EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

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Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum).)

PROJECT	
Participant:	1 - Alternatives Européennes EA
PIC number:	941964479
Project name and acronym:	Democratic Digital Commons - DDC

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	5
Event name:	Athens assembly – Migrants and AI
Type:	Assembly
In situ/online:	in-situ
Location:	Greece, Athens
Date(s):	10.10.2026
Website(s) (if any):	https://euroalter.com/events/ddc-assembly-4-digital-borders/
Participants	
Female:	133
Male:	60
Non-binary:	20
Greece	105
Italy	17
France	10
Austria	8
Belgium	4
Bulgaria	9
Cyprus	5

Czech Republic	7
Germany	7
Hungary	3
Ireland	5
Netherlands	8
Poland	4
Portugal	7
Spain	7
Ukraine	7

Total number of participants:	213	From total number of countries:	16

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

Athens assembly – Migrants and AI

The Athens assembly of the Democratic Digital Commons (DDC), publicly titled *Digital Borders: A Citizens' Assembly on Migration, Border Control and New Technologies*, continued the transnational process of collective reflection on artificial intelligence, democratic participation and digital justice, focusing particularly on the use of new technologies in migration and border control.

Bringing together **participants** from diverse backgrounds, including migrant and refugee communities, civil society organisations, researchers, activists and public institutions, **the assembly explored how AI technologies are increasingly being used in borders**, including border control, asylum procedures, policing and access to public services. Participants examined how these systems can reproduce and intensify existing inequalities and discriminatory practices, particularly affecting people on the move, and how more democratic alternatives might be developed.

This assembly had an additional **participatory preparation process**, with a public pre-event during Athens Refugee Week in June 2026, and a private facilitation training & design workshop in September, with the aim of heightening interest in the event, building trust with local communities, and ensuring that people with lived experience of migration were actively involved in shaping discussions and proposals.

The assembly followed the DDC's four-part methodology of **education**, **deliberation**, **imagination** and **contribution**. Through expert presentations, facilitated breakout discussions and collaborative exercises, participants explored the consequences of digital borders, discussed existing European legal protections, and developed proposals for more protections and alternatives.

The **2nd transnational consortium meeting** was also held in the days around the assembly, representatives of all project partners were present and active during the meeting and assembly.

Where?

The assembly took place at BIOS in Athens, Greece. The venue allowed us to have a plenary space, rooms for breakout discussions, a childs corner, safeguarding space, and break room.

When?

The main assembly took place on Saturday October 10th, 2026.

Who?

The assembly was organised in collaboration with Athens Refugee Week, Greek Forum of Migrants, Homo Digitalis, and a wider network of local and international organisations working on migration and digital rights.

The assembly brought together participants from diverse professional and social backgrounds, including people with lived experiences of migration, migrant and refugee community representatives,

researchers, civil society organisations, municipal workers, activists, technologists, digital rights advocates and citizens interested in AI governance, migration policy and social justice.

The main language was English, with Greek, French, Arab and Farsi translation available.

The assembly featured contributions from four main speakers:

Spyridoula Spyridon, Programme Manager and researcher at the University of Athens, working on migration, technology and AI. Drawing upon her research into the use of biometrics, databases and automated systems in migration and border control, alongside her experience working with migrant and refugee communities in Greece, she introduced the technological architecture of digital borders and discussed the EU AI Act and its implications for migration governance.

Ksenia Rybak, researcher, writer and curator based in Kyiv, Ukraine, whose work focuses on the intersections of technology, space and violence. Drawing upon research and lived experiences, she introduced an account of the screening of Ukrainian citizens at a Moscow airport, exploring how technologies can become instruments of surveillance, exclusion and control.

Lydia Emmanouilidou, journalist and audio producer, and co-editor-in-chief of the Greek investigative journalism outlet Solomon. Drawing upon her investigations into border regimes and new technologies, she contributed perspectives on the human consequences of digital surveillance and the importance of journalism in investigating and challenging harmful practices.

Eleftherios Chelioudakis, digital rights lawyer and Executive Director of Homo Digitalis, a Greek civil society organisation dedicated to protecting human rights in the digital age. Drawing upon his expertise in data protection, privacy and the human rights implications of emerging technologies, he explored existing legal protections and strategies for challenging unlawful data processing and surveillance practices at borders.

