

STOA - Study on EU Civic Engagement

The Use of Digital Tools and AI to promote Citizen Participation in EU Policymaking

Abstract: There has been growing interest in applications of digital tools, specially using artificial intelligence (AI) to promote civic engagement in policy making. At the same time, EU institutions and civil society are keen to reinvigorate democratic participation in EU policymaking, partly to make this process more accessible to citizens.

This study provides evidence for how digital participation tools can promote civic engagement in EU policy making and the preconditions for doing so. Building on a comprehensive landscape analysis, the study clusters 94 distinct tools from around the world and selects 11 representative cases for in-depth empirical assessment. This approach distinguishes between theoretical potential and practical utility, identifying the preconditions for successful engagement and how tool functionalities can support this.

The study also provides empirical insights into the current usage of digital tools, their associated advantages and limitations, and the trade-offs that need to be considered when conducting participatory processes. There is a specific focus on the current uses of AI in digital participation tools, alongside an assessment of its potential and risks.

Finally, the report outlines concrete policy options ranging from governance prerequisites to procedural considerations and technical alternatives. These options define the features and safeguards required to operationalise the link between citizens' voices and institutional action. If designed correctly, technology can enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of the European legislative process, and they offer guidance on how to achieve this.