D3.1 Empowerment Toolkit

WP3 Enhancing civic participation activities for people of African descent

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Public

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Executive summary

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Partners List Abbreviations

Acronym/Abbreviation	Description
NKUA (Department of Communication and Media Studies)	The University of Athens is the largest public Higher Education Institution in Greece, and among the largest universities in Europe. The Department of Communication and Media Studies at the NKUA is one of the preeminent Media departments in Greece and the region and is particularly active in promoting and supporting research through its research laboratories; department-based publication outlets; dissemination events of international symposia organised by the department and active dissemination.
CONVERGENCE (CONV)	CONVERGENCE is a Greek NGO focusing on generating unbiased technology-based systems and establishing reliable human-machine collaboration environments, bridging the gap between the needs of diverse stakeholders, through research, consultancy, targeted capacity building, awareness raising activities etc, towards the vision of Society 5.0. Our approach is guided by the various social markers, such as gender/sex, sexual orientation, cultural background, dis/abilities.
SCI-Hellas	SCI-Hellas (a branch of the Service Civil International), the Greek NGO partner, SCI- hellas is a Non-for- Profit organisation based in Athens. SCI-hellas is a key actor as it has long experience working on issues of social inclusion of vulnerable groups -mainly refugees, migrants and asylum seekers from African countries (including Muslims and people of African descent). They also work towards organizing women of African descent to address incidents of domestic violence.
CESIE ETS	CESIE ETS is a non-profit, non-political, and non-governmental organisation based in Palermo (Italy), active in the field of social inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups such as migrants and

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	refugees, including immigrants from Africa. CESIE ETS is committed to promote the cultural, social, educational and economic development at local, national, European and international levels. CESIE ETS contributes to growth and development through the active participation of people, civil society and institutions, always valuing diversity. CESIE ETS is therefore considered to be a very concrete and positive example of European values.
Instrategies	Instrategies is a think & do based in Barcelona specialized in European and international affairs, focusing on mobility, migration, inclusion and integration operating within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and mainstreaming gender equality. Instrategies work is dedicated to innovation through both knowledge and practical experience, designing, implementing and evaluating projects and policies. Instrategies has a a multidisciplinary team and an extensive network of collaborators with a track record on EU funded projects.

1. Introduction

1.1. Description and Objectives of the project

The AFROEQUALITY- 'Empowering people of African Descent: Hate Speech, Violence and Racism- Training on Digital Skills and Civic Participation' project aims at empowering Afrodiaspora towards claiming inclusion and belonging, through modes of citizenship and culture that include:

- identifying, reporting and addressing incidents of racism and Afrophobia in the partner countries
- developing digital citizenship and civic awareness skills that will increase civic participation and local capacity building within the African Community in the partner countries
- exchanging cultural knowledge through 'everyday cultures in the city', to increase empowerment against Afrophobia, xenophobia, hate speech and violence in Greece, Italy and Spain
- assist in a holistic approach towards ending gender and racial stereotypes, baseless notions of racial superiority, and incitement to racial hatred.

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The project is implemented under the coordination of the Department of Communication and Media Studies at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA) in collaboration with 4 partners in 3 countries, Spain, Italy and Greece.

Through a gender-sensitive and multi-stakeholder approach, AFROEQUALITY brings together a leading research public institution in Greece, CSOs working actively with Afrodiapsoric communities in Greece, Italy and Spain, as well as a socio-tech partner, who is an expert in data mining and app development, in order to explore, address and contribute to fighting Afrophobia and racism against People of Colour, via empowerment activities on digital and civic skills. Therefore, the project will assist directly Afrodiasporic people (hereinafter also mentioned as "target group/population" or "beneficiaries" or People of Concern) women and men aged between 18-45 – residing in Athens, Palermo, Barcelona and the respective regions. It provides training in civic participation and cultural awareness, including notions of human rights and digital/media skills, drawing upon our objective to empower beneficiaries on issues of racism, violence, hate speech and related hate crimes through an intersectional perspective.

The project is organized in 4 work packages:

WP1: Project Management and Coordination which includes all activities related to the proper and effective implementation, monitoring and management of the project, the internal procedures and communication of the partnership as well as effective project evaluation. Key objectives include: effective administrative and financial management of the project as well as guaranteeing the scientific quality of proposed activities and deliverables.

WP2: Development of an Action Plan combating racism through active civic participation of People of African Origin at local level. This WP includes all research activities leading to the development of an Action Plan that will be addressing issues of racism and will be promoting practices and modes of active participation of the Afrodiaspora. Key objectives include: a) mapping perceptions about representations of People of African Descent in the public sphere in Greece, Italy and Spain b) mapping incidents of xenophobia, Afrophobia and racism at the local level as well as c) the needs of the African diaspora in terms of participation and inclusion in the local community, and ways of engagement and interaction with host country culture and d) identifying good practices promoting civic participation of the Afrodiaspora in the host population

WP3: Enhancing civic participation activities for People of African Descent. This WP includes all empowerment activities aiming to benefit 180 Afrodiasporic people across participating countries through a number of 'empowerment workshops', which will unfold in the axes of Cultural identity, Interculturality and Alternative Narratives. Key objectives include: a) the provision of training resources towards the capacity building of the Afrodiaspora to address hate speech through media literacy skills b) the provision of training materials on digital

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education and digital citizenship c) the promotion of African cultures in the 3 partner countries

WP4: Initiatives to fight Afrophobia, xenophobia and hate speech. This work package focuses on formulating project outcomes and activities into sound policy briefs and educational cultural knowledge (gaming app), and in their effective dissemination. Key objectives include: a) communication and therefore advocacy of the project outcomes and proposals to combat xenophobia and racism at a policy level b) raising awareness and engagement of both stakeholders and the general public on matters of equality, participation and culture of Afrodiaspora c) communication and dissemination of the project at local, national and international level so as to further exploit its results d) bolstering its added value through sweeping activity in social media (hashtag culture) and fun cultural practices (gaming app).

1.2. An ontological statement of the AFROEQUALITY consortium

This report is the first public deliverable of the AFROEQUALITY project, a three-country project aiming to address issues of racism, hate speech and Afrophobia in Greece, Italy and Spain through research and empowerment activities in close collaboration with the African diaspora in all three countries. It is not though merely an EU project identifying the needs of people who are being targeted for their colour, ethnicity and religion (and related social and cultural categories like gender and sexuality). Neither is it merely a project attempting to design and implement training activities wherein members of the African diaspora will participate as beneficiaries of one-way information about citizenship. Instead, it embraces a decolonial perspective towards how the Afrodiaspora across all partner countries is being acknowledged through their voice and cultures at all levels of project design, implementation and monitoring. At the same time, it aims at establishing a dialogue with members of the Afrodiaspora in Italy, Greece and Spain, as well as at ensuring that the signifiers of colour, race, ethnicity and religion which are centrally the target of racism and hate speech (systemic and everyday) remain at the top of public and policy agendas. To this end, the AFROEQUALITY project progresses via making continuous changes in the terminology used in research material and deliverables, but also by inviting more members of the national Afrodiasporic communities to have a central role in the Advisory Boards and empowerment activities.
For this reason,the AFROEQUALITY consortium would like to begin by listing the changes made in the project design, monitoring and implementation as a result of continuous critical reflection and feedback from members of the Afrodiaspora in all three countries who participated in its research activities and sit at the national Advisory Boards, as well as from the partners' systematic dialogue and networking with key figures of the Afrodiaspora across countries (e.g. Activists, Community Chairs, NGO representatives, politicians, public figures and celebrities):

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- Instead of a single Advisory Board, the partnership decided early on to set up three National Advisory Boards attending to the needs of each national case separately, but also paying due respect to the Board members whose role is vital to the project but do not speak a language other than their national one. This decision led to smaller and more flexible Advisory Boards that reflect upon the project's nature and progress on a regular basis and are able to provide targeted and context-specific feedback on the project.
- The National Advisory Boards include at least two members of the Afrodiaspora per country, while, as the project unfolded, people who participated in research activities (e.g. Roundtables) were invited to become members of the National Advisory Boards (e.g. Greece). As a result, the National Advisory Boards (which convene twice a year with the national project teams) have become larger (yet flexible) and include more members from each country's Afrodiaspora. This leads to a more extensive and inclusive Afroequality Network.
- In the course of the project, AFROEQUALITY teams are conducting regular meetings with community representatives and prominent figures of the Afrodiaspora, while also attend forums and spaces of dialogue and cultural expression, in order to spread the word about the project and establish the need for a constructive and reflexive dialogue between Afrodiaspora and national stakeholders to progress.
- The AFROEQUALITY project originally used the term 'People of African descent' to include all people of African origin in partnering countries. However, after incorporating feedback from participants in Focus Group and Roundtable activities and from the National Advisory Boards, the partnership decided to shift towards the terms 'Afrodiaspora' and 'African diaspora'. Especially for the design and implementation of the e-survey across all countries, the terms adopted changed from 'People of African descent' to the following: AfroSpanish (AfroGreek and AfroItalian), Afrodescendants, and Greeks (Spanish or Italian) of African Origin. Those terms -the partnership contends- embrace a more inclusive and just approach to all members of Afrodiasporic communities whose citizenship, ethnic and racial status might differ.
- From April 2025 onwards, all deliverables submitted by the AFROEQUALITY project, including all related material, steadily adjust to the revised terminology explained above so that the partnership's shift to more inclusive and fair terms is practically imprinted in the project's activities, impact and added value.

