

LEARNING — DEMOCRACY

FOR DEMOCRACY — FOR LEARNING



SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA · IV INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE · ROME 2026

PANEL

M.16 · Digital Transformation and Democratic Regeneration: The Essential Role of Critical Education in the Age of Algorithmic Capitalism

**Critical Digital Competences for Social Intervention. Training Social Educators in
the Age of Data and AI**

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS NOT NEUTRAL

- Digital technologies and AI can expand opportunities, but they do not automatically ensure inclusion and equality.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Access to information, services and participation
- New possibilities for social and educational intervention



RISKS

- Reproduction and amplification of existing inequalities
- Algorithmic bias and discrimination
- Opacity of data-driven decision-making
- New forms of digital exclusion



From digital skills to critical digital competence

Social educators need **critical, ethical and reflective competences** to understand how technologies shape access to **rights, services and opportunities**. (Selwyn, 2016; Eubanks, 2018; UNESCO, 2024)

Why critical digital competence matters for social educators

Social educators work with people who are often more exposed to digital inequalities and exclusion.

ACCESS

Supporting access to digital services, information and opportunities

MEDIATION

Mediating between people, technologies and institutions

PROTECTION

Recognising risks related to privacy, bias, discrimination and vulnerability

EMPOWERMENT

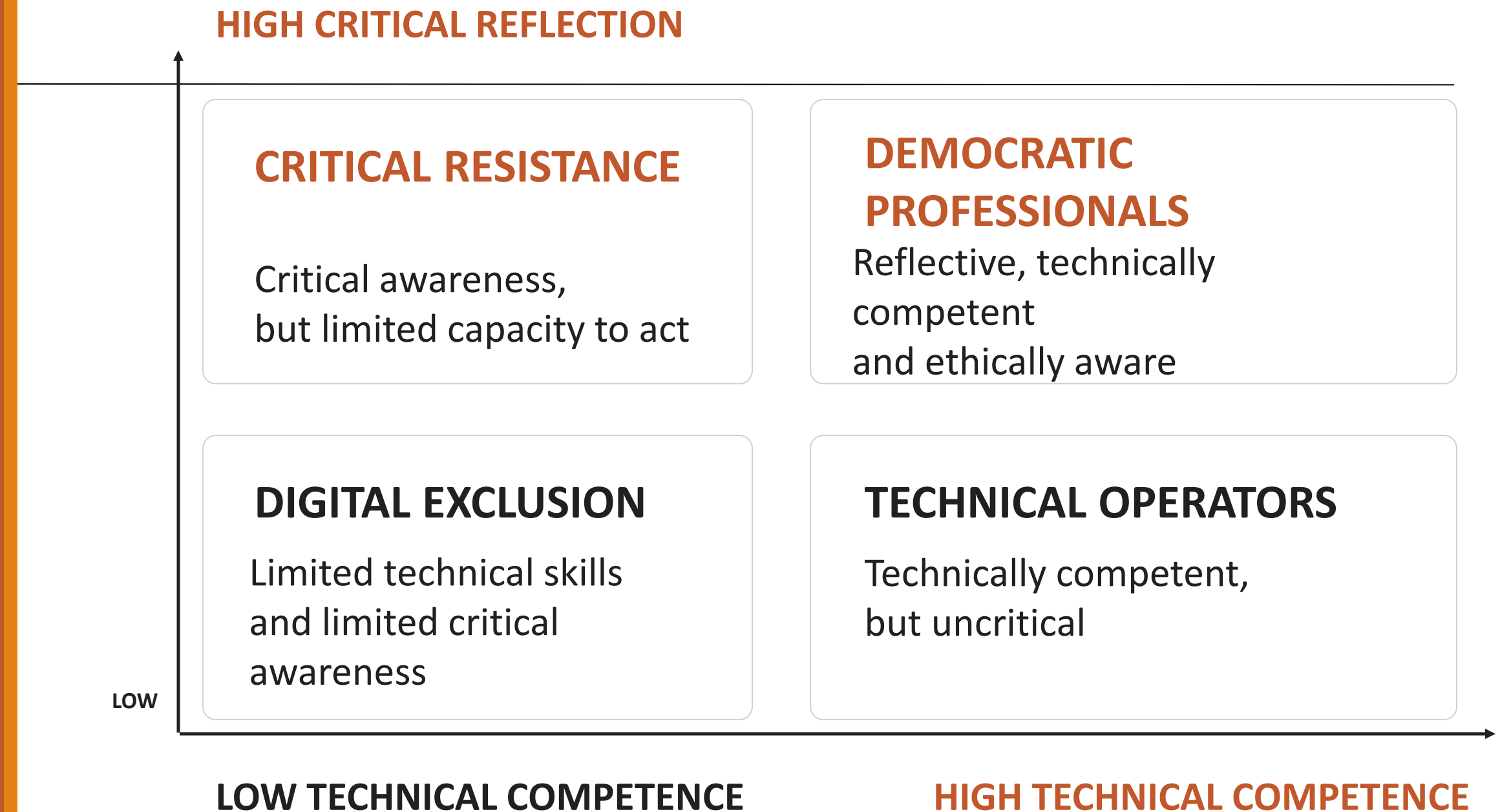
Promoting autonomy, participation and critical digital agency

Digital competence becomes part of professional educational competence.

