

Riding the Ethical Tightrope: Navigating the Global Struggle for AI Regulation

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The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) presents significant ethical challenges that have the potential to undermine human values. Phenomena such as deepfakes, autonomous lethal weapon systems (LAWS), and pervasive public surveillance illustrate the potential threats AI poses to humanity. Despite these concerns, the advancement of AI is an inevitable reality, necessitating that policymakers worldwide address the regulation of AI.¹ These regulations must ensure that AI development aligns with human values while promoting continued innovation.

At the international level, initiatives to address the ethical challenges posed by AI have been undertaken by the United Nations (UN). On March 21, 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution promoting the advancement of “safe, secure, and trustworthy” artificial intelligence (AI) systems for sustainable development. Led by the United States and co-sponsored by more than 120 countries, the resolution highlighted the respect, protection and promotion of human rights in the design, development, deployment, and the use of AI.² Although UN General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding on member states, they carry significant moral and political weight that can influence international norms and practices.³ There are some points emphasized in this resolution:

¹ Erdélyi, O.J. & Goldsmith, J. (2018) ‘Regulating Artificial Intelligence: Proposal for a Global Solution’, AIES ‘18: Proceedings of the 2018 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society, pp. 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3278721.3278731>.

² United Nations. (2024) ‘General Assembly adopts landmark resolution on artificial intelligence’ Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147831>. Accessed: May 27, 2024.

³ Joyner, C.C. (1979) ‘U.N. General Assembly Resolutions and International Law: Rethinking the Contemporary Dynamics of Norm-Creation’, California Western International Law Journal, 11(3), pp. 445–478.



AI and SDGs

Human-centric, reliable, explainable, ethical, and inclusive AI systems have the potential to accelerate and enable progress towards the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. However, the improper or malicious design, development, deployment, and use of AI systems could do the opposite.

Bridging the digital divide

There exists a significant technological gap between developing and developed countries in terms of conditions, possibilities, and capacities to support the development of AI systems. It is therefore essential to strengthen capacity building and provide technical and financial assistance to developing countries including promoting knowledge sharing activities and transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms, enhancing digital infrastructure connectivity and access to technological innovations, and scaling up the use of scientific sources, affordable technology, research and development. These efforts aim to bridge the digital divide and support effective, equitable, and meaningful participation and representation of developing countries in AI forums.

AI regulatory and governance frameworks

To promote safe, secure and trustworthy AI systems, Member States and other relevant stakeholders need to develop and support AI regulatory and governance frameworks that create an enabling ecosystem at all levels. Key considerations in AI regulatory and governance framework include establishing reliable mechanisms for content authentication and provenance, safeguarding individuals from all forms of discrimination, bias, misuse, or harm, protecting intellectual property rights, and ensuring the privacy and security of personal data.

**Respect for human rights
and fundamental freedoms**

Human rights and fundamental freedoms must be respected, protected, and promoted throughout the life cycle of AI systems. Therefore, the use of AI systems that cannot be operated in compliance with international human rights law or that pose undue risks to the enjoyment of human rights should be avoided. The resolution also emphasized that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online.

**Fair, inclusive, responsible
and effective data
governance**

Data plays a fundamental role in the development and operation of AI systems. Therefore, there is a need for fair, inclusive, responsible and effective data governance. To this end, Member States are encouraged to share best practices on data governance and to promote international cooperation, collaboration and assistance in this area.⁴

Although not legally binding, the aforementioned UN General Assembly Resolution on AI can significantly influence the development and use of AI globally, including the formation of AI regulations. This is a positive step forward, as the resolution emphasizes the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the AI lifecycle. If the objectives in the resolution are fulfilled, AI can co-exist with humanity and not the other way round.



⁴ United Nations General Assembly Resolutions No. A/78/L.49 on the promotion of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence (AI) systems for sustainable development.