The rationale behind this statement at this point in the report serves to establish how the AFROEQUALITY project evolves as an ongoing platform of dialogue between Afrodiasporas and policy-oriented and research discourse in Greece, Italy and Spain. It also evolves as a platform prompting this dialogue to highlight usually unseen or obscured aspects of Afrodiasporic identities, cultures and challenges in said countries. Such a dialogue prolongs and bolsters the focus on matters of race and racism at this historical, social and political conjuncture, wherein the overlapping conditions of Afrophobia, Islamophobia, colour and religious stereotyping permeate the social and political fabric of democratic EU societies.

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1.3. Overview of WP3- Scope of the toolkit

The context of WP3 empowerment activities

Through a number of empowerment activities WP aims at

1. Provide training resources towards the capacity building of the Afrodiaspora to address hate speech through media literacy
skills
2. Providing training materials on digital education and digital citizenship
3. Promoting the AFRO culture in the 3 partner countries

The activities planned in the context of WP3 unfold below:

- *T3.1 Selection of Agents of Change (NKUA lead, SCI, Instrategies, CESIE ETS)*

Participants, members of the African community, will be selected for the capacity building activities as part of this task. In total 60 members of the African community in Athens, Barcelona and Palermo are expected to be selected following an open call by CESIE ETS, disseminated and adapted by SCI- Hellas and InStrategies in Greece and Spain. The main goal is to recruit groups of participants (the Afrodiaspora, the target group) that are as much as possible representatives in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Vulnerability is also a variable to be taken into account since the project aims at empowering people subject to racist and xenophobic attacks. Further, a key objective is to gather individuals who can act as multipliers and potentially also as opinion leaders in their communities but in a EU wider environment. These selected members of the Afrodiaspora will participate in the following activities and will constitute the “Agents of Change”.

- *T3.2 Selection of Experts and training of trainers (NKUA lead, SCI, Instrategies, CESIE ETS)*

As part of this task a team of trainers is expected to be identified. Trainers will be experts in the fields of digital and civic participation, xenophobia and racism, hate speech, and means to address it through empowerment of vulnerable participants with an emphasis on experiential approaches. NKUA, CESIE ETS and Instrategies in Greece, Italy and Spain respectively is expected to carry out the selection of trainers (direct contract) who will be briefed on the needs of the target group and the objectives of the project. Their task will be

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to design the training material giving attention to interactivity and the empowerment process.

- *T3.3 Development of Empowerment Toolkit (NKUA lead, SCI, Instrategies, CESIE ETS, CONV)*

The training materials that will be used by experts during the capacity building activities (T3.4) have been developed and collected in the Empowerment Toolkit. The training material draws upon the thematic axes of the training program; on the principles of adult learning and the special requirements of the target group; contain tips, practical activities, brief manuals (i.e. on how to conduct a video), a guide of how civic participation could be a valid response to hate speech, discrimination and bias. The training empowerment toolkit includes some of the following categories: 1) what makes
participation "civic", what does this mean and how can it be achieved – relations of culture, civil society, participation. 2) how can I develop my digital skills, increasing at the same time the "visibility" of the Afro community in the general public, and how can I share my experiences through videos on social media and include information about the media, 3) how to identify and address a violent /hate speech incident, and how to use my digital skills to showcase it.

- *T3.4 Implementation of "Empowerment Workshops" (NKUA lead, SCI, Instrategies, CESIE ETS, CONV)*

This activity includes "empowerment workshops" for Afrodiasporic people, the selected "Agents of Change". This will be divided into 3 one-day sessions with 180 people participating in total. The following thematic sections will be addressed:
(1) Cultural Identity – this session will focus on increasing media and digital skills as a means to promote tolerance and intercultural understanding within the societies.
(2) Interculturality (incl. some general notions on Human Rights): what does interculturality means for me and for the society I live in, how can I pursue my civic rights and why, what are the benefits of multiculturality, examples from other good practice related to culture and race (from the desk research of WP2), how to promote if in the city I live.
(3) Alternative Narratives - Hate speech and discrimination at the Media; this section will pursue that participants identify, recognise and respond to media discrimination. Empowering them to build alternative narratives around hate speech/ Afrophobia by understanding underlying causes (lack of intercultural competences) and then promote their culture of the country of origin (video spots).
The training will be conducted in English, Italian, Greek and Spanish as this is considered an action to deepen the social integration of participants.

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Scope of this toolkit

This Empowerment Toolkit has been developed as part of the Afroequality Project, a European initiative aimed at promoting the inclusion, participation, and empowerment of Afro-descendant and migrant communities. More than just a training resource, this toolkit is a tool for capacity-building, self-determination, and collective transformation. It offers a pathway for individuals and communities to develop the awareness, skills, and critical voice necessary to actively shape civic and digital spaces—especially for those who have historically been excluded or marginalized.

Grounded in the values of social justice, intercultural dialogue, and active citizenship, the Afroequality project seeks to open up civic spaces and challenge systemic inequalities. It focuses on those who are often positioned at the margins—racialized individuals, migrants, and people of African descent—recognizing their knowledge, agency, and lived experiences as starting points for meaningful change.

In recent years, the demand for inclusive and critically engaged civic education has become increasingly urgent. Migration, social transformation, and the digital revolution are reshaping the fabric of European societies and questioning traditional definitions of citizenship, belonging, and democratic participation. This toolkit responds to that shift, offering not only theoretical insight but also practical, participatory tools for educators, trainers, youth workers, and community leaders working in multicultural and intercultural contexts.

Participants are invited to explore and reimagine what it means to belong, to act, and to participate—whether through everyday civic engagement, community action, or digital storytelling. Through individual and collective reflection, the toolkit encourages people not just to "fit in" to existing civic structures, but to reshape them in more inclusive, representative, and democratic ways.

This learning journey is structured around three interconnected modules that together form a coherent learning journey. The first module explores citizenship as a dynamic and lived practice, especially in contexts marked by migration, discrimination, or non-recognition. It highlights how people engage civically not only through voting, but also through community organizing, advocacy, and the assertion of identity in public spaces.

The second module focuses on the digital realm—a crucial space for both empowerment and resistance. It investigates how digital tools, media narratives, and online platforms can serve as both barriers and opportunities for marginalized groups. Digital literacy is presented not just as a technical skill, but as a civic and political capacity—one that enables participants to challenge dominant representations, share counter-narratives, and participate in the production of knowledge and meaning.

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The final part of the training centers on the urgent challenge of online hate speech and digital violence. Participants examine how exclusionary discourse manifests in the digital sphere and what strategies can be used to resist, respond, and rebuild. From media critique to collective digital actions, this section offers tools for creating inclusive and safe online environments, where the values of equality and dignity can flourish.

Together, these modules promote the growth of informed, confident, and empowered civic actors, capable of navigating and transforming both their local communities and broader digital ecosystems. This Empowerment Toolkit is not a fixed curriculum, but a flexible and living resource—open to adaptation, co-creation, and collective use.

It reflects the central vision of the Afroequality Project: that civic engagement, cultural identity, and digital participation are not separate domains—but deeply interconnected threads of a more just, inclusive, and democratic society

2. Module 1: The Civic Thread_ Weaving Culture, Society and Engagement

2.1. Introduction

The extent to which people take part in political and social life is a strong indicator of how active and dynamic a society is. It shows how individuals express their views, engage with others, and contribute to the common good. Participation tends to increase when people feel they truly belong to a community. This is why the variety, strength, and depth of social relationships—as well as the level of trust between people and toward institutions—are all crucial factors in shaping civic involvement.

In recent years, global events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the spread of armed conflicts have added new layers to a long-standing social crisis. These overlapping challenges have weakened interpersonal bonds and trust within society. As a result, participation in both civic and political spheres has declined. At the same time, there has been a growing shift in how freedom and desire are understood more as personal fulfillment and self-realization[1]. This

[1] Citizenship and Participation

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focus on the individual has contributed to the decline of collective groups and social networks. While still evolving, this cultural trend is also changing the way people experience and interpret participation.

To counter this, it's vital to rebuild the connections that link people together. Trust and social networks form the base on which meaningful participation is built. Community spaces that encourage interaction, cultural engagement, and civic activity play a central role in this renewal. However, traditional close relationships like those within families or between close friends are becoming less stable. As these personal networks weaken, so does the sense of solidarity and collective responsibility (Putnam, 2000)[2]. Without these shared connections, it becomes harder for people to feel part of a community or to engage even in basic democratic practices, such as voting.

