

A Human Rights-Based Approach to AI

MOOC Report
E-learning Department

Foreword

AI can impact upon many of our human rights in both beneficial and detrimental ways, giving us the means to realise human flourishing but also potentially posing novel challenges to individuals, communities and society at large.

Based on the partnership among four actors in the field of human rights (Danish Institute for Human Rights, Global Campus of Human Rights, Human Rights Centre at Queen's University Belfast and Raoul Wallenberg Institute) and building on collaboration with key stakeholders in academia, practice and AI industry, this MOOC aimed at sharing knowledge, creating connections, reinforcing synergies and - in the long term - catalysing broader attention and application of a HRBA to AI.

We found it relevant and necessary for everyone who is, or will be, affected by AI - that means all of us.

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Introduction

This MOOC's starting point was simple: thinking and talking about AI is vital but very hard. It's also vital but very hard to think and talk about human rights even when we know that dignity, welfare and freedom are shared values around the world and that states have signed international agreements to respect and promote these values. Combining the two - AI and human rights - can make thinking and talking about them even harder.

The MOOC showed that by adopting the lens of a HRBA to AI we enable hard conversations to take place within a concrete and proven framework that - among other aspects - can facilitate deeper understanding and respect of the principles and values of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and legality (PANEL), all at the core of both human rights and the ethical values encircling AI.

Through diverse case studies, we illustrated how adopting a HRBA can help navigate both the promises and perils of AI, highlighting why this framework is crucial in addressing these complex issues. Using examples from fields such as social media and the public sector, we emphasized the potential risks associated with AI, particularly in areas like decision-making and transparency. We also delved into the phenomenon of deepfakes and the spread of 'fake news,' examining how the rapid advancement of generative AI amplifies the challenge of verifying information and maintaining trust in public institutions.

We used experts to help MOOC participants see the issues that matter, but just as importantly, we used a learning-by-doing method, especially in the final week, that allowed participants to test and apply their knowledge.

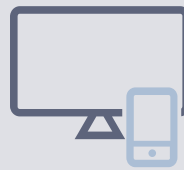
This report provides a comprehensive overview of demographic data, course content, impact, key insights, and recommendations based on responses from the participants' Welcome and Final surveys.

The MOOC in a nutshell

Key information



17 Feb-23 March
2025



Open edX



5+ h/week



Website



Teaser and
promotion



Discussions,
quizzes, peer
exercises

A snapshot

Course coordinators

- **Thérèse Murphy**, Queen's University Belfast, Global Campus of Human Rights
- **Line Gamrath Rasmussen**, Danish Institute for Human Rights
- **Sue Anne Teo**, Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law



Course lecturers



- **Laura Lazaro Cabrera**, Equity and Data Programme, CDT Europe Office
- **Rikke Frank Joergensen**, Danish Institute for Human Rights
- **David Kaye**, University of California, Irvine, School of Law
- **Keketso Kgomosotho**, University of Vienna

- **Chloe Lee**, Encode Justice, South Korea
- **Anna Su**, University of Toronto
- **Łukasz Szoszkiewicz**, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan

Interactive engagement

What was new in this MOOC in addition to our usual interactive activities, such as Mentimeter, Padlet, various discussions, and reflection cards? For the very first time we introduced scenario-based simulations, highly appreciated by the audience.

In the first scenario, participants reflected on key learnings from the course, with a particular focus on applying a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to the use of AI in schools. The second scenario explored the intersection of AI and social media. These simulations offered participants the opportunity to engage in virtual conversations, navigate real-world situations, and explore multiple perspectives, all while gaining a deeper understanding of the potential implications of their choices and decisions.

Scenario-Based Learning: AI Tutors



"Sure, we have already identified a series of measures to comply with standards that protect student data. We are also planning to run a survey among students and families to better understand their views and needs. Would this be ok for you?"

- Oliver

ⓘ Requires a correct answer to continue

In your view, would this be sufficient for a human rights-based approach?

