

The General Assembly: Primary Sources

AI Standards and Regulations

Here are primary sources that your moderator or legal chair thought would be helpful in gaining an understanding of the topic. These are by no means all of the sources available, just sources we wanted to highlight.

Source #1: United Nations Activities on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

This report published in 2019 by the United Nations outlines various ways that 35 different UN agencies and international bodies have adopted AI to meet global challenges. While AI has plenty of downsides associated with its increasing use, AI can also play a role in improving the globe. For example, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty uses AI to better detect and analyze the signatures of potential nuclear tests. This use of AI makes the treaty more effective as it is more difficult to conceal a nuclear test. But AI does not just have a use in national security, with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) integrating AI to help predict refugee movements in Somalia. Incorporating AI in this regard allows the UNHCR to be more responsive to emerging refugee crises and position its limited resources in an effective manner.

https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/gen/S-GEN-UNACT-2019-1-PDF-E.pdf

Source #2: Artificial Intelligence and the Sustainable Development Goals

This article from the United Nations outlines the ways in which AI has been incorporated to help reach the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). The UN used an AI algorithm to understand the linkages between the SDGs and human rights issues, underlining the importance of developing and respecting human rights in making the planet more sustainable. AI can have positive usages for governments, individuals, and even the UN.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2022/05/artificial-intelligence-and-sustainable-development-goals>

Source #3: Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

This 2021 report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) outlines recommendations for developing AI ethically. Because AI is already integrated in many decision-making processes, UNESCO felt that the development of guidelines was necessary to ensure that AI does not replicate biases that exist in many societies. For example, UNESCO recommends that AI is developed with an eye towards the respect, protection, and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms; creating peaceful, just and interconnected societies; should do no-harm. One of its major protections is to improve the protection of the data that AI relies on—including banning the use of this data by AI to develop social scores or engage in mass surveillance.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137>

Source #4: Conference Makes No Progress on Robotic Weapons

This source from the Arms Control Association discusses the failure of the Sixth Review Conference for the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) to adopt standards or regulations on so-called killer robots. The source notes that while some countries, such as Austria and New Zealand, have called for a total ban on developing autonomy weapons systems, Russia and the United States have rejected such a ban. The source also writes, “Advocates of a protocol banning autonomous combat systems argue that such weapons, including ships, planes, tanks, and other weapons governed by artificial intelligence rather than direct human oversight,

violate international humanitarian law by making it difficult to protect civilians trapped in combat zones. They question the ability of weapons that operate without human control to distinguish between armed combatants and unarmed civilians in such situations.” Given the failure to adopt any standards, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile have indicated an interest in working outside the CCW process to regulate AI and autonomous weapons.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-01/news/conference-makes-progress-robotic-weapons>

Source #5: Stop Killer Robots

This website is for the advocacy group, Stop Killer Robots. This group seeks to ban the development of and use of killer robots. Killer robots rely on AI to make decisions, but they are effectively automated weapons that can make decisions without the direct input of a human. Stop Killer Robots oppose the incorporation of AI into weapons systems because killer robots are dehumanizing, they can reproduce many of the biases of larger society in their programming, and they cannot make the ethical choices that a human operate can make—they can only follow their programming. This website has additional resources outlining their opposition to killer robots and autonomous weapons systems.

<https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/>

Source #6: How the EU’s Flawed Artificial Intelligence Regulation Endangers the Social Safety Net: Questions and Answers

This article comes from the Human Rights Watch (HRW), a human rights advocacy group. The Article is a Q&A with a HRW expert that defines AI regulation and criticizes an European Union (EU) regulatory framework that would use AI in order to monitor and control access to social benefits. AI would be used to 1) verifying a person’s identity; 2) assessing a person’s eligibility for benefits and the amount to which they are entitled; and 3) preventing and investigating benefits fraud. The HRW’s concern is that the use of AI in this way would discriminate against individuals who do not have reliable access to technology and the internet and would also target historically discriminated populations. The EU’s AI regulation also effectively protects the government from using a discriminatory AI system developed by another company—making it difficult for individuals to defend their rights.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/10/how-eus-flawed-artificial-intelligence-regulation-endangers-social-safety-net>