The loss of social ties can leave individuals feeling isolated and disconnected from their environment[3]. When these ties break down, the natural flow of social exchange is disrupted, and trust especially in public institutions tends to fade (OECD, 2022)[4].

Trust is shaped by how people act and interact. It is a key element in how well individuals participate in political, civic, and social life. When trust erodes, it can block the functioning of society at many levels, especially across generations. Creating spaces where people can build relationships and grow together is what some call "co-individuation" means encouraging shared responsibility, interdependence, and a sense of active involvement. These are essential ingredients for collective action and democratic contribution, especially in addressing today's complex problems.

The 2008 financial crisis, followed by the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, have once again highlighted how important civil society is. In particular, volunteering and the Third Sector have played a vital role in promoting inclusion and civic engagement. Yet despite this recognition, volunteering is in decline. Organizations in civil society are finding it harder to meet the social demands caused by ongoing economic instability. Rapid changes in society and the economy risk further weakening the potential of volunteering to foster participation and human connection.

Even if some volunteering models are based on older forms of engagement, with proper institutional support and a renewed sense of purpose, they can still provide meaningful

[2] idem
[3] Citizenship and Participation
[4] Idem

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opportunities for people—especially the younger generations—to take part and contribute to democratic life. For this to happen, institutions need to create supportive environments. This means acknowledging that volunteering is not only about delivering social services, but also about helping individuals develop social skills and creating spaces where community life can grow again.

This is especially important in the current context, where a growing lack of trust presents a major challenge for those trying to rebuild the "social competences" that are vital for a healthy democracy. Participation is closely linked to inclusion, and it reflects how effectively institutions enable citizens to speak, act, and contribute—forming dynamic and meaningful communities and collective identities.

Culture, trust, and interpersonal relationships are the foundation of participation. They shape the paths people take toward civic, social, and political engagement. These processes are deeply connected, forming a complex relational system at the heart of democratic life.

In the end, participation depends not only on people's willingness to get involved in shared life, but also on the commitment of institutions to care for the social practices and relational resources that allow this life to flourish. This means giving people the tools and the spaces they need to maintain strong, meaningful connections across individuals, generations, and different forms of citizenship.

2.2 Civic engagement:Traditions and Approaches to Citizenship

The idea of citizenship has changed over time and varies widely across different countries, cultures, and belief systems. These differences influence how people around the world define and experience what it means to be a citizen.

The origins of the concept go back to ancient Greece, where citizenship was tied to the right to take part in public decisions. For those who had this privilege, being a good citizen was about more than rights—it was seen as a moral duty. Civic responsibility was essential, and those who ignored it were considered harmful to society.

In today's world, citizenship is often understood as a legal connection between a person and a state, usually referred to as nationality. Most people are officially citizens of a particular country, which gives them access to certain rights and protections. But with those rights also come responsibilities—things that the state expects individuals to do in return. In this mutual

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relationship, citizens contribute to society, and in exchange, they expect their rights and interests to be respected.

Still, citizenship is not only a legal matter. It also involves a deeper sense of belonging—feeling part of a community that one helps to shape. A community might be united by common values, shared rights and duties, a sense of loyalty to a larger group, or a shared identity. These communities can exist at the local level—where daily social life happens—or at the national level, connected to government and state institutions.

To understand how individuals relate to society, we can look at four connected areas of citizenship: political/legal, social, cultural, and economic. Each one plays a key role in how citizenship is lived and practiced:

- The **political and legal dimension** focuses on rights and duties between individuals and the state. Developing this area means learning how political systems work, promoting democratic values, and building participation skills.
- The **social dimension** is about how people relate to one another in everyday life. It involves loyalty to the community, solidarity, and the ability to build healthy relationships. It also requires social awareness and communication skills.
- The **cultural dimension** has to do with shared traditions and identities. It includes knowledge of history, language, and cultural practices that help form a sense of collective belonging.
- The **economic dimension** deals with how people interact with the world of work and resources. It includes the right to employment and a decent standard of living. Having economic knowledge and job skills is essential for taking part in this aspect of citizenship[5].

These dimensions develop through socialization—that is, through the experiences and environments that shape us. Families, schools, civil society groups, political parties, local associations, the media, neighborhoods, and peer networks all play a part in shaping our understanding and practice of citizenship.

To build strong and meaningful citizenship, it's important for individuals to be able to engage with all four dimensions. Like the legs of a chair, each dimension supports the others. If one is missing or weak, the whole structure becomes unstable.

In what communities or groups do you feel a sense of belonging?

Being part of a community means having the opportunity to shape it, support its growth, and contribute to the well-being of those who live in it. For this reason, citizenship can also be

[5] Citizenship and Participation

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seen as something we actively do—it's about being engaged and taking part in the life of society.

There are many different ways people can participate: in their local neighborhood, through social or community groups—whether formal or informal—or by getting involved at the national or even international level. The idea of active citizenship is about taking responsibility for improving the community we belong to and working toward a better quality of life for everyone involved.

This concept is strongly connected to democratic citizenship, which is based on key democratic values such as pluralism, respect for human rights and dignity, and adherence to the rule of law.

So, a question worth asking is:

Do you consider yourself an active citizen?

1.3 Citizenship, Participation, and Human Rights

Do you consider yourself an active citizen?

Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that every person has the right to a nationality, the right to change it, and the right not to be arbitrarily stripped of it. This fundamental right is also protected by other international agreements, such as the Council of Europe's Convention on Nationality (1997). In international law, the terms "citizenship" and "nationality" are generally treated as having the same meaning. The Convention itself confirms this, stating that nationality refers to the legal connection between a person and a state, and for the purposes of the treaty, the two terms are considered synonymous.

Having a recognized nationality is essential because it directly affects people's everyday lives. Being a citizen of a country often means having access to important rights and services—depending on national laws, these may include the right to vote, run for office, receive social benefits, healthcare, education, own property, work legally, or reside permanently. Although each state has the sovereign power to define who its citizens are and what rights they hold, this power is limited by international human rights standards. Notably, states must respect the principles of equality and work to prevent statelessness when setting their citizenship rules.

Taking part in political, social, and cultural life is a basic human right recognized in many international treaties, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes the right to vote and participate in government, to take part in cultural life, to gather

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peacefully, to form associations, and to join trade unions. Participation is not only a right in itself—it is also essential to achieving full and meaningful democratic citizenship for all.

The idea of participation is also central to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This treaty clearly states that children—defined as anyone under 18—have the right to express their opinions on matters that affect them, and that adults must take those views seriously, considering the child's age and maturity. Children have the right to speak freely, to access and share information, and to contribute to decisions that influence their lives. The Convention highlights the importance of young people as active citizens who can help shape their communities and bring about positive change.

However, true participation is not possible without access to other fundamental rights. If people are denied education, healthcare, freedom of speech, or economic security, their ability to take part in civic life is seriously limited. In the same way, when individuals are excluded from participation, many other rights remain inaccessible. Participation is not just a right—it's a key driver of a human rights-based society. It helps build solidarity, gives people a voice in public life, promotes democratic change, and allows each person to take control of their own story.

1.4 Who Gets to Participate? Rethinking Citizenship

What forms of civic engagement are available to ordinary citizens beyond voting in elections?

A major part of today's conversation about citizenship focuses on how to strengthen people's involvement in democratic life. It has become increasingly evident that voting every few years is not enough—either to keep elected leaders truly accountable during their time in office, or to encourage citizens to feel responsible and engaged in the democratic process. In fact, low voter turnout is often a symptom of political disengagement, which poses a serious threat to the health of democratic systems.

Another important issue relates to those who do not fully enjoy the rights or responsibilities that come with citizenship. One reason for this is ongoing discrimination. Many minority communities may hold official citizenship in the country where they live, yet still face barriers to real participation in society and public life.

There's also the challenge brought on by globalization and the increasing movement of people across borders. As international labor and migration patterns change, more and more people live in countries where they are not recognized as citizens and cannot easily apply for

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citizenship. This includes migrant workers, temporary residents, and individuals who, despite living long-term in a new country, are unable to access full legal status.

This raises an important ethical question: should migrant workers be denied basic rights simply because they lack official citizenship?

Is it right to deny migrant workers basic citizenship rights just because they lack formal status?

A third aspect of the problem is the issue of statelessness. Although the right to nationality is guaranteed by international human rights law, there are millions of people around the world who are not recognized as citizens by any country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that by the end of 2010, there were 12 million stateless people worldwide[6]. Statelessness is often the result of the dissolution of countries such as the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, but stateless individuals may also include displaced persons and refugees, expelled migrants, and people whose birth was never registered by the authorities.[7]

1.5 Forms of Participation

A widely accepted idea in democratic theory is that citizen participation is essential to the functioning of democracy. This participation can take many forms, using different tools and happening at various levels of society. Over time, many frameworks have been developed to understand how people engage with government and decision-making. One of the most well-known is **Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation**, first introduced in 1969[8].