- No, it would not. If we start surveying students and families, we will never be able to put this idea in practice. We should just introduce it and then see how it goes and ask for feedback.
- Not sure yet. This is great and I'm sure in line with current legislation and the principle of accountability. But what measures will the school take to ensure that AI tutors do not discriminate against particular groups of students?

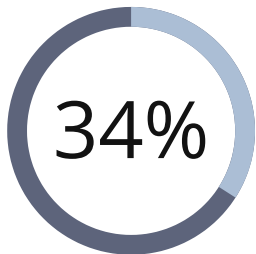
Highlights

The course:

- addressed one of the fastest-developing sectors: AI.
- provided a practical human rights based-approach, including tools like **the PANEL principles**.
- discussed **new challenges** and **emerging issues**, especially in relation to democracy, ethical standards, and vulnerable groups.
- offered current, real-world **insights from different parts of the world** through frameworks and case scenarios.
- was praised for being **thought-provoking, updating the knowledge**, and **fostering critical thinking**.
- Attracted **74%** of participants who were **new to GC courses**, although **83%** had a **prior knowledge** or studies in human rights.

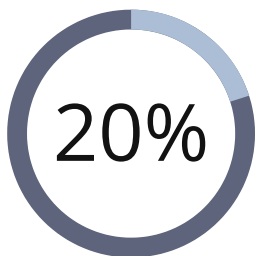


Professional profiles



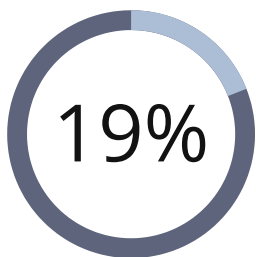
Students, researchers

The biggest group was made up of students (20%) and researchers (14%)



NGO Professionals

Another big group was constituted by NGO professionals (20%).



Other professionals

The course attracted professionals from a wide range of sectors, including (but not limited to) human rights activists, legal experts, educators, therapists, researchers in gender equality and online advocacy, development and humanitarian aid workers, UN volunteers, cybersecurity specialists, medical professionals and public sector employees.

Participants' profiles

Motivation

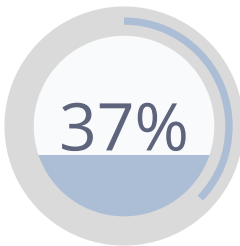
- Enhance or complement **existing knowledge**.
- Navigate **emerging ethical, legal, and technical challenges** posed by AI.
- Understand **the impact of AI** on human rights, democracy, and vulnerable populations.
- Support **career development and specialisation** in fields including policy, advocacy, education, law, and research.
- Apply insights in **real-world contexts**: online advocacy, public sector roles, and international organisations.
- Need to address militarised AI, misinformation, hate speech, and AI-driven discrimination.

Participants' profiles

The majority of participants were highly motivated and deeply engaged. Many expressed a strong interest in the increasing relevance of the topic in both their personal and professional lives, eager to better understand its risks, opportunities, as well as its legal and technical dimensions.

They emphasised the inevitable presence and impact of AI, as well as the perplexities and curiosities surrounding how to ethically address the growing concerns.

I would like to know its intersection with Human Rights Law and how we can adapt to this change by influencing policies that are not just abstract but ones that apply to real daily life challenges.



Differently from other MOOCs, 37% of participants already had a solid background in the subject and joined the course to further deepen their knowledge and enhance their skills.

As a young researcher, I am both fascinated by the use of AI in research and everyday life, and equally terrified by its impact on human rights, freedoms and security. My research focuses on protecting the rights of the youngest users of the web, social media, for whom, it seems, AI systems are not only useful, but also extremely dangerous. I would like to know the opinion of others, perhaps to find answers to the problems faced by today's society, in which AI is used at almost every turn.

Expectations

Researchers and students were eager to explore the ethical challenges of AI, particularly its impact on democracy, social cohesion, and inclusion.

