



Civil Society Week
*Strengthening cohesion & participation
in polarised societies*

Technology for the Common Good: the innovation we need in a democratic, inclusive and competitive Europe!

Wednesday 19 March | 9:30 – 11:00



The main question of the workshop was: How can Europe be a leader in innovation while preserving its values, rules and moral standards? The workshop provided a platform for reflection on this crucial question, focusing on key areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), data governance, digital skills and participation. Using a World Café discussion format, experts and participants explored both the opportunities and challenges of digital technologies for European democracy and put forward policy recommendations to mitigate risks and maximise benefits.

In the first part of the workshop, following the introduction by Elisa Lironi, Deputy Executive Director at ECAS, Sandra Parthie, President of the EESC's INT section, emphasised the need for European-led AI development to ensure digital sovereignty, ethics and trust in the digital age, alongside economic competitiveness. She called for greater promotion and adoption of European technological solutions. Franca Salis-Madinier, Vice-President of the EESC Workers' Group (Gr. II), spoke about the role of AI in the workplace and its impact on workers' rights, as discussed in the EESC opinion: *Pro-worker AI: levers for harnessing the potential and mitigating the risks of AI in connection with employment and labour market policies*. She highlighted the importance of monitoring how AI is rolled out in work environments, ensuring transparency in workforce data management, and enhancing digital literacy in order to build trust.

The co-organisers introduced the topics of the roundtables, explaining that each topic was divided into two sub-tables: one on challenges and the other on opportunities. The discussion was conducted in two rounds of 20 minutes each.

1. Social Economy Principles for a Democratic Digital Space (Sarah de Heusch, Social Economy Europe and Vera Vidal, La Coop des Communs). Participants examined the role of social economy principles in shaping a democratic digital space amid Europe's push for

technological sovereignty. Key challenges include insufficient investment, security risks, interoperability issues, scaling up democratic governance, building user trust, enforcing regulations, and the absence of a clear EU digital vision. Proposed solutions included increasing political and financial support for democratic digital tools, strengthening alliances among digital and civic actors, and raising awareness about the implications of digital sovereignty for democracy.

2. Digital Skills and Education (Arja Krauchenberg and Petra Kogelnig, Europarents). The discussion focused on the need for digital literacy to ensure responsible use of technology. Key challenges included lack of digital knowledge, media literacy and intergenerational trust. Recommendations included enhancing training programmes for teachers and parents to equip them with the skills needed to guide children and young people in the digital realm. Strengthening intergenerational cooperation was highlighted as essential to fostering trust and effective learning between different age groups. Increasing funding for safe digital spaces with strong oversight and privacy protections was deemed crucial for creating a secure online environment.

3. AI Empowering Citizens (Sotiria Tsalamani, European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training and Vesna Bajšanski-Agić, TechSoup/Philea). Participants explored AI's dual role as both an enabler and a risk to democracy. Identified risks included disinformation, AI bias, the slow regulatory enforcement and potential surveillance misuse. Opportunities highlighted included AI-driven accessibility tools for inclusive democracy, AI-powered civic engagement platforms, AI-assisted public services to improve citizen interactions with governments, and strengthening AI digital literacy while ensuring ethical AI development in governance.

4. Digital Participation (Elisa Lironi and Nicolò Triacca, ECAS). The discussion addressed the risks of 'democracy-washing', where digital participation lacks credibility due to transparency and accountability issues. Challenges such as digital exclusion were also noted. However, participants recognised that, if carried out well, digital participation enhances direct citizen engagement (including a direct link with representatives), promotes inclusivity and improves policymaking. Recommendations included reinforcing transparency in digital democratic platforms, promoting inclusive participation, and ensuring strong data protection measures.

5. Digital Market, Workers, and Economy (Sandra Parthie and Franca Salis-Madinier, EESC). Participants explored Europe's competitive edge in digital innovation and the need for a compelling narrative to promote European digital solutions. Key takeaways included the importance of fostering a tech-friendly regulatory environment, strengthening investment in digital infrastructure, exploring future game-changing technologies beyond AI, and championing rights and EU values in the work sector and vis-à-vis citizens in general.

Conclusion and Recommendations – In the final ten minutes, each moderator presented their table's conclusions to the group. The final recommendations focus on three key areas: co-designing a European Digital Space, building digital skills for democratic participation, and investing in digital infrastructure and inclusion.