

Artificial Intelligence Literacy for Democratic Societies

A Council of Europe Recommendation for enabling all segments of the population to develop a critical understanding of AI and its broader impact and to engage with it ethically, responsibly and safely and to prevent and mitigate its adverse effects on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

WHY AI LITERACY MATTERS?

AI systems increasingly influence how people learn, communicate, access information, encounter public services and participate in democratic life. And they are almost invisible: through recommendation systems, automated decisions, synthetic media, learning technologies and administrative tools.

AI literacy helps people recognise when AI is involved, understand what is at stake, and act with informed judgement.

1 THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF AI LITERACY

AI literacy refers to the capacity to engage with AI critically, ethically, responsibly, safely and effectively, which involves understanding the human, technological and practical dimensions of AI. These three dimensions form the conceptual core of the Recommendation and are to be interpreted as complementary and mutually reinforcing. They should not be taught or practiced in isolation.

The Recommendation gives particular attention to the human dimension.



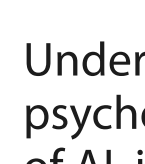
A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL

Together, these three dimensions define AI literacy as a continuum of capabilities enabling individuals to understand, question, and shape the role of AI in society and make informed decisions about the use of AI systems.



HUMAN

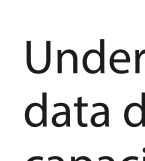
PRIORITY



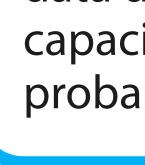
TECHNOLOGICAL



PRACTICAL



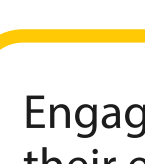
HUMAN



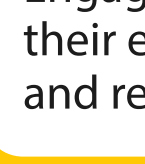
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HUMAN



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PRACTICAL



HUMAN



TECHNOLOGICAL



PRACTICAL

2 WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

AI is not just a software. AI encompasses a growing range of sociotechnical systems that comprise the interplay of:

PEOPLE & SOCIETY



COMPUTATION & DATA

PEOPLE



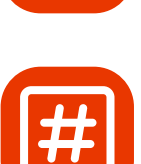
INSTITUTIONS



POLICIES



SOCIAL PRACTICES



ENVIRONMENT



DEVICES



INFRASTRUCTURE



SOFTWARE



DATA



STATISTICS

Together they shape the design, development, deployment and use of AI systems.

These sociotechnical systems are designed to automate, augment or replace tasks normally associated with human intelligence.

3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Recommendation is grounded in four areas of principles:



FOUNDATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF AI

- 1. AI is sociotechnical:** Reflects its developers' values and the context that shaped it.
- 2. AI is diverse:** More than GenAI: prediction, decision-making and recommendation systems too.
- 3. AI is built on and shaped by data:** Data's origins, quality and limitations fundamentally influence what AI systems produce.
- 4. AI has limits:** Error-prone and unable to truly think, understand or reason like humans.
- 5. AI brings opportunities and risks:** Affects rights, society and environment, with impacts not fully known.
- 6. AI is a tool, not a human being:** Can seem human, but lacks real understanding or agency.



HUMAN RIGHTS, ETHICS & HUMAN DIGNITY

- 1. AI poses risks to fundamental rights and freedoms:** Threatens privacy, non-discrimination, freedom of thought and due process through surveillance and opaque decisions.
- 2. Human dignity comes first:** AI deployment must not come at the cost of dignity, equality, equity or environmental sustainability.
- 3. AI affects cultural and linguistic diversity:** Risks reinforcing bias and standardisation; diversity must be preserved.
- 4. Ethics guide engagement with AI:** Ethical reflection and action are needed at every stage of AI's life cycle and governance.
- 5. Vulnerable groups need protection:** Children and disadvantaged or marginalised groups need special protection in AI-affected environments.



DEMOCRACY, RULE OF LAW & THE PUBLIC SPHERE

- 1. AI mediates the public sphere:** Influences access to information, public discourse and institutional decisions, affecting democracy and public trust.
- 2. AI can amplify harmful content:** Can generate or spread disinformation and hate speech, undermining social cohesion.
- 3. Evidence underpins credible claims:** Claims about AI's effectiveness and safety must rest on independent, scientific evidence open to scrutiny.
- 4. Accountability for AI-facilitated decision making:** Decisions by public authorities must be accountable, traceable, explainable, lawful and contestable.
- 5. Accessible recourse and redress:** People must be able to contest AI-related decisions and obtain redress.



SOCIAL AGENCY, CRITICAL THINKING & RESPONSIBILITY

- 1. AI affects human behaviour:** Shapes how people learn, act, communicate and decide, with implications for autonomy and agency.
- 2. AI affects human development:** Can significantly affect cognitive, procedural, social and emotional skills across different ages and contexts.
- 3. Agency, judgment and responsibility:** Humans should not delegate their agency, judgment or responsibility to AI systems.
- 4. Critical assessment of AI use:** People should be able to make informed choices about using AI, recognising its influence on their access to information.
- 5. Human relationships matter:** AI risks weakening or substituting for human relationships, undermining the depth of social life.
- 6. People shape AI governance:** Individuals and communities should participate meaningfully in decisions on AI's development, use and governance.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

1. Recognise the three-dimensional model

Adopt it as the reference model for AI literacy, with particular attention to the human dimension.

2. Review national frameworks

Align strategies, legislation, policies and curricula with the three-dimensional model and its principles.

3. Involve stakeholders

Engage relevant stakeholders in developing, implementing and evaluating AI literacy policies, with resources and training for their participation.

4. Promote AI literacy

Extend AI literacy across society through formal, non-formal and informal learning and public awareness.

5. Provide professional development

Offer education and training on AI literacy, especially for education professionals.

6. Translate and disseminate

Translate the recommendation into official languages and share it with relevant authorities and stakeholders.

7. Review implementation

Examine implementation within five years of adoption, and sooner where appropriate.

These recommendations can be operationalised through measures grouped under the following headings:

A. National strategies and governance frameworks

National strategies and governance provide the foundation for coherent, sustainable and context-sensitive AI literacy, supported by adequate resources.

B. AI literacy in curricula and learning frameworks

AI literacy involves the development of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding needed to engage with AI critically, ethically, responsibly, safely and effectively.

C. Learning, teaching and assessment

Should pay particular attention to the human dimension of AI, promoting critical thinking, learner agency, mutual learning and professional autonomy.

D. Continuous professional development

Helps educators, public officials and other professionals maintain and strengthen their AI literacy through an ongoing, adaptive and system-supported process.

E. Higher education and research institutions

Play a central role in advancing AI literacy, generating knowledge and innovation, and preparing future professionals for responsible engagement with AI. Learning, teaching and assessment

F. Awareness raising and societal engagement

Essential for fostering informed, critical and inclusive public understanding of AI and its implications for human rights, democracy and social agency.

5 THE INTENDED RESULTS — AI LITERATE PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS CAN:

1

Recognise when AI is shaping information, decisions or opportunities.

2

Question AI claims, outputs, purposes and evidence.

3

Use or refuse AI with informed judgement.

4

Protect rights, dignity, agency and human relationships.

5

Challenge harmful or unlawful AI-related decisions.

6

Participate in decisions about how AI is developed, used and governed.

This Recommendation gives particular emphasis to principles concerning the human dimension of AI in order to address its impact on human rights, democracy and the rule of law – including human dignity and social agency, privacy, autonomy, equity and non-discrimination – as well as its wider implications for well-being, social justice, sustainable development and the environment.

Its focus on the human dimension marks the Council of Europe's distinctive contribution to global policy and discourse on AI literacy and AI and education.