Arnstein described eight levels of participation, arranged like steps on a ladder. These steps reflect the amount of influence citizens have over decisions. At the bottom are two non-participatory stages—**manipulation** and **therapy**—which are considered inappropriate because they give the illusion of participation without any real involvement.

The next three levels—**informing**, **consultation**, and **placation**—offer limited opportunities for citizens to express their views. While people are given space to speak or share opinions, those in authority are not required to act on that input. These levels are often considered **tokenistic** rather than truly participatory.

At the top of the ladder are three stages that reflect **genuine citizen empowerment**: **partnership**, **delegated power**, and **citizen control**. In these stages, citizens take an active role in decision-making and have real influence over outcomes. The higher one moves up the

[6] UNHCR Global Trends 2010
[7] *About statelessness, UNHCR #IBelong*
[8] Manual for Human Rights Education with Young people

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ladder, the greater the level of shared power and responsibility between citizens and institutions.

Building on Arnstein's model, **Roger Hart** adapted the idea to explore how children and adolescents participate in society. Hart emphasized that participation is not just an option for young people—it is a basic right and an essential way for them to learn the values and responsibilities of citizenship[9].

Youth participation, according to Hart, can also be seen as a partnership between adults and young people. The degree of involvement can vary depending on many factors, such as context, available resources, the goals of the initiative, and the age or experience of the young participants. Hart's version of the ladder outlines **eight levels of youth engagement**, showing the different ways in which young people can take part in projects, organizations, and community life—with varying levels of voice, responsibility, and decision-making power.

Level 8: Shared decisions with adults
Projects or ideas are initiated by young people, who invite adults to join the decision-making process as equal partners.

Level 7: Youth-initiated and directed
Projects or ideas are initiated and led by young people; adults may be invited to provide support when needed, but the project can run independently.

Level 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth
Projects are initiated by adults, but young people are invited to share power and responsibility as equal partners.

Level 5: Consulted and informed
Projects are initiated and managed by adults, but young people provide input and are informed about how their contributions influence the decisions or outcomes.

Level 4: Assigned but informed

Projects are managed by adults; young people are given specific roles or tasks and are fully informed about how and why they are involved.

Level 3: Tokenism
Young people are given roles in a project but have little or no influence over decisions. A false impression (intentional or not) is created that they are participating, when in reality they have no real say.

[9] Idem

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Level 2: Decoration
Young people are used to represent youth in a visible way without being given any meaningful role. Like decorations, their presence is superficial and serves to make a project or organization appear youth-inclusive.

Level 1: Manipulation
Young people are included in a project without any real influence over decisions or outcomes. Their presence is used to serve other objectives, such as winning local elections, improving the image of an institution, or securing funding from organizations that promote youth participation.[10]

There are many ways in which young people can play an active role as citizens in their societies. In 2011, a survey was conducted involving young people aged 15 to 30 in the EU Member States to explore how young European citizens participate in society. The survey focused on their involvement in organizations (e.g., sports clubs, volunteer associations), political elections, volunteering activities, and projects that promote cooperation with young people from other countries.[11]

In all countries, a minority of young people reported participating in activities aimed at promoting cooperation with youth from other nations. Participation rates ranged from 4% in Italy to 16% in Austria. About one-quarter of young adults were involved in organized volunteer activities in 2010. The highest rates were observed in Slovenia, Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands, ranging from 36% to 40%.
Among young people of voting age, approximately 8 out of 10 had voted in a local, regional, national, or European election in the previous three years. Participation varied from 67% in Luxembourg to 93% in Belgium, where voting is compulsory.
Around one-third of young people in the European Union took part in sports club activities in 2010. About one-sixth were involved in youth organizations, and one in seven participated in organizing cultural events.[12]

1.6 Social and Civic Capacities Related to Citizenship

Social and civic competences play a crucial role in shaping individuals who are capable of acting responsibly and contributing actively to their communities. Fostering these

[10] Manual for Human Rights Education with Young people
[11] *"Youth on the Move", Analytical Report, European Commission, May 2011* http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_319a_en.pdf
[12] *"Youth on the Move", Analytical Report, European Commission, May 2011* http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_319a_en.pdf

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competences helps strengthen social cohesion, particularly in societies marked by growing cultural and social diversity[13].

To promote justice and unity within society, it is essential to educate and motivate citizens, especially young people to take an active role in both social and political spheres. Education systems are therefore called upon to play a key part in developing these essential civic skills.

Recognizing their importance, the Council of the European Union has citizenship competence among the key competences for lifelong learning. In the European Framework, it is defined as follows:

"Citizenship competence refers to the ability to act as responsible citizens and to participate fully in civic and social life, based on an understanding of social, economic, legal, and political structures and concepts, as well as global developments and sustainability."[14]

The European Framework also highlights that effective citizenship involves knowledge in several key areas, such as:

- Basic concepts and phenomena concerning individuals, groups, workplaces, society, economy, and culture
- Shared European values as laid out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Awareness of current affairs and the ability to critically understand significant events in national, European, and global history
- An understanding of the goals and values of political and social movements, especially those focused on sustainability, climate change, and demographic shifts
- Recognition of cultural diversity and identity within Europe and across the world
- Insight into the multicultural and socioeconomic dimensions of European societies and how national cultures contribute to a broader European identity

"Skills for citizenship competence relate to the ability to engage effectively with others in common or public interest, including the sustainable development of society. This involves

[13] INVALSI (2025). Social and Civic Skills in citizenship Matters. *National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System.* Available at https://www.invalsiopen.it/competenza-sociale-civica-cittadinanza/

[14] *COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2018*

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critical thinking and integrated problem solving skills, as well as skills to develop arguments and constructive participation in community activities, as well as in decision-making at all levels, from local and national to the European and international level."[15]

To be engaged citizens, individuals must also be able to access and critically analyze both traditional and digital media, and understand the role of media in democratic society.

At the core of responsible citizenship lies a commitment to human rights, which form the foundation of democracy.

"Constructive participation involves willingness to participate in democratic decision-making at all levels and civic activities. It includes support for social and cultural diversity, gender equality and social cohesion, sustainable lifestyles, promotion of culture of peace and non-violence, a readiness to respect the privacy of others, and to take responsibility for the environment."[16]

Citizenship and Participation: Pathways to Belonging and Change for Migrants

Citizenship and participation go beyond legal or bureaucratic definitions—they reflect meaningful experiences of belonging, recognition, and visibility. For many migrants, however, these aspects often remain partial, fragmented, or shaped by a variety of visible and invisible barriers.

In numerous European contexts, access to citizenship is tightly linked to legal status, which is typically granted only after lengthy and often complicated procedures. These processes are frequently hindered by administrative hurdles, cultural expectations, and political constraints. As a result, many people who have long been part of a country—contributing to its economy and social fabric—still find themselves excluded from fundamental rights, such as voting or political representation.

Yet citizenship should not be reduced to possessing official documentation. It also encompasses everyday actions, shared responsibilities, interpersonal relationships, and care for the common good. It is within this broader and more active understanding of citizenship that this toolkit is positioned, aiming to offer both reflections and practical guidance on how migrants can participate in community life, decision-making processes, and civic or volunteer initiatives.

15 *COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2018*

16 *Idem*

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Nonetheless, migrant participation is far from guaranteed. It is often constrained by systemic challenges, including limited opportunities for institutional representation, language and cultural barriers that hinder access to civic engagement, and deeper symbolic obstacles such as racism, stereotypes, and the persistent view of migrants as passive recipients of integration rather than as full political and social contributors.

Through the voices and experiences of migrants involved in volunteering and activism, a different perspective on citizenship emerges—one that is grounded in a sense of responsibility toward oneself, the host society, and the country of origin. Even in conditions of marginalization, this form of citizenship becomes a practice of social creativity and contribution.

In this context, migrant-led organizations (MCBOs) play a vital role. They provide spaces of dignity, community, and transformation, where individuals can reconnect, share their skills, and actively participate in public life even in the face of institutional neglect or exclusion.

Creating Citizenship Through Engagement: Migrants' Contributions in Community Groups

Martinez-Damia et al. (2023)[17] present the findings of a qualitative study that combines the framework of liberation psychology with a generative perspective to examine the role of volunteering among migrants involved in Migrant Community-Based Organizations (MCBOs) in Milan. Set against a backdrop of exclusionary policies and structural forms of discrimination toward migrant populations, the research explores volunteering not just as civic engagement, but also as a means of resistance, identity reconstruction, and social creativity.

Drawing on the model developed by Omoto and Snyder (2002), Martinez-Damia et al. (2023) investigate three key dimensions of the volunteering experience: the motivations and conditions that prompt participation (antecedents), the lived experiences within MCBOs, and the individual and collective outcomes of volunteering. The research is based on interviews with 27 volunteers originating from countries with low to medium Human Development Index ratings. These conversations explored not only the participants' migration trajectories and organizational roles, but also the personal transformations associated with their social involvement.

