

AI LITERACY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS,
DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL AGENCY

A three-dimensional AI literacy framework

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems represent the first technologies to successfully mimic human behaviours, communications, and decision-making processes, creating unique educational and societal challenges. This policy brief proposes a comprehensive three-dimensional framework for AI literacy—technological, practical, and human—with particular emphasis on the often-neglected human dimension. Current approaches to AI literacy predominantly focus on technical skills and practical applications while inadequately

addressing AI's profound impacts on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. This brief recommends the Council of Europe adopt this human-centric framework as the foundation for a Committee of Ministers Recommendation on AI literacy, providing member states with flexible guidance to develop contextually appropriate educational initiatives that safeguard core European values while preparing citizens for an AI-transformed society.



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AI technologies are increasingly embedded in economic, social, and political systems, yet public understanding of these technologies remains limited. The anthropomorphic qualities of AI systems—particularly generative AI—create unique challenges as users frequently misperceive these systems as operating with human-like intentions or understanding. Existing approaches to AI literacy are insufficient for three key reasons:



Limited scope

Most AI literacy initiatives focus predominantly on technological aspects (algorithms, data, statistics) or practical skills (how to use AI effectively), while inadequately addressing human impacts.



Human dimension gap

Critical considerations about AI's effects on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law are frequently omitted or minimised in current educational frameworks.



Competence vs Awareness imbalance

Current approaches overemphasise technical competences rather than developing the broader awareness necessary for citizens to make informed decisions about AI systems.

International frameworks, including the Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI (2024) and the EU AI Act (2024), recognise the importance of AI literacy but lack specific guidance on implementing comprehensive educational approaches that address all dimensions of AI. This policy deficit affects multiple stakeholders:

Students and teachers lack sufficient awareness about AI's human impacts

Citizens cannot effectively participate in democratic debates about AI governance

Policymakers need frameworks to develop contextually appropriate initiatives

Industry and civil society require common understanding for responsible AI development



Without a comprehensive framework that addresses all dimensions of AI literacy—particularly the human dimension—Europe risks an education system that produces technologically skilled but ethically underprepared citizens, potentially undermining fundamental rights and democratic processes.

POLICY OPTIONS

Option 01 — Maintain status quo with enhanced digital literacy

This approach would avoid creating a separate AI literacy framework, instead incorporating AI-related content into existing digital literacy initiatives.

PROS

Leverages existing educational infrastructure and curricula

Avoids "literacy proliferation" by maintaining digital literacy as the umbrella framework

Requires minimal additional resources and restructuring

CONS

Risks inadequate attention to the unique challenges posed by AI systems

May perpetuate the technical/practical focus while continuing to neglect human dimensions

Digital literacy frameworks often lack sufficient emphasis on human rights, democracy, and rule of law

Option 02 — Adopt a competence-based AI Literacy framework

This approach would develop detailed competency frameworks specifying measurable AI-related skills to be acquired by different age groups and educational levels

PROS

Provides clear, measurable objectives for educational systems

Facilitates standardised assessment and certification

Aligns with existing competence-based educational approaches

CONS

Overemphasises technical skills at the expense of broader awareness

Risks rapid obsolescence as AI technologies evolve

May create unnecessary barriers by emphasising specialized technical knowledge not required by most citizens

Inadequately addresses the critical human dimension of AI literacy

Option 03 — Implement a three-dimensional AI literacy framework

This approach would adopt a comprehensive framework addressing technological, practical, and human dimensions of AI literacy, with particular emphasis on the human dimension.

PROS

Provides a balanced approach addressing all crucial aspects of AI literacy

Centres human rights, democracy, and rule of law considerations

Offers flexibility for member states to adapt to local contexts

Focuses on awareness rather than technical competence, making it accessible to all citizens

Aligns with the Council of Europe's core values and mandate

CONS

Requires development of new educational resources and teacher training programs

May be perceived as adding complexity to already crowded curricula

Implementation will require significant coordination across educational stakeholders

RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTION

The Council of Europe should adopt Option 3: Implement a three-dimensional AI literacy framework as the foundation for its Committee of Ministers Recommendation on AI literacy.

FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2024

Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

✎ EUROPEAN UNION · 2024

Artificial Intelligence Act.

✎ BIESTA, G. J. J. — 2011

Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy (1st edition)

✎ BAWDEN, D. — 2001

Information and digital literacies: A review of concepts, *Journal of Documentation*, 57(2), 218-259

✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2025

Discussion paper on Draft Recommendation on AI literacy



✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2024

Regulating the use of Artificial Intelligence systems in education – Preparatory study on the development of a legal instrument



✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2024

The state of artificial intelligence and education across Europe – Results of a survey of Council of Europe member states



✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2022

1st Working Conference «Artificial Intelligence and education: A critical view through the lens of human rights, democracy and the rule of law» – Conference highlights



✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2025

Feasibility study for a European Reference Framework for the evaluation of educational technologies – Short version



✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2024

2nd Working Conference «Regulating the use of AI systems in education» – Provisional report of the conference



✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2024

Regulating artificial intelligence in the education domain: a general approach
Ilkka Tuomi



✎ COUNCIL OF EUROPE · 2024

Towards a European review framework for AI EdTech systems
Beth Havinga

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The three-dimensional framework provides the most comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by AI systems while aligning with the Council's core values. Unlike other options, this framework:

- 01** Balances all dimensions: Ensures technological and practical aspects are addressed alongside critical human impacts.
- 02** Emphasises awareness over technical competence: Makes AI literacy accessible to all citizens regardless of technical background.
- 03** Centres human rights: Places core European values of human rights, democracy, and rule of law at the heart of AI education.
- 04** Provides implementation flexibility: Offers high-level guidance while allowing member states to develop contextually appropriate educational initiatives.
- 05** Addresses multiple educational roles: Goes beyond qualification (knowledge and skills) to include subjectification (individual development) and socialization (participation in society).

This framework uniquely positions the Council of Europe to take international leadership in promoting a human-centric approach to AI literacy that differentiates it from more technically-focused frameworks developed by industry or other international organizations.

CONCLUSION

The anthropomorphic nature of AI systems, their increasing ubiquity, and their profound impacts on society create an urgent need for comprehensive AI literacy. The proposed three-dimensional framework—technological, practical, and human—offers a balanced approach that addresses all crucial aspects of AI while emphasizing its impacts on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. By adopting this framework, the Council of Europe has the opportunity to take a leadership position in promoting a uniquely human-centric approach to AI literacy that distinguishes it from more technically-focused initiatives. This approach aligns perfectly with the Council of Europe's core values and mandate.

The time to act is now. As AI systems become increasingly embedded in social, economic, and political systems, ensuring all citizens have the awareness and critical understanding to navigate an AI-transformed world is essential. The three-dimensional framework provides member states with the foundation they need to develop educational initiatives that prepare their citizens not just to use AI effectively, but to ensure AI development and deployment respect and enhance human dignity, rights, and democratic values.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The Council of Europe is working to ensure that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education aligns with human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Through its AI and Education (AI&ED) programme, the Council of Europe is developing legal and policy instruments, guidelines and tools and resources to promote transparent, inclusive, and responsible AI use in education.