UNESCO, 2024; European Commission, DigComp 3.0, 2025

Critical digital competence is more than digital skills

- CRITICAL REFLECTION × TECHNICAL COMPETENCE



DIGICARE as an Empirical Context

The DIGICARE European Erasmus + VET project "Digital Competences for the Improvement of social intervention Actions in Risk of Exclusion contexts" provides an empirical context for examining how critical digital competences can be identified, developed and translated into professional practice.

- Erasmus+ cooperation across educational, social and VET contexts
- Focus on professionals working with people at risk of exclusion
- Critical, ethical and reflective use of data, digital technologies and AI.

Country involved: Spain, Germany, Belgium, Italy.

<https://digicare-project.eu/it>

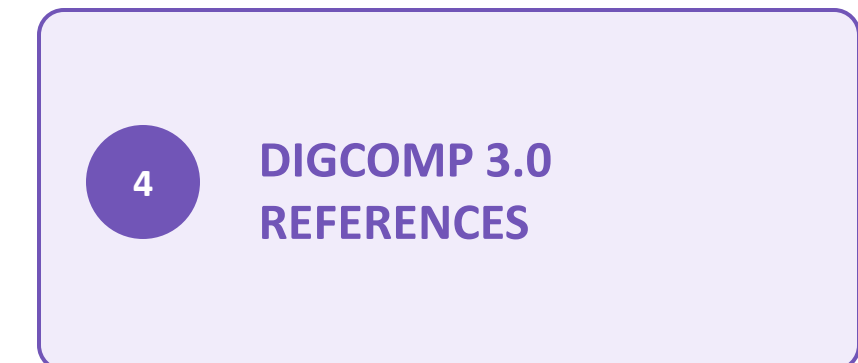
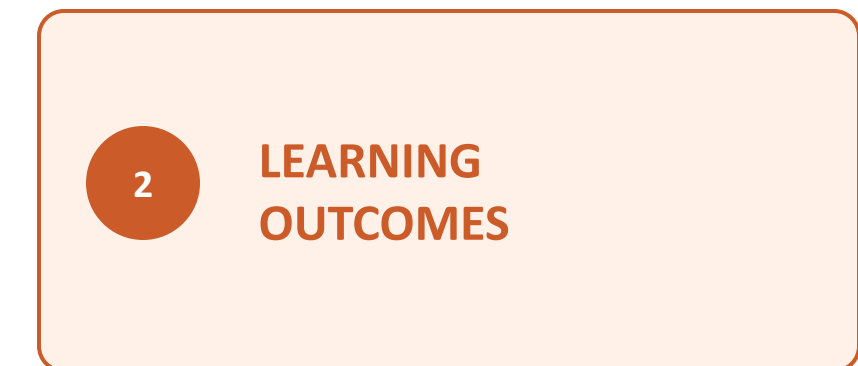
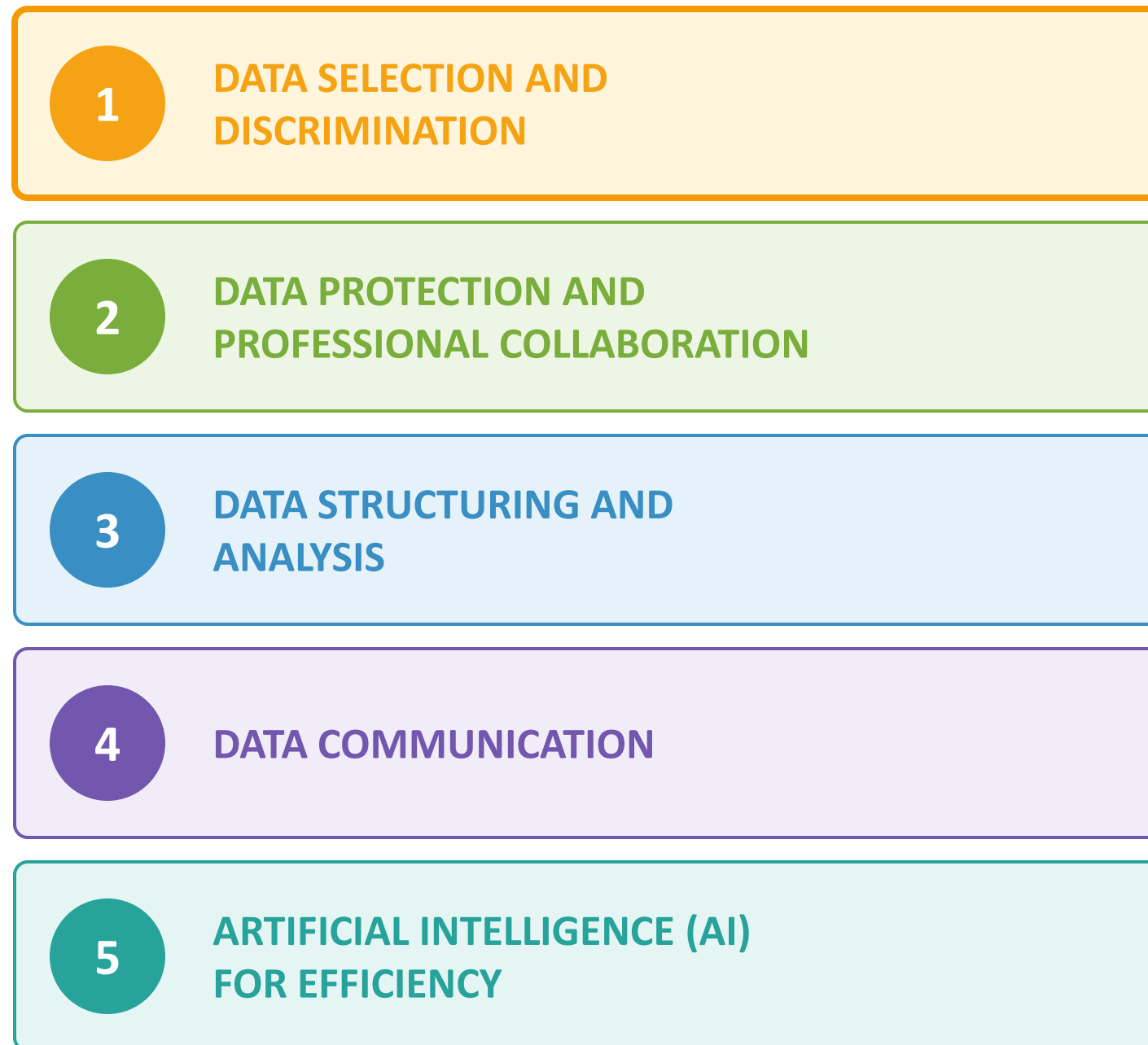