In today's modern world, it is undeniable that digital technology and the rise of AI has become part of our everyday life so I am interested to learn more about AI and its impacts on human rights, particularly the impact on vulnerable population e.g. children, women, people with disability, refugees and migrants etc. This course can help me meet my personal goal by providing the knowledge and thought provoking discussion on this topic.

Experts aimed to enhance their existing competencies:

I am a Federal Prosecutor and currently coordinate the Working Group on Human Rights and Business at the Brazilian Federal Prosecution Service. Many of the human rights violations we face today are linked to large tech companies—especially social media platforms—used to spread hate speech and misinformation. I want to better understand the role of AI in driving algorithms that fuel this harmful content.

I'm an elections expert, trained at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Ghana, and I currently work with Elections Cameroon. Human rights and elections are deeply connected, and integrating AI knowledge into my work will be a valuable asset. AI is here to stay—understanding it better will help us improve lives.

Others joined with more personal or practical motivations, including a desire to improve their career path or apply a human rights-based approach to AI in their everyday lives. They also appreciated the course's accessibility and the fact that it was offered free of charge.

As a medical doctor going through a career shift towards Computer Science and AI I believe this will be a useful tool in future projects.

Impact

The course was widely praised for: delivering new knowledge and updating participants on trends and best practices, offering reliable academic resources, presenting a clear, practical approach applicable to a wide range of professional context. Participants appreciated its focus on developing a critical understanding of how to apply a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to AI, particularly through the PANEL principles.

The content offered both the opportunities and risks posed by AI technologies, and offered accessible, well-explained examples that made complex topics easier to grasp.

Before the course, I was unaware of the PANEL approach. Now, I analyze my business techniques using its principles: participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and legality and it has been priceless. I have yet to use it in my soft skills training. The course materials introduced new areas I have not dived into like the issues resulting from the use of new technologies which are not widely discussed. Additionally, I now have a clearer understanding of Nigeria's digital journey and the areas that need improvement, especially in 'people' score assessment, where our cultural norm to technology remains basic. Overall, I am glad I enrolled in this course. It has helped me break out of my social media filter bubble. I broadening my sources of information. Moving forward, I intend to educate others on the importance of human rights-based approach to technology.

This course gave me valuable insights into how AI intersects with human rights, especially through frameworks like the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). It helped me better understand the real-world impact of AI systems, such as issues of bias, accountability, and transparency. Professionally, it strengthened my ability to engage in legal and ethical discussions around AI regulation—skills that are increasingly relevant in my field. Personally, it encouraged me to think more critically about the role of technology in society and the importance of protecting human dignity in the face of rapid innovation.

Supported PhD and academic research

The impact of the course was reflected in many comments about the research, as AI challenges, currently 'under the spotlight' present numerous opportunities for discovery and analysis. We have gathered a solid group of experts already working on this topic.

For students the course served as both an academic foundation and an inspiration for further inquiry. Several participants reported integrating course insights into their ongoing PhD work and research projects. Other researchers found new motivation to explore and share the topic more widely through seminars or academic forums.

I have actually been able to expand the scope of my research expertise as anticipated, I have submitted an abstract for a call for papers on the intersection between technology, law and SDGs. Through the knowledge gained I intend to broaden my research and study abroad a human rights-based approach to AI for SDGs. It's an impeccable milestone.

This course help me out in my personal knowledge about AI and its merits and demerits regardings human rights and its impact on laws regarding human rights so being a student of law this was very good experience and professionally i am good at this topic now i can speak on this and can arrange seminars or lectures on AI and human rights .

I found module 4 on Generative AI very interesting as it speaks directly to a new research project in which we will use LLMs.



Empowered Practitioners

Practitioners benefited greatly. The MOOC broadened their' perspectives on the intersection between human rights and AI, shedding light on ethical considerations and real-world implications—especially in areas like advocacy, development, education, elections, and the protection of vulnerable groups. In this regard participants reported increased confidence and clarity in their professional roles.