An **additional group of four experts 'info points'** supported the deliberative process, bringing perspectives from EU migration and asylum policy, refugee law, digital rights, political participation, data justice and technology governance. These included representatives and researchers connected to the Greek Forum of Migrants, academic institutions such as Pantheon University and Digital Commons conference.

A **facilitation team** supported the assembly's discussions, enabling participants to engage in smaller groups and collectively develop proposals for democratic AI governance. They were selected through an open call, shared by 20+ different migrant rights organisations in Athens.

Municipal workers were also invited to join the final stage of the assembly to hear the proposals developed by participants, connecting citizens' deliberations with local public institutions and opening opportunities for further dialogue with policymakers.

Preparation Phase

Rather than approaching the Athens assembly as an isolated event, a longer participatory process was developed in collaboration with local organisations, particularly Athens Refugee Week and the Greek Forum of Migrants, to strengthen engagement with local communities and ensure that the themes and discussions were informed by lived experience.

To build local collaborations, many pre-visit trips were conducted by the core team, and a mapping of local & international actors in the migrant rights, legal and technological fields was conducted. This led to the assembly having a large number of collaborators including: Greek Forum of Migrants, Homo Digitalis, Greek Forum of Refugees, DigiCommons Conference, Ksenia Rybak, Athens Refugee Week, InterAlia, Parea Radio, Athens Comics Library, We are community, BauTopia, Vana Ba Afrika – as well as project partners Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Arroz Estudios, Desiré Foundation, Iuridicum Remedium, make.org.

Two pre-events took place;

An **initial public pre-event during Athens Refugee Week on June 25th,** opening conversations around AI, migration and border technologies. This created an opportunity to introduce the subject within an existing festival bringing together migrant communities, local organisations and citizens, and began the process of identifying relevant questions and concerns.

An open call for facilitators ran in August and September, shared through the mapped organisations, and with a priority to include a wide range of communities within the assembly team. On **September 17th, a facilitation training and brainstorming session** took place at the Greek Forum of Migrants for the selected facilitators. This session aimed to make the assembly's curation and facilitation more participatory, involving people with lived experience of migration in shaping the questions, methods and priorities of the deliberative process. A 2nd briefing was held in the days before the assembly.

The training also included a workshop on EU legislation such as the AI Act, introducing facilitators to the emerging European regulatory framework and its implications for migration and fundamental rights. This helped connect the assembly's deliberations to existing legislation, ensuring that

participants' concerns and democratic demands could inform discussions about how legal protections might be strengthened or adapted.

The **2nd project consortium meeting** was also held around the days of the main assembly (the 8-11 October). The agenda included; sharing & group review of completed project related activities, a mapping of relevant external organisations, events and projects, a review of the current draft citizens charter, planning of the final project activities, and starting to strategise the release of the citizens charter and other project creations. All partners were present.

Invitations for the assembly were spread through; the facilitators networks, the built partners, a built database of athens & eu-based migrant rights and digital rights groups, networks built from EAs previous assembly projects, reaching out directly to local municipal workers, social media & newsletters & physical posters in the streets.

AGENDA Athens Assembly

10h30-11h **Arrival & registration**

11h-11h30 **Welcome** Introduction to the assembly, DDC and shared expectations

11h30-11h45 **Technical presentation** The Invisible Architecture Governing the Digital Border, with Spyridoula Spyridon

11-45-12:05 **Real example of the use of these techonologies** Technological border screening, with Ksenia Ryba**k**

12h05-12h15 **Break**

12h15-13h **Conversation** Our rights, the media, and collective strategies with Lydia Emmanouilidou and Eleftherios Chelioudakis

13h-13h15 **Collective reflection & questioning**

13h15-14h15 **Lunch**

14h15-14:30h **Expert pitches: “What can I bring to your conversation?”**

14:30h-15h15 **Breakout I - Values and tensions**

15h15-16h15 **Breakout groups II - Vision / Safeguards**

16h15 - 16h30 **break**

16h30-17h **Cross-pollination - Proposal gallery**

17h00 - 17:30h **Sharing and closing**

Welcome

The assembly opened with board member Rasha Shaaban introducing the relationship between new technologies and migration, followed by an introduction to the Democratic Digital Commons project by coordinator Billie Dibb and the objectives of the day.

