European decision-makers; Experts in youth work; Experts in digital transformation
	Support the development of national digital citizenship and digital curricula based on the revised DigComp 2.2 & Digital Citizenship Education principles, both in formal and non-formal settings.	National and local	National and local decision-makers; educators in formal and non-formal sectors
	Develop guidelines & ethical standards for the practice of youth workers – related to the use and choice of AI technologies; designing processes that guide young people to navigate an AI-enabled society.	All levels	Organisations; Experts in digital transformation; Youth workers at all levels.
	Develop guidelines to facilitate multi-stakeholder cooperation (for shaping policies and digital technologies), with a focus on private companies and youth stakeholders.	European and national.	European and national organisations; Decision-makers; Youth leaders; Representatives of technology companies.
	Propose guidelines to support national decision makers in developing national AI policies/standards with a youth lens.	European	European organisations; European experts in the fields of public policy; digital transformation; youth participation; youth work.
Capacity building	Capacity building opportunities for young people & youth workers to develop competences (knowledge, attitudes, skills, values) related to AI. Initiatives could be based on DigComp 2.2 and Digital Citizenship Education principles.	European and national	European and national organisations; Education experts; Academia; Decision-makers; Youth workers; Youth organisations.
	Capacity building opportunities for youth-led & youth work organisations to engage in advocacy initiatives related to AI (contributing to policies & strategies; development of AI standards; monitoring processes of how AI is used at European and national level).	European and national	European and national organisations.

	Support the creation of networks of youth and civil society organisations working on AI issues (e.g. empower them to identify and protect youth rights affected by AI technologies).	European and national	European and national organisations
	Develop new educational resources to empower educators interested in AI & critical digital literacy.	European and national	European organisations; European and national education institutions; Experts in the field of AI and education.

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[Veronica](#) ȘTEFAN is a professional with more than 17 years of experience in the youth sector, working intensively at the intersection of education, policy and new technologies. She has been engaged in a variety of international initiatives, from research to public policy, capacity building or project management, while providing expertise for different stakeholders such as the Council of Europe, UN agencies, European Union bodies, as well as many other national and international private and public entities.

Her recent activity includes contributions to digital policies, research on the social impact of artificial intelligence and new technologies, development of digital competences for educational and youth actors. Veronica is originally from Romania, where she has founded a series of non-profits, including the first Romanian Digital Think-Tank; starting with 2021 she leads a series of international partnerships related to youth participation and digital transformation on behalf of the Estonian National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidary Corps.