The data has been analyzed using a constructivist grounded theory approach alongside reflexive thematic analysis[18], brought to light three core themes: volunteering as a generative response to both nostalgia and systemic oppression; the emotional bonds and sense of

[17] Martinez-Damia, S., Marzana, D., Paloma, V., & Marta, E. (2023). Community participation among immigrants: A generative journey towards personal growth. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *96*, 101853.

[18] INVALSI (2025). Social and Civic Skills in citizenship Matters. *National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System.* Available at https://www.invalsiopen.it/competenza-sociale-civica-cittadinanza/

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community formed within MCBOs; and a deepened perception of personal development that extends beyond organizational boundaries. MCBOs emerge as open and flexible spaces where migrants experience dignity, recognition, and the chance to act responsibly toward themselves, their local environment, and their countries of origin.

This contribution aims to underscore how, even within hostile and exclusionary settings, voluntary engagement can become a transformative force, fostering empowerment, building social cohesion, and supporting both individual and collective human development.

1.7 Keys to Successful Civic Participation: An Example from an Intercultural Setting

In an increasingly self-enclosed Europe and international global context, the process of integration among peoples—initiated after the end of World War II—is being severely tested. In this scenario, intercultural education and the opening of schools to the world are becoming true priorities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has powerfully highlighted the interconnected nature of today's world, underlining the need for educational systems to adopt a more global outlook. Limiting civic education to a solely national perspective would no longer reflect the complexity of current global challenges and would risk overlooking crucial dimensions of citizenship in the 21st century.

In this context, Intercultura plays a meaningful role by promoting an approach that brings together intercultural dialogue, global awareness, and education for sustainability. Drawing on its affiliation with ASviS and its commitment to the 2030 Agenda Goals, the organization offers educational initiatives that integrate these core themes.

Among these, civic education workshops stand out as a key activity. Held in collaboration with schools, often during the Intercultural Dialogue Day or other shared events, these workshops are facilitated by volunteers and frequently involve students who have participated in study-abroad programs. Through these sessions, young people are encouraged to explore and reflect on key issues relevant to increasingly globalized societies, including:

- citizenship from both European and international perspectives
- intercultural understanding and exchange
- sustainable development and environmental responsibility

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Such initiatives aim to nurture a new generation of students who are not only informed but also committed to creating more inclusive, sustainable, and interconnected communities.

1.8 Activities Related to Citizenship

Context note:

The activities suggested in this module are intended as examples only and should not be understood as fixed templates to follow in every context. Some of the proposed exercises may not be appropriate when working with individuals from the African diaspora. In these cases.

At the same time, the module includes specific activities, some with attached materials, that have been designed with Afro-descendant participants in mind. These activities are particularly suitable for use during training courses and offer spaces for empowerment, cultural expression, and shared reflection. While they are centered on the experiences of Afro-descendant communities, they can also involve participants from diverse backgrounds, encouraging inclusive and respectful dialogue across cultures.

1) What Makes Participation 'Civic'? Exploring the Links Between Culture, Civil Society, and Engagement: this link provides the rationale and objectives behind the development of this activity.

It explores the key question: What makes participation "civic"?

By examining the relationship between culture, civil society, and engagement, the resource outlines the conceptual foundations and goals of the activity, emphasizing how civic participation is shaped by context, identity, and access.

2) Participatory Chinatown (Adapted for In-Person Use): instructions

Topic: Citizenship, Participation, Urban Inclusion

Participatory Chinatown is an engaging role-playing activity that invites participants to step into the shoes of fictional residents in a changing neighborhood. Originally developed as a digital game to support community planning in Boston's Chinatown, this version has been adapted to work entirely **in person**, making it ideal for workshops, public forums, or adult civic education programs.

In this activity, each participant takes on a character with a unique background—perhaps a recent immigrant, a local business owner, or a single parent—each with their own goals, such

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as finding a place to live, getting a job, or building community connections. These personal objectives often come into conflict or alignment with others, creating a space where players must navigate competing priorities and work together to make decisions about shared urban spaces.

Rather than being a competitive game, Participatory Chinatown is a collaborative and reflective experience. The focus is on **exploring the complexity of civic life**: how different people experience the same neighborhood in very different ways, and how decisions about urban development can include—or exclude—certain voices.

The game concludes with a **facilitated group discussion**, where participants step out of character and reflect on what they've learned. This debrief is a key moment: participants consider how the challenges faced by their fictional personas mirror real-world issues of access, equity, and voice in city life.

Suggested Duration: 90 to 120 minutes

The activity can be structured as follows:

- **Introduction & character assignment (15–20 minutes):**
  Participants are welcomed, introduced to the activity, and assigned a character profile with personal goals and background information.

- **Role-playing phase (45–60 minutes):**
  Participants interact in small groups, navigating a series of decisions or scenarios based on their character's needs and the available resources in the fictional neighborhood.

- **Group reflection & civic dialogue (30–40 minutes):**
  A facilitator guides participants through a discussion, helping them draw connections between their experiences in the game and real-life issues of citizenship, participation, and inclusion.

This activity works particularly well in community settings, classrooms, and civic labs, where it can open up meaningful conversations about urban life, decision-making, and the power of listening to diverse perspectives.

Participatory Chinatown – Tutorial Video: this introductory video explains the structure and purpose of the game, with real footage from sessions and commentary from participants and facilitators.

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A behind-the-scenes look at how the game was played in a real-life community event, including interviews and reflections: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA5sz-ymv6k

3) Annex 1: Activity related to Cultural Identity

For an additional activity related to the theme of Cultural Identity, please refer to Annex 1 – Theme 1 at the end of this document.

3. Module 2: Digital Competencies and Visibility of Afro-Descendant Identity

2.1 Introduction: Digital literacy as a foundation for inclusion and active citizenship

There is a growing consensus that a more inclusive and fair society cannot be built without ensuring that individuals possess adequate digital skills. One of the most pressing and forward-looking challenges today is to develop a generation of citizens who are not only digitally capable, but also conscious and responsible in their use of technology. This involves moving beyond simple access to digital tools or internet connectivity, and instead promoting a deeper form of digital citizenship, one that includes the ability to find trustworthy information, assess its credibility, and participate in digital spaces in a constructive, meaningful way that benefits both the individual and the wider community.

While achieving such a goal is complex, it remains fundamental. It demands significant investment in digital education to address the growing cultural, social, economic, and political needs of our time, as well as to keep pace with rapid technological change.

Although digital competence is shaped by culture, education plays a decisive role in helping individuals develop and strengthen their digital identity and the abilities associated with it. Digital literacy should be seen as part of a broader set of essential life skills needed to sustain an inclusive and equitable society. These include critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, emotional intelligence, ethical awareness, and the capacity to navigate both private and public spaces within the digital world.

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Digital education, therefore, cannot be limited to teaching technical know-how. It must also address cognitive, ethical, and emotional dimensions that help create safe and respectful online environments. This vision aligns with the European Commission's Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles, which emphasizes the importance of putting people at the center of digital transformation. It is also reflected in the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens.

Being part of the so-called "digital native" generation does not automatically equate to digital competence. International assessments such as PISA and ICILS have shown that simply spending time online does not guarantee the development of crucial digital skills. In some cases, it may even have negative effects on young people's emotional well-being and life satisfaction. The ability to evaluate information critically or use digital tools responsibly depends heavily on one's social and family context, as also highlighted by recent studies on digital educational inequality.

This makes it all the more urgent to promote digital literacy at every level of society. Institutions, and particularly educational systems, must take an active role by revising teaching methods, modernizing learning environments, and adopting more inclusive, forward-thinking educational approaches.

Although this transformation is not without challenges and transitions are rarely straightforward, encouraging developments are taking place. Many universities have begun to offer interdisciplinary programs in digital humanities, and schools are increasingly implementing teaching strategies that promote digital awareness, co-designed learning experiences, and cross-curricular collaboration. These innovative methods often rely on hands-on projects and dialogue-based exchanges between students and teachers, helping to create learning environments that are more equitable and student-centered.

Such changes contribute to reshaping social relationships in the classroom, reducing rigid hierarchies that may hinder open discussion and critical thinking. In this way, schools become spaces where ethical, environmental, and social awareness can grow an outcome with lasting value for the broader community.

Ultimately, using digital tools responsibly is not just a matter of technical ability it reflects a deeper cultural and societal transformation. Empowering young people with the skills and awareness to actively shape their digital environments allows them to take real ownership of the digital world. In this sense, digital literacy represents both a challenge and an opportunity: a powerful lever for reducing inequalities and dismantling prejudice, beginning with the youngest generations.[19]

[19] Competenze digitali, uguaglianza e inclusività

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2.2 Media Literacy: Knowledge, Competencies, and Democratic Participation in the Digital World

2.2.1 Digital Competence and Media Education: Beyond Functional Skills

Digital competence goes far beyond the mere ability to use technology or perform isolated tasks. It involves a continuous process of interpretation that must take into account cultural, social, and political contexts. For this reason, media literacy should not be seen as a standalone goal, but rather as one component within a broader vision of media education, one that should play a key role in shaping educational strategies suited to today's complex media environment.