This course on human rights in AI has helped me understand the ethical implications of AI technologies and their impact on fundamental rights. It has equipped me with the knowledge to analyze AI systems critically, ensuring that they align with human rights principles. This will be crucial in my professional goal of working in tech policy or advocacy, where I can contribute to responsible AI development and implementation.

For many, it was not only an educational experience, but also a call to action.

This course has equipped me with professional means needed to defend and advocate for human rights. Honestly speaking, this course was so helpful that it deeply acquainted me with the impacts of AI on human rights. Most importantly, it helped me understand the principles that social media platforms or generative AI should consider when deploying AI. Many thanks to Global Campus of Human Rights for providing this course, now I can consult social media platforms and tech companies on how and when they should apply the PANEL principles.

I want to learn and do more about digital rights so this particular course has been very important to me as it gave me a lot of new concepts to think with and made me aware of issues I didn't particularly pay attention before. This course has inspired me to at least share with my coworkers about what we can do and hopefully, share it with a wider network.

On a practical level, many appreciated the exposure to different perspectives, including those regional or of vulnerable groups impacted by AI, and valued the interdisciplinary nature of the content.

Professionally It helped me realize how AI can powered governments deliver more efficient, responsive, and personalized public services. Personally It helped me to understand better the mechanism of fake news and to learn new vocabulary such shallow fakes,cheap fake and how to interact with it.

As an engineer, it helped me to view the dangers of AI from the human rights perspective. Since the lecturers are also not experts in AI, the way the content was laid out, I could also have a glance at how the average citizens perceives the black-box of AI.

Inspired critical thinking

Last but not least, considering that AI is a rapidly developing sector, many participants highlighted the course's most notable quality outcome: it was thought-provoking and fostered critical thinking, leaving them with open questions that inspired further reflection – and, in some cases, even answers.

The course allowed me to explore in greater depth the dilemma surrounding the scope of existing human rights, as guaranteed by the UDHR and other international treaties, in relation to the digital realm and artificial intelligence. Are current human rights provisions sufficient to address AI-related challenges, or is there a need to expand their scope by introducing new digital rights? I have concluded that AI and digitalization are inherently covered by existing human rights frameworks. The key lies in interpretation and a broad, nuanced approach to their application.

Recommendations from participants



- Revise **assessments** for clarity and ensure feedback is constructive and responsive.
- Offer **more interactive** elements, such as live webinars.



- Consider **shorter, more focused video** content to improve engagement

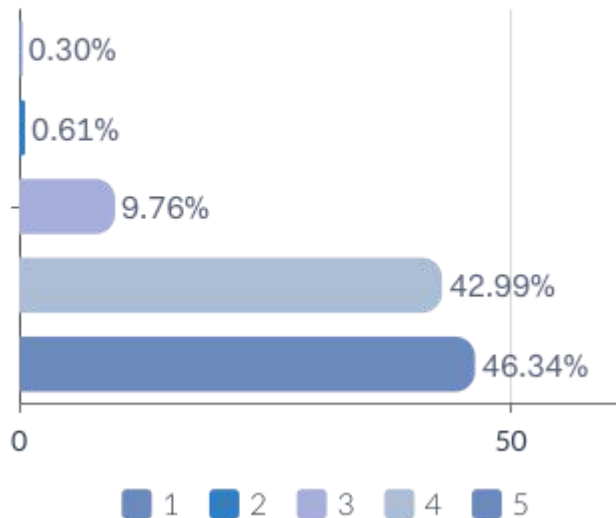


- Enhance **accessibility tools**, especially for participants with learning differences (e.g., improve screen reader compatibility)
- Provide **case studies with greater depth**.

