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Draft Global Normative Instrument on the Ethics of AI unveiled

UNESCO expert panel issues draft recommendation

17 September 2020 – Paris, France – When UNESCO’s Member States decided to launch the process of developing a global recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence (AI) in November 2019, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres congratulated the Organization for taking up this challenge, declaring that “artificial intelligence is a critical frontier issue for the whole UN system and the whole world.”

UNESCO in March this year asked 24 leading experts with multidisciplinary experience in the ethics of artificial intelligence to develop a [draft recommendation](#) on the ethics of AI.

UNESCO then launched [a wide process](#) of consultations to obtain the many points of view of stakeholders. This involved experts from 155 countries, members of the public (through a global online survey), United Nations agencies, major stakeholders from the sector such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft, and the world of academe with the University of Stanford and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.



The resulting draft recommendation was today submitted to UNESCO’s 193 Member States. Negotiations are planned ahead of its planned final adoption by Member States at the Organization’s General Conference in November 2021

'We must make sure Artificial Intelligence is developed for us and not against us' declared UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. “We need a robust base of ethical principles to ensure artificial intelligence serves the common good. We have made this process be as inclusive as possible since the stakes involved as universal,” she explained.

Over recent years and all the more so since the outbreak of COVID-19, there have been ever more applications drawing on AI, notably with the aim of accelerating research into vaccines and improving tracing of the virus. AI has contributed to the development of telemedicine and distance learning. It has also been used to operate drones for the delivery of medical supplies and the need for a global regulatory instrument has grown on a par with the spread of AI applications.

The potential of artificial intelligence, as described in both scientific publications and works of fiction, gives rise to fear that machines will take decisions out of human hands, that it will erode individuals’ right to and that it will expose people to manipulation to the detriment of their rights and freedoms. The massive quantity of

data collected and processed daily raises major concerns over confidentiality, privacy, and the reproduction of discriminatory practices and stereotypes.

The draft recommendation submitted to the international community establishes a number of over-arching concepts:

- *Proportionality*: AI technologies must not exceed what is necessary to achieve legitimate aims or objectives, and should be appropriate to the context.
- *Human oversight and determination*: humans are ethically and legally responsible for all stages in the life-cycle of AI systems.
- *Stewardship of the environment and peace*: throughout their life-cycle, AI systems must contribute to the peaceful interconnectedness of all living creatures with each other and respect the natural environment, notably with regard to the extraction of raw materials
- *Gender-inclusion*: AI technologies must not reproduce the gender inequalities found in the real world, notably with regard to salaries, representation, access, and stereotyping. Political actions, including measures of positive discrimination, are required to avoid these major pitfalls.

UNESCO will assist governments and civil society players (corporations, members of the public, etc.) in developing concrete awareness-raising campaigns and ethical impact assessment tools for AI in all fields.

Beyond wishing to establish international consensus on the subject, UNESCO's experts urge Member States and AI players further to raise public awareness and stress that is important for everyone to be made aware of their digital rights.

About UNESCO

Headquartered in Paris and based on international cooperation beginning in 1945, UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015. Learn more at <https://en.unesco.org/>

Source: UNESCO press release