To effectively respond to the widening gaps in digital access and usage, educational approaches must expand their scope. A narrow focus on technical media skills is no longer sufficient. Digital competence today requires an understanding of the broader media ecosystems we interact with and how they influence our thinking, shape public discourse, and impact society. Developing such awareness is essential for promoting more equitable and meaningful participation in digital life.

Disinformation: Why Digital Democracy Is the Real Solution

For educational approaches to be truly effective, they must move beyond the assumption that digitalization alone automatically leads to more democratic access to information. As Umberto Eco pointed out in 1979, the act of interpretation is fundamentally a social process, influenced by shared cultural frameworks and collective knowledge. Simply being exposed to digital content is not enough, especially in online environments where the features of each platform shape the way messages are perceived and understood.

If democracy is understood not merely as formal equality, but as the active removal of structural obstacles that prevent full participation, then it becomes necessary to take seriously the critique raised by scholars such as Buckingham. He argues that media literacy is often presented as a matter of personal responsibility, which allows institutions to shift the weight of education onto individuals. This tendency risks neglecting the need for broader structural changes, such as regulatory policies and meaningful investments in public education.

What Is Media Literacy, Really?

Media literacy is now widely recognized as a key area of academic research and institutional focus, aimed at helping individuals engage with the media landscape in a critical and responsible manner. In the United States, for instance, the National Association for Media

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Literacy Education describes media literacy as the capacity to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using different forms of communication. This approach views media literacy as an integral part of education, encompassing not only media analysis and critique but also hands-on media production and active involvement.

This understanding typically frames media literacy in practical terms, focusing on the skills needed to interpret and produce media content. While this functional perspective is a useful starting point, it does not capture the full depth of the concept.

A more comprehensive approach is reflected in the report *Media Literacy Versus Fake News. Best Practices in Italy*, published by the Italian Digital Media Observatory [20]. This report draws on the European Commission's definition of media literacy, first introduced in 2007, which connects it directly to the idea of digital citizenship. In this view, media literacy is understood as the ability to engage with the media in a thoughtful and responsible way, making it a crucial tool in the fight against disinformation.

The Commission's definition emphasizes the importance of being able to access media, understand and critically evaluate its various forms and content, and communicate effectively across different settings. Ultimately, this positions media literacy as a matter of culture—a way of thinking and acting that encourages connection, critical reflection, and active participation rather than passive consumption. In today's digital world, these abilities are more essential than ever.

A Historical Perspective on Media Education

The development of both mass and digital media has introduced significant challenges for education, requiring new approaches to how we teach and learn in a media-saturated world. A historical perspective, such as the one offered by Falcinelli, helps us understand how the concept of media education has evolved since the 1970s. During that period, institutions like UNESCO and the International Council for Film and Television began defining media education as a field concerned with understanding the history of media, their influence on society, and how to access and interpret them. Initially, this focus was directed toward traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers, forming the basis for the more comprehensive framework we see today.[21]

Over time, Falcinelli outlines three key areas that have shaped the field of media education. The first is education about media, which emphasizes the importance of knowing how media messages are created and understanding how the overall communication system functions. This represents a knowledge-based perspective. The second area, education through media, encourages a critical and conscious approach to media use, aiming to promote thoughtful and

[20] IDMO (2023). *Digital Media Literacy Gaps and Needs*. Available at: https://www.idmo.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IDMO-Digital-Media-Literacy-Gaps-and-Needs_EN_final_compressed-3.pdf

[21] *Teachers Digital 4.0: affrontare la disinformazione e promuovere la digital media literacy attraverso l'istruzione e la formazione nelle scuole europee*

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responsible consumption. This can be considered a behavioral or attitudinal focus. Lastly, education with media highlights the role of active engagement in content creation. It supports the development of practical skills and fosters the ability to express ideas, emotions, and opinions through a variety of media formats and languages.

This threefold framework reflects a shift from passive consumption to active and reflective media participation, which is increasingly essential in today's digital society.

2.2.2 Digital Citizenship

Helping people develop digital and media literacy, as previously outlined, is essential for preparing them to engage in a thoughtful and critical way within the digital world. These skills serve as the foundation for becoming active and responsible digital citizens.

Digital citizenship involves more than just knowing how to use technology. It includes the ability to interact constructively with others around shared goals, such as addressing issues related to sustainability. It also requires the use of critical thinking, the ability to solve problems, build coherent arguments, and participate actively in community-based activities. Moreover, it involves being able to access and interpret both traditional and digital media, while understanding how these tools function and contribute to democratic life.

This broader understanding of digital citizenship is also reflected in European education policy. The European Commission, for instance, highlights the importance of these skills in its Digital Education Action Plan for 2021 to 2027. The initiative aims to strengthen digital competencies across member states, placing particular emphasis on encouraging critical analysis, media awareness, and responsible behaviour in online settings.

Diversity

Diversity is a complex and wide-ranging concept that includes various forms of human difference. These differences may relate to culture, language, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic background, and they shape how individuals learn and grow. Rather than implying inequality, diversity simply refers to the natural variation that exists among people—for example, in the language they speak or their physical traits. Inequality, on the other hand, arises when such differences result in disadvantages or unequal access to opportunities.

To build more just and inclusive societies, three interconnected principles are often emphasized: equity, diversity, and inclusion. These concepts guide efforts to ensure fair treatment and full participation for everyone, particularly for those who have historically been marginalized or excluded due to their identity, migrant background, or disability.

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Equity is about recognizing that people have different needs and providing resources accordingly, so that each person or group has the opportunity to thrive.

Diversity reflects the presence of a wide range of social identities and backgrounds in any setting, from schools to workplaces.

Inclusion focuses on creating environments where all individuals feel valued, respected, and able to contribute, with their unique experiences and perspectives acknowledged and embraced.

At the European level, various initiatives have been developed to support these goals, particularly in education. For further insight into how diversity and inclusion are being promoted in schools across Europe, one can refer to recent EU publications dedicated to the topic.

Why Diversity Matters

In today's increasingly multicultural societies, the ability to collaborate, be inclusive, and appreciate diverse viewpoints is becoming more and more essential. Much of this diversity is linked to increased mobility, as individuals and families move across borders and settle in European countries. A range of factors contributes to this dynamic: migration flows, socioeconomic inequalities, greater visibility of gender and sexual diversity, and a growing emphasis on inclusive educational practices.

While the experience of diversity is now a global phenomenon, each country addresses it differently, shaped by its own historical and social context. For instance, the United States has a long-standing history of both immigration and indigenous communities. In Europe, countries with colonial pasts—such as France, Cyprus, and the United Kingdom—have seen significant migration since the mid-twentieth century. Others, like Germany and Norway, initially welcomed migrants through labor recruitment programs. In recent years, migration from African nations and conflict-affected areas has grown, often driven by the pursuit of safety, better living conditions, or employment opportunities. A turning point came in 2015, when a major wave of migrants arrived across the Mediterranean, further enriching Europe's ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious landscape.

The current migration landscape includes many families with children, which underscores the importance of providing support systems that help these families adjust to their new environments. Past experiences indicate that the degree to which newcomers can integrate successfully depends heavily on the policies adopted and the attitudes expressed by host societies.

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Diversity and Culture in Educational Settings

Culture cannot be easily defined by national borders, language, or ethnicity. Today's societies are shaped by the presence of many different subcultures, each with its own way of understanding the world, based on shared values and meanings. Although culture is often seen as fixed or stable, it is actually something that changes over time. It develops through daily interactions, exchanges, and reinterpretations made by individuals and communities.

Cultural diversity can be understood at three main levels:

- **International or global culture**, which refers to ideas, values, and practices that are shared across countries and cultures.
- **National culture**, which includes customs, traditions, and beliefs common to people within a single country.
- **Subcultures**, which exist within a larger society and are formed by smaller groups who express unique identities or lifestyles.[22]

These forms of culture can be seen in different ways. Some are **visible**, such as clothing, food, music, and celebrations what we often associate with cultural expression. Others are reflected in **everyday behaviors**, including language use, gender roles, family structures, and political views, which influence how people interact. Lastly, there are **deeper symbolic values**, like religious beliefs, moral principles, and worldviews. These are often less visible but play a powerful role in shaping how individuals see themselves and the world around them.

Ethnic Diversity

Ethnicity is formed through a combination of elements such as language, religion, nationality, and shared history. These cultural aspects create a sense of belonging among members of the same group, while at the same time distinguishing them from others. In the European context, ethnicity is often linked to a person's status as a migrant. In contrast, in North America, it tends to be more closely associated with race and physical characteristics passed down through generations. These different understandings are shaped by the distinct historical experiences of migration in each region.

