UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

UNESCO-AI-ETHICS-2021 · UNESCO · policy statement

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Summary

First global standard-setting (normative) instrument on AI ethics, adopted by acclamation by all 193 UNESCO Member States on 23 Nov 2021. It is a "Recommendation" — UNESCO soft law: non-binding ethical guidance addressed to Member States (and, through them, to all AI actors incl. the private sector), NOT a treaty or binding regulation. Hence it GOVERNS no topic in the binding sense the catalog reserves for "governs" (which requires an explicit operative/quasi-binding provision in the topic's own vocabulary); the appropriate type for the many values-adjacent topics it touches is "implicit" (general principle or named policy-action area), and "silent" for the narrow/technical/frontier topics that postdate or fall outside its values frame. Structure: ~141 paragraphs across a Preamble; Scope; Aims & Objectives; Values (4: human rights & dignity; environment/ecosystem flourishing; diversity & inclusiveness; peaceful, just, interconnected societies); Principles (incl. proportionality & do-no-harm — with an explicit call NOT to use AI for social scoring or mass surveillance; safety & security; fairness & non-discrimination; sustainability; right to privacy & data protection; human oversight & determination; transparency & explainability; responsibility & accountability; awareness & literacy; multi-stakeholder & adaptive governance); and 11 Areas of Policy Action (ethical impact assessment; governance & stewardship; data policy; development & international cooperation; environment & ecosystems; gender; culture; education & research; communication & information; economy & labour; health & social well-being). Implementation backed by a Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM) and Ethical Impact Assessment (EIA) used by 60+ states. Distinct from the separately-referenced 2023 UNESCO guidance on generative AI in education. Primary text verified via the UNESCO official article page and the OHCHR-hosted UNESCO submission.

At a glance

Adopted

2021-11-23

Effective

2021-11-23

Status

in force

Primary source

UNESCO, Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, adopted by the General Conference at its 41st session, 23 November 2021, doc. SHS/BIO/PI/2021/1 (Paris: UNESCO, 2022).

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HARVARD

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OSCOLA

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