Participants were introduced to the practical arrangements, translation and interpretation, the role of facilitators and the safeguarding space. Warm-up questions encouraged participants to reflect on their expectations and establish shared principles for democratic participation.

The opening introduced a central question that would continue throughout the day: *Who gets to decide how technologies are used to govern migration, and whose rights, freedom and safety are being protected?*

Technical presentation - understanding Digital Borders and AI Surveillance

Spyridoula Spyridon introduced participants to the mechanisms through which AI-enhanced border systems operate, exploring how surveillance technologies, biometric identification, interconnected databases and automated decision-making systems are increasingly embedded within migration governance.
Drawing upon examples from Greece and across Europe, the presentation examined surveillance technologies around the Evros border, the iBorderCtrl deception-assessment pilot, phone data and speech analysis, and the interoperability of European migration databases. The presentation also addressed the EU AI Act, connecting these technologies to questions of European regulation, fundamental rights and accountability.

Lived Experiences, Rights and Collective Agency

Building upon the technical introduction, **Ksenia Rybak** contributed a research and lived account concerning the screening of Ukrainian citizens at a Moscow airport.
Her contribution connected discussions of technological surveillance to experiences of people subject to border control, encouraging participants to consider the human consequences of systems often presented primarily in terms of efficiency, security and technological innovation.

Lydia Emmanouilidou and **Eleftherios Chelioudakis** then held a conversation exploring the relationship between lived experiences, investigative journalism, fundamental rights and collective strategies for challenging harmful surveillance practices.
Drawing upon their respective expertise in border investigations and digital rights law, the conversation explored the possibilities for holding institutions and technology providers accountable and protecting individuals against unlawful or discriminatory data processing.
The session encouraged participants to move beyond identifying potential harms towards considering what forms of legal protection, democratic oversight and collective action might allow communities to reclaim agency over technologies affecting their lives.

Breakout Groups: Reflecting on Digital Borders

Following the presentations, participants divided into facilitated breakout groups to reflect on what had stayed with them and how the use of digital technologies might affect people on the move.

Participants questioned whether technologies might help address practical difficulties associated with migration, including physical documentation, language barriers and complex asylum procedures.

One example concerned the destruction of a physical passport, which can effectively turn a person into a 'non-person' within administrative systems. Participants questioned whether digital alternatives might address such problems, while recognising the additional risks associated with dependence on technological infrastructures and data collection.

A recurring observation was that AI does not necessarily create new forms of discrimination, but can amplify existing patterns of racism, exclusion and unequal treatment through increasingly automated and opaque systems.

Participants also challenged the assumption that technology is inherently neutral, emphasising that its consequences depend upon who develops and controls it, for what purposes and within which political and economic systems.

Expert Pitches

Following lunch, accompanied by music and a dance session from Vana Ba Afrika, eight experts quickly summarised their knowledge of migration policy, human rights, AI technologies and democratic participation through answering three questions: *What do I know? What question could I help you explore? What perspective might I challenge or add?*
This approach aimed to make different forms of knowledge available to participants, allowing groups to request expert contributions according to the questions emerging from their own discussions.

Breakout groups I : Identifying Values and Tensions

Participants went into facilitated groups to identify which values should shape the use of AI in migration and border control, and where these values might come into conflict with existing technological practices.

Across the discussions, participants highlighted several shared priorities:

- Human dignity, empathy and the protection of fundamental rights.

- Freedom of movement, equal treatment and access to asylum protection.

- Transparency around the collection, storage and use of personal data.

- Human accountability and the ability to challenge automated decisions.

- Protection against racial profiling, discrimination and unnecessary surveillance.

- Meaningful participation of migrant and refugee communities in technological governance.

- Equal access to information, legal assistance and public services across different languages.

A recurring question was *Safety for whom?* Participants distinguished between security measures intended to control borders and the actual safety experienced by people crossing them.
The discussions also identified tensions between security and dignity, efficiency and human interaction, technological innovation and actual social needs, and public accountability and private profit.
Participants questioned whether the increased use of AI should automatically be considered progress, particularly when technologies reduce human involvement, reinforce existing inequalities or make decisions more difficult to understand and challenge.