Evaluation

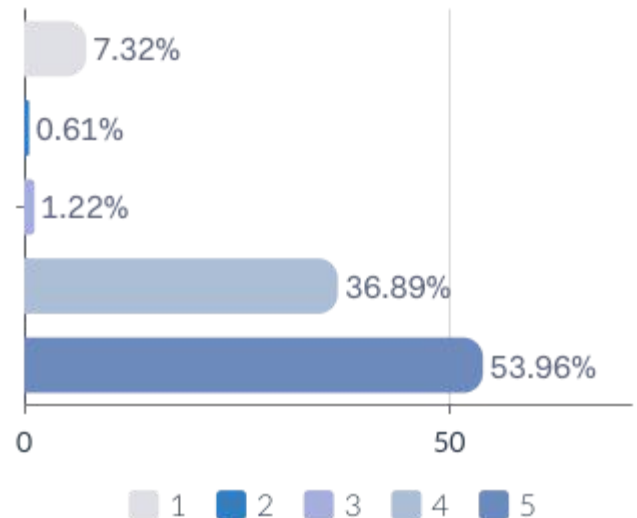
Course rating

scale 1 (lowest) - 5 (highest)



Positive impact of course materials

scale 1 (strongly disagree) - 5 (strongly agree)



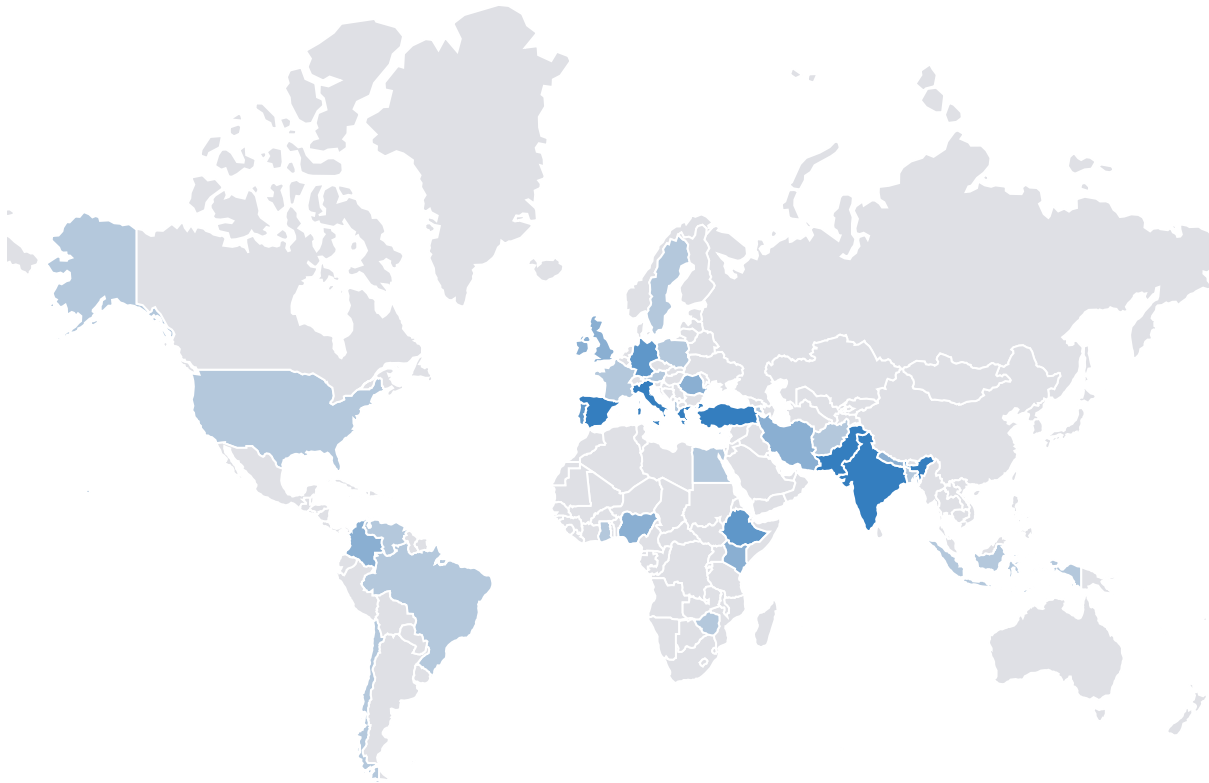
- **93%** of participants would recommend the course to a friend.
- After the course, the general knowledge on the topic **increased** from the initial 4,3% (excellent) and 8,3% (very good) to 15% (excellent) and 44% (very good).

