
Recommendation on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the education sector

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Context

The impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on everyday life is continuously growing. While its rapid development often raises hopes, many fears are also emerging. If not regulated, AI can become a serious threat, especially when used improperly.

The development of AI and the use of AI applications, at the initiative of major groups competing with governments, **without any real public debate and without a clear regulatory framework**, when not used properly have already demonstrated to be a threat to democracy, breaching right to privacy and the protection of personal data.

In this context, **the education sector** appears to be particularly sensitive to developments in AI technologies. Some see them as a potential threat to academic integrity. Others, on the contrary, see them as useful tools for improving teaching and learning by enabling us to "reflect on the purpose of the pedagogical and educational process", as explained by Sobhi Tawil, director of the programme devoted to the future of learning and innovation in Unesco's education sector ("1", no. 432, Wednesday 1 February 2023).

AI in education offers new learning opportunities, particularly in the fields of medicine, engineering and architecture, as well as assistance for people with disabilities. AI can also be used in learner assessment systems, in the selection of admission files, in the fight against plagiarism, in the creation of lesson plans, in the creation of teaching modules, in the search for sources, and so on. AI can therefore change the way educators deliver and the way students acquire knowledge and skills, access information and learning resources, and obtain assessments.

The main challenge of this upheaval will therefore be to train learners and teachers to use AI responsibly and to understand its impact on society. Education and training will play a crucial role in developing a digitally skilled workforce and citizens capable of making the best use of these new technologies.

The Conference of INGOs believes that it is now fundamental for the future of democratic societies to understand and define how AI can be used responsibly and constructively to improve the curriculum and knowledge that will enable citizens to be well informed and improve the information overall.

Introduction

Considering that all countries should be able to benefit from the positive contributions of "artificial intelligence (AI) systems";

Considering also that the use of these systems raises fundamental ethical concerns;

Recognising that the cognitive biases that AI is likely to entail and that the inequalities in technological development could accentuate the digital divide and lead to social and/or economic cleavages exacerbating discrimination, inequality and exclusion;

Anticipating both the profound positive and negative repercussions of AI on societies, and in particular on educators and learners in educational contexts;

Recalling that the feasibility study published by the Council of Europe's *Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI)* on 17 December 2020¹ considers it necessary to create a comprehensive governance framework and an effective international legal response to accompany the development, design and application of AI;

Recalling that in its report published in 2021 and entitled "*Artificial Intelligence (AI) and education: a guide for policymakers*"², UNESCO estimates that AI will represent more than 5.5 billion euros in the education sector in 2024;

Recalling that the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI of 23 November 2021³ constitutes the first global normative framework for the ethical use of AI, which describes how to amplify the benefits of AI while reducing the risks that these technologies entail;

Considering that the Council of Europe published a report on 21 October 2022 entitled "*Artificial intelligence and education: a critical view through the lens of human rights, democracy and the rule of law*"⁴ which provides a critical analysis of the use of AI in education with an aim to ensure that education systems respond proactively and effectively to the numerous opportunities and challenges introduced by the use of AI technologies in education;

Considering it of the utmost importance to place AI at the service of human beings, particularly in the field of education and lifelong learning, in order to guarantee respect for the privacy of European citizens, to ensure SDG4, to prevent degrading quality education, unfair biases and protect democratic values;

¹ The CAHAI feasibility study is available by clicking on this link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/artificial-intelligence/publications>

² The UNESCO report is available by clicking on this link: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000376709>

³ The UNESCO Recommendation is available by clicking on this link: <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/recommendation-ethics-artificial-intelligence>

⁴ The Council of Europe report is available only in English by clicking on this link: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-092922-gbr-2517-ai-and-education-txt-16x24-web/1680a956e3>

Noting that self-regulation by industries developing AI technologies is clearly not sufficient to prevent certain ethical harms, and that there is a need to put in place liability and redress mechanisms that can be easily applied by those affected;

Recognising that the necessary and urgent solutions to regulate the use of AI, particularly in the form of national strategies and regulations, can only be found by involving the entire educational community and civil society, international NGOs (INGOs) and interested parties at all levels of mobilisation and decision-making;

Recalling that the European Commission believes that AI can pose a very high risk to education or vocational training, as it could affect an individual's access to education and career development;

Stressing the urgent need to better protect the citizens of European countries against the risks of inappropriate use of certain AI tools that could call into question democratic values, the rule of law and respect for human rights;

The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, gathered in Strasbourg from 9 to 11 October 2023, on the occasion of its plenary session:

1. **Welcomes** the work undertaken by the Council of Europe in its various Steering Committees to create a comprehensive legal framework, combining binding and non-binding legal instruments, to support the rapid development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools;
2. Solemnly **calls** on the member states of the Council of Europe to step up this effort, particularly in the education sector, in order to minimise the risks associated with the misuse of AI technologies, to promote the use of AI systems to reduce inequalities in access to knowledge and support the learning of all students, particularly those with disabilities or learning difficulties;
3. **Calls on** the Member States to take account of the excellent work carried out for several years at European Union (EU) level, in particular the proposed EU Regulation on AI, which aims to provide a legal framework for the use of AI by 2025;
4. **Calls on** the governments of the Member States, together with civil society and NGOs, to develop national strategies enabling every citizen to become aware of the opportunities and threats associated with the use of AI in education, but also to use the available tools ethically;
5. **Calls on** the Member States to develop training programmes to help teachers intelligently guide the learners in the use of AI tools;
6. **Calls on** the Member States to develop ambitious educational programmes aimed at educating the learners about the foundations of AI, how it works and its implications for society;
7. **Asks** the Ministries of Education of the Member States to set up appropriate training courses to enable citizens to receive lifelong training, whatever their age, their personal conditions or their social background, to understand and use AI tools responsibly;

8. **Encourages** the Member States to strengthen measures to ensure the safety of European citizens when they use AI tools in an educational context, by putting in place operational liability and redress mechanisms for those concerned;
9. **Calls on** civil society and INGOs to support and promote any innovative action to raise awareness in society as a whole of the challenges associated with the use of AI, particularly in the field of education;
10. **Encourages** all the directorates of the Council of Europe to continue their excellent work on the positive and negative consequences of the use of AI technologies, to involve representatives of the civil society even more closely in this research and to communicate the results very widely;
11. **Encourages** the Member States to ensure the implementation measures that enshrine that AI tools are not breaching right to privacy in view to protect the best interest of the learners and educational community.