Empowering Participation through Digital Tools

October 29, 2025, Riga

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European Center for Not-for-Profit Law

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About ECNL

- 20 years of experience in civil society law and policy
- We empower partners and build networks to co-develop locally-led responses with the goal to protect our spaces for action
- Through research, we create knowledge and strengthen legal protections

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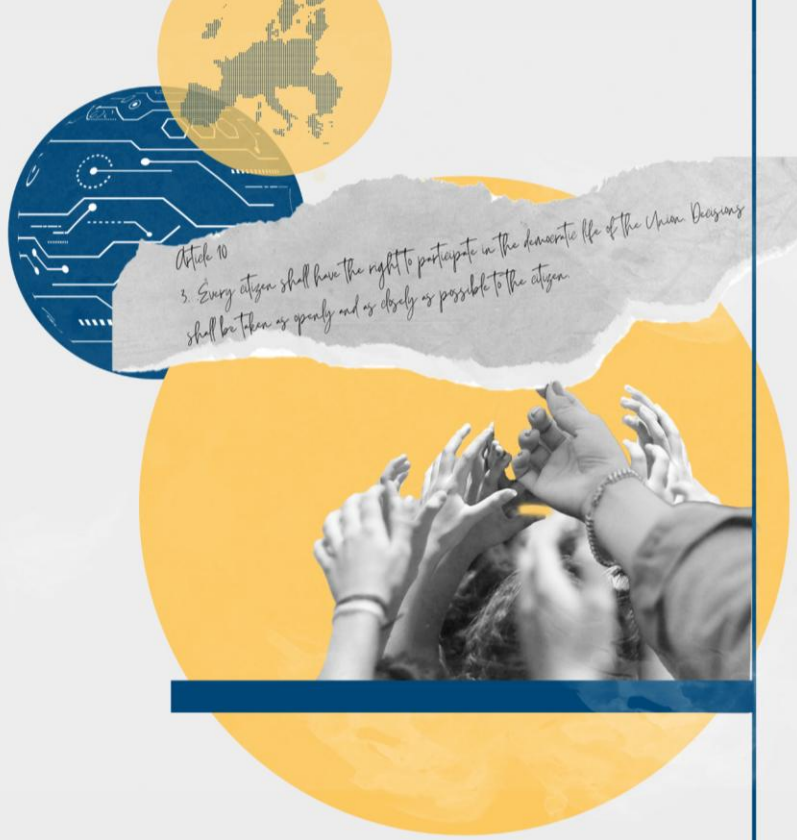

NEW DIMENSIONS FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

MODELS TO ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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- Overview of the key safeguards of participation at the EU level;
- Key benefits and types of ***online platforms and gamification*** and their use by the EU institutions and national/local level;
- Other examples that can promote public participation;
- Existing good practices and gaps for civil society participation;
- Recommendations on how to strengthen meaningful participation.

↑

Examples from at least 12 countries

See ECNL's report:

Online platforms for public participation and advocacy

Key characteristics and benefits

- Reaching a wider population
- More inclusive and accessible to individuals with disabilities
- Increased participation and engagement
- Facilitate real-time interactions
- More cost-effective
- Offer a range of participation methods

Types of platforms

- Citizen engagement platforms/ softwares
- Online advocacy websites
- Online petition platforms
- Digital tools that support local/ community engagement

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Gamification and serious games

Key characteristics and benefits

- Provide educational content in an interactive and engaging manner
- Encourage cooperation and teamwork
- Inspire a broader range of participants
- Empower participants, making them active contributors
- Facilitate the collection of real-time feedback
- Facilitate behavioral change and the implementation of policies

Types of games

- Information sourcing games
- Data generation games
- Pervasive games (location-based games)
- Deliberative games
- Co-designed games
- Educational games
- Marketing games

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Considerations

- Internet access
- Digital literacy
- Content curation/moderation policies in place
- Privacy and Data Protection
- Cybersecurity
- Protection of human dignity
- Effective follow-up

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AI IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: FALSE PROMISE OR GENUINE HOPE?

"Artificial intelligence systems, when used responsibly, with adequate safeguards and due diligence and consistent with human rights law, can play a significant role in enhancing good governance, including by facilitating access to information and participation in public life, strengthening democratic institutions and the resilience of civil society"

"[U]sed in compliance with international human rights law, information and communications technology can be an effective tool to foster greater participation and contribute to promoting human rights principles and good governance"

A/HRC/RES/57/5 UN Human Rights Council Resolution on The role of good governance in the promotion and protection of human rights

Use of AI-assisted tools

- Content moderation
- Translation services
- Chatbots
- Automated moderators
- Processing, analysing and summarising inputs
- Proposing relevant topics to platform users
- Provide data regarding participant practices
- Increase user engagement

See ECNL's blog:

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Benefits and considerations

- Find/extract patterns from data
- Deliberative potential
- Save time and costs (?)
- Visualize results
- Solve language barriers/multilingual
- Analysis and synthesis of responses
- Scalability
- Interoperability

- Privacy risks
- Discrimination and bias
- Sentiment misclassification
- Digital divide
- Exclusion instead of inclusion
- "Drowning effect" - losing fringe voices to find middle-ground alignment
- Misinformation/hacking

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A Framework for Human Rights-Centered Tools

- Human Rights Impact Assessment - before piloting and periodic reassessments
- Addressing potential pitfalls of AI participation tools
- Meaningful human-in-the-loop validation
- Civil society engagement - bottom-up inclusion
- Transparency, evaluation and sustainability

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Society Inside

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FRAMEWORK FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

THE FRAMEWORK FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT
GUIDANCE FOR CONVENORS

1 **Creating a shared purpose**

Why is shared purpose important?

Some possible purposes for stakeholder engagement

Engaging internal and external stakeholders in defining purpose and outcomes

2 **Designing and delivering a trustworthy process**

Step 1: Understanding and addressing worries about barriers and limitations

Step 2: Deciding when to engage

Step 3: Deciding who to engage

Step 4: Choosing engagement methods

3 **Demonstrating visible impact**

Phase 1: Setting up internal buy-in from the get-go

Phase 2: Analysing findings and evaluating responses

Phase 3: Communicating and engaging around impact

Phase 4: Reflecting and acting on stakeholders input

Phase 5: Evaluation

Recommendations

Public Institutions:

- Commit to a rigorous process even when it's slower and more complex than purely technical solutions
- Allocate sufficient budget for human rights work, not just technical development
- Establish multi-stakeholder governance before beginning development

Civil Society Organizations:

- Demand seats at design tables, not just consultation opportunities
- Insist on published human rights impact assessments before deployment
- Hold institutions accountable through monitoring and public advocacy

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Recommendations

Technology Developers:

- Design for transparency and human oversight from the start
- Prioritize minority voice amplification features over efficiency
- Engage ethicists and rights experts as core team members, not afterthought reviewers

Public:

- Ask questions: How was my input analyzed? Can I trace it in the final report? Who reviewed the AI's work?
- Use grievance mechanisms when AI misrepresents your perspective
- Participate in impact assessments and usability testing

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