Shift in knowledge



Certificates

Our certificates, awarded to those who completed all course requirements, reached **309 participants** in **108 countries** around the world.



1491 Participants

20% Certificates

The course had a particularly high participation rate from Europe (56%), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (15%) and Asia/Pacific (12%). Participation from Latin America (10%), MENA (4%), Central Asia (4%) and Southeast Europe (1%) was in line with previous courses.

Course completion (20%) exceeded by far our target of 10% and represents a record rate for our MOOCs. The country with the highest number of certificates issued was Italy (33), followed by India, Pakistan and Turkey (14).

Selected comments

I really liked the design of the course—this was my first time enrolling in a MOOC, and I truly enjoyed the experience. The materials were up to date, even including some from as recently as February 2025, which made the content feel current and relevant. I also appreciated the variety of learning formats: the combination of videos, literature, word clouds, and discussion forums was both compelling and engaging. What stood out most for me, though, was the course's commitment to inclusivity. Even though I'm not personally affected, providing video transcripts for people with disabilities is, in my opinion, one of the best examples of inclusive education I've seen in my academic journey so far. It really shows thoughtful design and respect for all learners.

I really appreciated how the course connected human rights principles directly to real-world AI challenges. It helped me understand not just the risks, but also how to think critically about solutions. The mix of theory, case studies, and discussions made the topic much more concrete and relevant.

Courses like these are very helpful to those of who cannot afford to take off the time/ money for an entirely new Master's or a diploma, but wish to have access to the information and a certifiable attestation of the same.

It will allow me to stand for and remember the importance of protecting Human Rights whenever AI comes up in a discussion.

Thank you for providing us with input like the Digital Ethical Compass and other toolkits that I will use further in my work. Thank you for making sure that there was representation globally in the course.

Selected comments

First of all, I am a big fan of David Kaye - he was one of the reasons I registered for this online course and, once again, I found his interventions very interesting and to the point. For me, he is the first one who really put human rights into the AI debate with his report as UN SR on freedom of expression. Overall, I found the course very good, with a variety of activities and support materials. The case studies at the end were maybe a bit 'light' in comparison to the content of previous modules.

As many other participants, I struggled a bit with quiz 2 of the first module, but at the end this pushed me into further readings and studying, so not a bad thing at the end ;-)

Finally, while I understand that the course is meant to be 'global', there are many documents adopted by the Council of Europe which could have been mentioned, such as the Recommendation of the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights "Unboxing AI: 10 steps to protect Human Rights (disclosure: I worked on this document in 2019), or more recently the risk and impact assessment of AI systems from the point of view of human rights, democracy and the rule of law ("the HUDERIA"). Thank you very much for the course.

This course on a human rights-based approach to AI has been invaluable in helping me understand the intersection of emerging technologies and human rights. As a junior lawyer aspiring to pursue an LLM in Transitional Justice and Human Rights, the course has equipped me with crucial insights into the ethical and legal implications of AI, particularly in terms of privacy, accountability, and discrimination. This knowledge will be essential in shaping my future career in human rights law, especially in addressing the challenges posed by technology in the justice system.

These five weeks have been incredibly valuable for me, reinforcing my belief in AI regulation and education, especially to protect vulnerable groups, including minors and women. The course helped me deepen my understanding of the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) and how it can be effectively applied to AI to drive meaningful and positive change. I particularly appreciated the MOOC's intercultural and intersectional approach. It was inspiring to see how, despite our different backgrounds, we all share a common belief: AI should work for people, not harm them.

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