

North-South Centre Youth Universities 2026

AI, Youth, and Peace:

Preventing cybercrime and digital harm through responsible AI governance

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly integrated into daily life, offering new opportunities for innovation, education, and sustainable development. It is reshaping how people access information, communicate and interact. At the same time, its rapid deployment raises important questions about how digital technologies can be governed in ways that respect human rights, democratic values, and the rule of law.

When poorly designed or misused, AI systems can contribute to risks such as bias, disinformation, deepfakes, online scams, and other forms of digital manipulation. These phenomena can affect fundamental rights including privacy, data protection, freedom of expression, equality, and access to justice, with specific risks for women and girls, who are often disproportionately targeted by online abuse and harassment.

These challenges manifest differently across regions, where diverse socio-economic conditions, governance frameworks, and levels of digital access shape both risks and responses.

When left unaddressed, these challenges extend beyond individual harm, deepening social divisions and eroding trust in democratic institutions. In fragile or transitional contexts, misleading or harmful content can amplify tensions and weaken social cohesion. They can also influence offline behaviours and public debate. Addressing digital harm and cybercrime is therefore a matter of technological regulation, and of protecting democratic security and supporting peaceful and inclusive societies.

At the same time, when harnessed constructively and guided by human rights principles, AI can also improve access to justice, strengthen public service delivery, and help detect online harms. Ensuring responsible and rights-based governance of AI is therefore essential to maximizing its benefits while mitigating its risks.

Young people today are frequent users of AI technologies, from social media and chatbots to educational platforms. They are both exposed to its risks and well placed to shape its impact. As innovators and advocates, they can play a key role in prevention, awareness-raising, and community engagement, contributing to more inclusive and peaceful digital environments.

Building on the 2025 Youth Universities' focus on "Empowering Youth for Digital Safety," the 2026 edition expands its scope. It will strengthen individual digital safety competences while also addressing broader challenges linked to AI-enabled digital harms and cybercrime. The programme

will explore how youth engagement, critical AI literacy, and responsible governance approaches can help prevent digital harm and contribute to more democratic and peaceful societies.

As an organisation dedicated to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, the Council of Europe has played a pioneering role in regulating digital technologies. Its legal instruments provide standards for protecting fundamental rights, regulating AI, ensuring data protection, and combating cybercrime, with relevance beyond Europe¹.

Other regional organisations have developed complementary frameworks and interregional initiatives addressing misinformation, racism, xenophobia, and digital violence through coordinated, rights-based approaches².

The 2026 Youth Universities will situate their work within this broader ecosystem of legal and policy frameworks, promoting dialogue and mutual learning across regions. In alignment with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, the programme will empower young people through legal and critical AI literacy, enabling them to detect manipulation, address digital risks, and advocate for responsible and rights-based governance.

Placing also a focus on youth-led solutions, the programme will encourage young people to contribute to AI and digital governance, including by bringing youth perspectives into policy development and implementation.

By fostering critical thinking, global citizenship, and interregional cooperation, the Youth Universities aim to enable young people to act as multipliers within their communities and contribute to more inclusive and peaceful societies.

The activities taking place at the Universities will address the following questions:

- What does critical AI literacy mean, and why is it important for active citizenship in the digital age?
- What skills are needed for young people to safely navigate AI-powered digital environments and detect misleading or harmful content?
- How can young people support the implementation of legal frameworks on data protection, AI and cybercrime and contribute to more inclusive and peaceful societies?

¹ CoE [Convention 108+ on data protection](#), the [Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](#), and the [Budapest Convention on Cybercrime](#) provide standards, open beyond Europe, for protecting fundamental rights, regulating AI, ensuring data protection, and combating cybercrime.

² Such as the [African Union's Malabo Convention](#), the [Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa](#), the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy and the [League of Arab States' Convention on Combating Information Technology Offences](#). Interregional dialogue initiatives such as the [Luxor Declaration](#) and the North-South Centre's [Kotor Declaration](#) further emphasise the need to address misinformation, racism, xenophobia, and digital violence through coordinated, rights-based approaches

- What should young entrepreneurs and innovators consider when using AI technologies to ensure their projects are not only innovative, but also ethical and respectful of human rights?
- What are the implications of banning or restricting social media platforms for young people's rights, participation, and access to information, and how can balanced approaches be developed?