

Artificial Intelligence and Youths: Ethical Commitment and Critical Thinking

The contest “A Sea of Words” was launched in 2008 by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation. This initiative brings together the voices of young people, who are essential agents of change, on topics of social, cultural, economic, or political dialogue, which prompted the 1995 Barcelona Declaration.

This contest gives a voice to young people from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and the European Union, promoting debate around common problems and shared values.

“A Sea of Words” encourages the participation of youths from both shores of the Mediterranean and expresses different challenges and goals of each country in the region. In the 16 years that the contest has taken place, 3,366 stories written by youngsters between 18 and 30 years old have been presented. 1,447 stories came from the northern shore and 1,883 from the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. With the goal of encouraging the voices of youths, the project has the objective of creating new socio-political narratives that strengthen the culture of peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Each edition focuses on different current topics concerning young people from all over the Mediterranean, making their realities and conceptions known with a creative tool: writing. Through stories about real or fictitious experiences, young people provide a personal, historical or anthropological vision of issues and realities that, despite geographical or cultural distances, are common to the Euro-Mediterranean region.

In this 16th edition: “Artificial Intelligence and Youths: Ethical Commitment and Critical Thinking”, focused on the impact of Artificial Intelligence and the challenges it entails, the contest received a total participation of 212 valid stories from 25 different countries of the Mediterranean basin reflecting on the impact of AI in our societies.

The winning authors of the 10 best texts – selected by an international jury – were invited to Barcelona on 8 November 2023 to participate, for three days, in the awards ceremony, creative workshops and other cultural exchanges to develop common meeting spaces. Out of all the invited finalists, seven finally joined us in this cultural exchange.

We are currently witnessing a new change of paradigm in which algorithms and latest information technologies not only create and produce content but also interact with us to provide answers, make decisions, or anticipate various situations. The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) does not seem to have limits and opens a whole universe of applications in different social, cultural and employment fields that affect us very directly.

AI provides a multitude of opportunities to accelerate necessary transformations but also poses risks that our societies will have to face. As AI becomes more sophisticated, it will influence decision-making and therefore have a greater impact on our lives.

Beyond its economic effects and in terms of progress, we are interested in exploring others that are related to our immediate social environment and behaviours, which involve new learning, changes in the concept of privacy, and new social relationships. An important consideration concerns the challenges that affect the new narratives, especially the creation of transmedia content and the latent danger of misinformation.

As people are affected by increasingly automated decision-making, great challenges arise in these fields, mainly in ethical terms. A negative conception and misuse of AI can exacerbate inequalities and social polarisation, bring about the loss of skills, or contribute to the creation of unreal realities.

In a region like the Mediterranean with one of the world's biggest digital divides in terms of gender, AI risks creating more gender inequality and bias. Given this new paradigm, it is essential to empower young people with the right skills to enable them to think critically, innovate and reduce uncertainty in the face of potential negative effects.