[22] Chua, S. W. Y., Sun, P. Y., & Sinha, P. (2023). Making sense of cultural diversity's complexity: Addressing an emerging challenge for leadership. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, *23*(3), 635-659. https://doi.org/10.1177/14705958231214623 (Original work published 2023)

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Various factors including geographical location, economic conditions, religion, culture, ethnicity, and race interact to shape people's perceptions and behaviors. These influences often play a role in the development of prejudice, stigma, and racist attitudes. Even in societies that are culturally diverse, people tend to make sense of complexity by using mental shortcuts, grouping others into categories. This process can lead to the creation of stereotypes and to favoring those who belong to one's own group, while excluding or judging those perceived as different.

Racism is not always openly expressed; it can remain hidden for long periods and then resurface during times of crisis. In such moments, it is often reinforced by harmful narratives and false information. A clear example of this occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when certain communities, including Asians, Muslims, and Jews, were unfairly blamed through the spread of misleading and discriminatory messages.

Language and Hate

The way people speak, including their accents, dialects, or different forms of language, can sometimes increase the chances of them facing hate or discrimination. Linguistic diversity covers people who speak only one language, those who speak multiple languages, and also individuals who use alternative communication methods like sign language or Braille. Despite this variety, speakers who use non-standard forms of language often experience social and linguistic discrimination because standard forms are usually associated with greater prestige and influence. In particular, migrant accents and the home languages that are passed down through second or third generations are often looked down upon both in schools and within communities.

Young people are very aware of migration-related issues. Many of them actively question unfair stories about migrants. However, when asked to respond to manipulated or false news reports, they sometimes find it difficult to remember and challenge those inaccurate accounts.

2.3. Activities proposed on module 2

Context note:

The activities suggested in this module are intended as examples only and should not be understood as fixed templates to follow in every context. Some of the proposed exercises may not be appropriate when working with individuals from the African diaspora. In these cases.

At the same time, the module includes specific activities, some with attached materials, that have been designed with Afro-descendant participants in mind. These activities are particularly suitable for use during training courses and offer spaces for empowerment,

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cultural expression, and shared reflection. While they are centered on the experiences of Afro-descendant communities, they can also involve participants from diverse backgrounds, encouraging inclusive and respectful dialogue across cultures.

2.4.1 Video Creation Basics

Creating a video is more than just recording a few clips — it's a creative process that involves planning, storytelling, technical skills, and post-production editing. Whether you are working with young people or adults, video creation activities are an excellent way to develop communication, collaboration, and digital media skills in an engaging and accessible format.

This section introduces two key resources:

- Understanding the Video Creation Process
  This resource outlines the main phases of video production — from idea development and scripting, to filming and editing. It's perfect for beginners who want a clear overview of how to approach video creation with structure and intention.

Video Production Process Guide – National 4-H Council (PDF)

- Video Creation Basics
  This activity-based guide takes participants through the practical steps of filming and editing a short video project. It's designed to be interactive, making it ideal for workshops, classrooms, or group settings. Participants will engage in brainstorming, role distribution, filming, and basic editing, resulting in a collaborative final product.

2.4.2 Media literacy

To enrich this section, we suggest including a focus on media literacy, particularly in relation to how digital content—especially images and videos—can shape perceptions and influence democratic participation. Several useful resources can support this approach. For example, *The Power of Images* explores how visual media can impact public opinion, while *Digital Media Literacy for Democracy* highlights the importance of critical thinking in the digital age.

You might also consider integrating elements from *Digital Storytelling: Protecting Democracy in the Digital Age*, which encourages participants to reflect on the role of narrative in shaping civic understanding. To address current challenges such as disinformation and manipulated content, resources like *Spotting Deepfakes* and *How to Detect Deepfakes and Avoid Disinformation* provide practical tools and awareness strategies.

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These materials can either be used to create a dedicated activity on media literacy or serve as enriching components within existing sessions on citizenship, participation, or digital culture.

2.4.3 Afro visibility

The activity "Hair Nah" – Web Game for Afro Visibility" offers a creative and impactful way to explore issues related to Afro visibility, microaggressions, and digital culture. By placing the player in the role of a Black woman navigating everyday public spaces, the game transforms a common but often trivialized experience—unsolicited touching of Afro hair—into a powerful interactive narrative. The gameplay is intentionally simple and accessible, allowing users to quickly engage with the concept while prompting deeper reflection on the dynamics of personal space, race, and bodily autonomy.

"Hair Nah" also provides an entry point into broader conversations about how digital media can serve as a space for resistance and representation. Through its stylized pixel art, character customization options, and metaphorical gameplay mechanics, the game invites players to reflect not only on the lived experiences of Black women, but also on how those experiences are often ignored or dismissed in both physical and digital environments.

Within the context of media literacy and inclusive education, the game can be used to examine the intersection of game design, social justice, and cultural identity. It is particularly useful for workshops or learning environments focused on diversity, anti-racism, and digital awareness, offering participants a way to engage emotionally and critically with the topic through an innovative and culturally specific medium.

2.4.4 Digital Storytelling – Empowering Afro Narratives

This activity invites participants to share personal stories that highlight their identity, experiences, or aspirations as members of the Afro community. Through digital storytelling, participants create short videos (2–3 minutes) using simple tools such as Canva or CapCut.

These stories might focus on topics like migration, daily life, community values, or dreams for the future.The process includes combining personal photos, text, and voice recordings or background music. Once completed, the stories are shared on social media platforms using hashtags such as **#AfroVoice** or **#MyAfroStory** to amplify their visibility and reach a broader audience.

This activity strengthens basic digital skills like video editing and multimedia storytelling, while promoting greater visibility for Afro narratives in public and online spaces. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on how algorithms and engagement mechanisms influence what content gets seen and shared. By the end of the session, participants not only gain technical

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skills, but also become more conscious of how digital platforms can be used as tools for self-expression and social visibility.
Useful resources to support this activity include the *Digital Storytelling Cookbook* (a step-by-step guide to creating digital stories) and various case studies of storytelling workshops implemented in African communities, available on platforms like ResearchGate, Videa.ca, and PubMed Central.

Resources:

- *Situating Digital Storytelling within African Communities* → practical examples of workshops held in Kenya and South Africa (Available on platforms like ResearchGate, Videa.ca, PubMed Central)
- *Digital Storytelling Cookbook* → a step-by-step guide to creating digital narratives using images, audio, and voice (Available at wrd.as.uky.edu)

2.4.4 Annex 2: Interculturality

Activity related to Cultural Identity

For an additional activity related to the theme of **Interculturality**, please refer to **Annex 2 – Theme 2** at the end of this document.

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4. Module 3: Digital Tools Against Hatespeech

In today's digital world, the internet is not only a place where people connect, express themselves, and build communities, but also a space where exclusion, hostility, and misinformation can easily spread. One of the most damaging issues online is hate speech, which includes content that targets people because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or migration background. For Afro-descendant communities and other racialized groups, coming across such content—or even just observing it—can feel very personal and emotionally upsetting.

This chapter focuses on how individuals, particularly young people and community leaders, can identify, react to, and keep track of hate speech when it appears online. In addition, it highlights how digital skills can be used not only for protection but also as tools to expose these acts, raise public awareness, and promote justice. By using thoughtful, creative, and responsible forms of communication, people can challenge harmful narratives and work toward a more inclusive digital environment.

What Is Hate Speech and Why It Matters

Hate speech goes beyond the use of offensive words. It can take the form of any message, image, or action whether it is written text, a meme, a video, or even an emoji that intentionally targets someone with insults, threats, or messages that encourage discrimination or violence based on aspects of their identity. The nature of online platforms allows this kind of content to circulate quickly and widely, often without proper control, which increases the harm and helps make dehumanizing language seem normal.[23]

UNESCO's 2023 report *"Addressing Hate Speech through Education"* highlights how hate speech can lead to real-world consequences, including violence, social division, and a weakening of democratic participation. It also harms the dignity and visibility of marginalized groups, especially when social media algorithms promote provocative or extreme content, bringing harmful messages into everyday public discussions.

This situation shows why digital literacy is an essential part of being an engaged citizen. It involves much more than simply knowing how to use technology. It also means understanding the ethical side of communication, the influence of narratives, and how certain messages can be amplified. Being able to recognize hate speech and respond appropriately is a powerful way to take action and protect both individuals and communities.

[23] UNESCO. (2021, October 25). Learn the facts, think critically, take action: Stand together against hate speech. UNESCO. Available at: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/learn-facts-think-critically-take-action-stand-together-against-hate-speech un.org+14

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How to Identify Hate Speech Online

Identifying hate speech involves more than simply reacting with emotion. It requires media literacy and a critical understanding of how communication works. Sometimes hateful content is not obvious—it may be masked as humor, satire, or social commentary. To assess whether something qualifies as hate speech, there are several important aspects to consider.

- First, pay attention to messages that dehumanize or marginalize others. Content that depicts individuals or groups as inferior, dangerous, or fundamentally different should be approached with caution.
- Second, use media and information literacy skills. This includes questioning who created the content, why it was produced, and whether the sources are trustworthy. Look for signs of stereotyping, emotional manipulation, or one-sided messages, instead of balanced or thoughtful discussion.[24]
- Third, be aware of the way different aspects of identity intersect. Hate speech often targets more than one characteristic at the same time—for example, both race and gender—which can intensify the harm and deepen social inequalities. Being able to recognize this complexity is essential.