Breakout Group II: Vision and Safeguarding

Following the values discussions, participants moved into groups focused on imagining alternative technological futures and identifying the safeguards necessary to protect fundamental rights.

Vision groups were invited to consider what AI and migration systems might look like if they were designed around the values identified during the assembly.
Participants imagined technologies that could help people on the move access reliable information in different languages, understand asylum procedures, receive legal guidance and navigate journeys, arrival and integration. Proposals also included translation assistance, support with documentation and tools that could allow individuals to access information collected about them and use it as evidence in support of their own claims.

Safeguarding groups focused on identifying what must be protected when AI is introduced into migration and border systems.
Participants called for restrictions on surveillance, protection of personal data, meaningful human oversight, independent accountability and stronger protections for children and other vulnerable populations. Importantly, participants questioned whether the objective should always be to make existing technologies more ethical or whether certain systems should not be introduced at all.

Closing Plenary and Emerging Proposals

The final stage of the assembly focused on bringing together proposals developed across the different groups, identifying shared principles and connecting participants' demands to wider discussions about democratic AI governance.
The collective exercises developed several proposals and principles contributing to the ongoing Citizens' Charter for Democratic AI.

1. Protecting Human Dignity and Freedom of Movement

Participants proposed placing human dignity, freedom of movement and access to protection at the centre of decisions concerning migration technologies.
They highlighted the risks associated with biometric surveillance, automated profiling, digital border screening and technological systems used to assess the credibility of asylum applicants.
Public authorities should ensure that technologies do not undermine fundamental rights, and that individuals can understand and meaningfully challenge decisions affecting their lives.

2. Democratic Participation: Nothing About Us Without Us

Participants proposed moving beyond understanding migrant and refugee communities as subjects of technological governance towards recognising them as active participants in designing and controlling the systems affecting their lives.
People with lived experience of migration should be meaningfully involved in decisions concerning the development, implementation and oversight of technologies used at borders, in asylum procedures and in public services.
Proposals included participatory governance, public accountability, decentralised decision-making and democratic oversight of both public institutions and private technology providers.

3. Transparency, Accountability and the Right to Challenge

Participants highlighted the importance of being able to understand what data is collected, how it is processed and how it influences decisions.
They proposed stronger rights to access, correct and, where applicable, delete personal information, alongside accessible complaints mechanisms and meaningful opportunities to challenge automated decisions.
Independent watchdogs, clearer accountability for private companies and effective enforcement of existing European protections were proposed as necessary safeguards.

4. Technology as a Tool for Support Rather Than Exclusion

Participants imagined how AI might be redirected away from surveillance and control towards supporting people on the move.
Proposals included multilingual access to information about migration and asylum procedures, legal and translation assistance, and technologies helping individuals navigate public services and administrative processes.
Participants also explored whether data collected by authorities could become evidence available to individuals, allowing people to use technological records to defend their own rights.

Next steps

The Athens assembly will contribute several principles to the development of the Citizens' Charter for Democratic AI, particularly regarding freedom of movement, human dignity, participatory technological governance, data protection, transparency, independent accountability and safeguards against discriminatory profiling.

The assembly also raised broader questions that will continue to inform future deliberations, including whether certain technologies should be used at borders at all, how existing EU legislation can be strengthened or adapted to better protect migrant communities, and how AI might be developed to support access to rights and public services rather than intensifying surveillance and exclusion.

To build upon the participation of municipal workers and institutions during the assembly, a follow-up event is planned in collaboration with Athens Refugee Week in June 2027. This event aims to involve a wider group of policymakers and public institutions, creating opportunities to present and further discuss the proposals developed by participants and explore how these demands might influence local and European approaches to AI governance.

Communication

1. EU Visibility
Visibility of the EU CERV Programme's support was integrated into the assembly's communications, including the event presentation, project website, social media materials and participant resources.

2. Stakeholder Mapping and Partnerships
The assembly was developed through collaboration with a wide network of local and international partners, supporting community participation, expert contributions, outreach and the wider democratic process.

3. Dissemination
Dissemination activities included social media promotion, newsletters, direct outreach through consortium, local partner and stakeholder networks, engagement with new partner organisations and continued communication through the Democratic Digital Commons online platforms.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).

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