# UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)

**Date**: 2021-11-23

**Location**: Paris, France

## Executive Summary

The “Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence,” adopted by UNESCO on November 23, 2021, outlines a comprehensive framework for the ethical governance of AI technologies. It emphasizes the importance of human rights, dignity, and environmental sustainability throughout the AI system life cycle. The document advocates for multi-stakeholder engagement, promoting inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in AI development and deployment. Key policy areas include ethical impact assessments, data governance, and international cooperation, particularly focusing on the needs of low- and middle-income countries. The recommendation aims to ensure that AI serves humanity positively while mitigating risks associated with discrimination, bias, and environmental harm. Member States are encouraged to implement these guidelines voluntarily, fostering a global dialogue on AI ethics to promote equitable access and benefit-sharing.

## Characteristics

* **Human Rights Focus**: Emphasizes the respect, protection, and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the AI system life cycle, ensuring that AI technologies enhance human dignity.
* **Environmental Considerations**: Advocates for the protection and promotion of environmental and ecosystem health, urging AI actors to minimize their ecological footprint and comply with environmental laws.
* **Inclusivity and Diversity**: Stresses the importance of diversity and inclusiveness in AI development, ensuring participation from marginalized groups and addressing gender disparities in technology.
* **Ethical Governance**: Calls for multi-stakeholder governance frameworks that are transparent, inclusive, and capable of addressing the ethical implications of AI technologies.
* **Accountability and Oversight**: Highlights the need for clear accountability mechanisms for AI actors, ensuring that ethical and legal responsibilities are upheld throughout the AI system life cycle.
* **Education and Awareness**: Promotes AI literacy and ethical education to empower individuals and communities, fostering informed engagement with AI technologies.

## Actors

| Category | Actor |
| --- | --- |
| Political Actors | United Nations; United Nations Officials |
| Research and Innovation Actors | Universities; Researchers; Academic Institutions |
| Civil Society Actors | Civil Society Organisations |

## Main Themes

| Category | Subcategory |
| --- | --- |
| Technology & Innovation | Artificial Intelligence; AI Ethics |

## Practical Applications

* Member States are encouraged to introduce frameworks for ethical impact assessments to identify and assess benefits, concerns, and risks of AI systems, including impacts on human rights and fundamental freedoms.
* Member States should develop due diligence and oversight mechanisms to prevent, mitigate, and account for the impact of AI systems on human rights and inclusive societies.
* Member States are encouraged to develop national and regional AI strategies, including certification mechanisms for AI systems that adhere to ethical guidelines.
* Member States should establish mechanisms for the active participation of all Member States, especially LMICs, in international discussions concerning AI governance.
* Member States should implement policies to ensure that AI actors respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the AI system life cycle.
* Member States should promote open data and consider reviewing their policies to support the safe, fair, legal, and ethical sharing of data.
* Member States should ensure that the potential for digital technologies and AI to contribute to achieving gender equality is maximized, including dedicated funds for gender-responsive schemes.
* Member States should promote AI education and digital training for artists and creative professionals to assess the suitability of AI technologies for their profession.
* Member States should work with international organizations and educational institutions to provide adequate AI literacy education to the public.
* Member States should develop guidelines for human-robot interactions and their impact on human relationships, particularly in health care and education.
* Member States should implement policies to raise awareness about the anthropomorphization of AI technologies and their ethical implications.

## Commitments

No specific quantifiable commitments or targets identified.