When the content is unclear or open to interpretation, ask yourself a few key questions. What is the purpose of this message? How might it affect the individuals or groups being talked about? Does it encourage understanding, or does it reinforce harmful assumptions?

There are several resources designed to support this kind of analysis. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offers a Digital Literacy Curriculum that includes exercises on identifying extremist material and responding to misinformation. The Council of Europe's No Hate Speech Movement also provides educational tools for young people and educators working to promote respectful online communication.

Strategies to Respond and Take Action

Once a violent or hate speech incident is identified, what should you do?

1. Emotional self-regulation ("meta-moment")

Before responding, take a moment to pause and decide what kind of action reflects your values. This technique, suggested by researchers like those at Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence, helps avoid escalating situations or acting impulsively.[25]

[24] UNESCO. (2023, March 27). *Addressing hate speech through education: A guide for policy-makers and teachers*. UNESCO. Available at: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-and-partners-launch-first-education-focused-guide-addressing-hate-speech

[25] European Commission/ Better Internet for Kids. (n.d.). *Online hate speech* [Teaching module]. Better Internet for Kids. Retrieved August 1, 2025, from https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en/learning-corner/teachers-and-educators/online-hate-speech

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2. Counterspeech

Rather than silence, try responding constructively. Counterspeech is the act of replying to hateful content with facts, empathy, personal stories, or humor. Studies (e.g., Gagliardone et al., 2015) show that counterspeech—especially when rooted in lived experience—can reduce the reach and acceptance of hate narratives.

3. Reporting

Every major social media platform includes tools to report harmful content. While reporting may feel ineffective, research from the European Commission shows that user reports often lead to content removal—especially when multiple users flag it or it violates regional laws like the EU Digital Services Act.

4. Community care

Sometimes the best response isn't public. Reach out to someone who's been targeted and offer support. Organize group responses or discussions to break isolation and provide solidarity.

Using Digital Skills to Document and Showcase Incidents

Beyond reacting in the moment, participants in this toolkit are encouraged to *transform hate into visibility* by applying creative digital skills to document and raise awareness.

1)Documentation and Evidence Gathering

Capture screenshots, video recordings, or URLs of hateful content. Annotate them with dates, platforms, and context. This documentation can be used for reporting to civil society organizations, local authorities, or human rights monitors.

2) Storytelling and Multimedia Creation

Using tools like Canva, CapCut, or InShot, participants can create short videos or photo-stories that explain what happened and why it matters. These can include quotes from the original content (blurring names/faces for privacy), voiceovers with personal reflections, and closing calls to action. Creative forms—such as spoken word, animated reels, or Instagram stories—often resonate more than pure information.

3)Platform and Hashtag Strategy

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Share content through channels with both reach and relevance. TikTok, Instagram, and Telegram are useful for visual narratives; Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) can amplify civic and institutional responses. Use hashtags like #StopHateOnline, #AfroRights, or create localized tags for your community.

4)**Ethical Sharing and Consent**

Ensure that you anonymize others when necessary, especially if content is emotionally intense or shows individuals who may not want to be identified. Ethical storytelling respects the dignity of both the speaker and the audience.

Case Studies and Best Practices

Projects like UNESCO's *Global Citizenship Education for Peace* and the *Digital Youth Engagement Framework* from UNDP offer concrete examples of communities using digital media to respond to hate speech. For instance, in Kenya and Indonesia, youth-led teams produced digital stories that challenged religious and racial hate, reaching over 30 million viewers.

In Europe, campaigns under the Council of Europe's *No Hate Speech Movement* trained young people to create counter-narratives that blended personal testimony with civic analysis. Their work not only built digital skills but also helped shape local policies and influence school practices.

4.1. Activities related to module 3

Context note:

The activities suggested in this module are intended as examples only and should not be understood as fixed templates to follow in every context. Some of the proposed exercises may not be appropriate when working with individuals from the African diaspora. In these cases.

At the same time, the module includes specific activities, some with attached materials, that have been designed with Afro-descendant participants in mind. These activities are particularly suitable for use during training courses and offer spaces for empowerment, cultural expression, and shared reflection. While they are centered on the experiences of Afro-descendant communities, they can also involve participants from diverse backgrounds, encouraging inclusive and respectful dialogue across cultures.

1.Hate Speech Analysis Game (Council of Europe)Recognize and Analyze: Understanding Hate Speech Online

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To begin, participants can engage with an interactive digital tool developed by the Council of Europe as part of its *Human Rights Speech* platform. This tool helps users assess whether a given message or post qualifies as hate speech based on clear legal and ethical criteria. Through real-world examples and guided questions, participants are invited to reflect on how speech can incite harm or exclusion, even when it appears as a joke, opinion, or meme.

This activity can be done individually or in small groups, and followed by a discussion: *Did everyone agree on which examples were hate speech? Why or why not?* These conversations often surface cultural differences in how offense is perceived—and are essential to building collective understanding and shared digital values.

2. Practice Counterspeech: Responding with Voice and Empathy

Once participants feel confident recognizing harmful content, the next step is learning how to respond constructively. Here, we introduce the concept of **counterspeech**—responding to hate or discrimination with facts, empathy, personal stories, or even humor.

Using materials from the **Dangerous Speech Project**, participants work in teams to create responses to various real or simulated examples of hate speech. They learn to analyze tone, choose the best approach (e.g., calm correction, personal testimony, ironic humor), and draft 1–2 short responses.

The facilitator can encourage discussion: *Which responses felt authentic? Which might provoke more anger? Which would resonate with the broader community?* Through this activity, participants build both critical thinking and online communication skills—while also boosting confidence in speaking out.

3. From Reflection to Action: Building a Mini Media Campaign

To turn learning into impact, participants are invited to design a **micro-campaign** addressing online hate that targets their own community. They begin with an interactive quiz developed by **Internet Matters** that tests knowledge about the different forms of hate speech, including racial discrimination, xenophobia, and coded language.

After completing the quiz together, participants reflect on where they struggled most. Then, working in small groups, they design a creative message—such as a 30-second video, an Instagram story, or a graphic post—meant to counter a specific narrative. They define their audience, tone, and platform, and draft a short posting plan (this can be done simply using Google Slides or Trello).

This activity combines **storytelling, visual design**, and **platform strategy**, showing participants how to create messages that are not only powerful but also discoverable and shareable. It also introduces basic campaign skills: hashtags, captions, and community calls to action.

For inspiration, the **Council of Europe's No Hate Speech Movement** provides useful templates, youth-led examples, and messages that promote positive identity and human rights.

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4.*Annex 3: Alternative narratives*

Activity related to Cultural Identity

For an additional activity related to the theme of **Interculturality**, please refer to **Annex 3 – Theme 3** at the end of this document.

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Annexes

This training material has been developed within the framework of the **AFROEQUALITY** project, a European initiative committed to promoting social justice, inclusion, and intercultural dialogue.

The following activities are part of the Empowerment Workshops, each activity corresponds to one of the core themes of the training module—Cultural Identity, Interculturality, and Alternative Narratives—and is designed to support the empowerment of Afrodiasporic individuals and communities. These workshops provide participants with opportunities to reflect on their lived experiences, develop critical skills, and express themselves creatively. Through dialogue, collective learning, and digital tools, the activities aim to strengthen civic engagement, promote inclusion, and amplify underrepresented voices.

Annex 1 - Theme 1: Cultural Identity

These activities focus on the exploration and celebration of cultural identity as a source of strength, creativity, and pride. Participants are invited to reflect on their personal histories, values, and experiences, and to express them through creative methods such as digital storytelling, art, or group dialogue. The workshops create safe and supportive spaces for individuals to reclaim their narratives and challenge stereotypes rooted in Afrophobia and discrimination. Through storytelling and self-expression, cultural identity becomes a tool for resistance, visibility, and connection.

Annex 2 - Theme 2: Interculturality

These activities aim to foster mutual understanding and dialogue among participants from diverse backgrounds. Through interactive and participatory exercises, they explore how cultural differences can enrich social life and strengthen democratic values. Participants engage with key human rights principles—such as dignity, equality, and freedom—and are encouraged to reflect on their roles as active citizens in a multicultural society. The sessions promote solidarity and civic engagement, empowering participants to recognise and claim their rights while respecting those of others.

Annex 3 - Theme 3: Alternative narratives

These activities address the impact of digital racism, disinformation, and online hate speech on racialised communities. They support participants in critically analysing dominant media narratives and understanding how representation—or the lack thereof—affects public perception and social justice. Through media literacy tools and guided reflection, participants learn to create their own counter-narratives that affirm their identities and promote diversity, inclusion, and equity. The sessions empower individuals to take ownership of their voices in the digital space and contribute to shaping fairer and more accurate narratives.

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