The DIGICARE Competence Framework

Five competence areas, each developed through the same four-part structure

AREA 1 — EXAMPLE OF THE SHARED STRUCTURE



THE SAME FOUR ELEMENTS ARE DEFINED FOR EACH COMPETENCE AREA



What the focus groups revealed

Digitalisation is welcomed — when professionals are prepared and supported

RECOGNISED NEEDS

- ✓ Better data management
- ✓ Less digital bureaucracy
- ✓ Stronger professional coordination
- ✓ AI support for decision-making
- ✓ More practical training

CONCERNS AND RESISTANCE

- ✓ Tension with relational work
- ✓ Limited digital preparation
- ✓ Privacy and data-protection risks
- ✓ Lack of time and resources
- ✓ Fear of replacing human judgement

KEY INTERPRETATION

Participants did not reject digitalisation itself. They questioned digitalisation introduced without adequate training, critical reflection and organisational support.

From European practices to shared learning

DIGICARE turns situated experiences into transferable educational resources



OUTCOME

Transferable approaches for social intervention and VET/CVET training

Towards an Open-Access Learning Platform

Evidence and European practices become accessible training resources

01

AI & SOCIAL
INTERVENTIO
N

Opportunities, limits
and responsible uses

02

DATA &
IMPACT
ASSESSMENT

Data management,
evidence
and evaluation

03

ETHICS, INCLUSION
& CRITICAL
COMPETENCE

Bias, rights, accessibility
and social justice

04

REFLECTIVE
PRACTICE &
PROFESSIONAL
JUDGEMENT

Contextual decisions and
human responsibility

OPEN-ACCESS
PLATFORM

Web-based • Multilingual • Accessible • Transferable across European
VET/CVET

Technical knowledge must be connected to ethical judgement and relational responsibility.

Critical Competence Requires Reflective Practice

Digital tools are not inclusive simply because they are available or efficient



Critical digital competence is a professional and democratic responsibility.

Eubanks, 2018 • Couldry & Mejias, 2019 • Selwyn, 2021

Concluding Remarks

A human-centred approach to digital innovation

Digital innovation becomes
educationally meaningful
only when it strengthens

●
**PROFESSIONAL
JUDGEMENT**

guided, not replaced

●
**HUMAN
RELATIONSHIPS**

protected, not standardised

●
**SOCIAL
INCLUSION**

expanded, not assumed

From digital skills to critical, reflective and responsible practice

THANK YOU

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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