

Stronger Together

Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good

Stronger Together: Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good

This project constituted one of the four strands of the British Council's Stronger Together initiative, a programme that aims to connect young leaders with policymakers, academics, businesses and civil society organizations.

Featuring two focus groups and four hackathons across Europe, the programme was designed to produce a set of recommendations to be presented at a final dialogue in London between young leaders and high-level policy representatives on March 7, 2023.

Preface

We are delighted to present this report, which captures the essence and outcomes of a remarkable series of interlinked activities that constituted one of the four strands British Council's Stronger Together EU Region programme in cooperation with IRCAI and sponsored by Microsoft. This program aims to connect young leaders with policymakers, academics, businesses, and civil society organizations, fostering a platform for meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

The report encapsulates the vibrant discussions, thought-provoking ideas, and innovative solutions proposed by the young leaders who participated in this initiative. Furthermore, it highlights the energy, determination, and unwavering commitment of these individuals to work collaboratively towards building a brighter and more inclusive future.

On top of building on youth skills and facilitating cooperation, one of the objectives of the project was to produce a set of comprehensive recommendations, synthesizing the diverse perspectives and expertise of these young leaders. These recommendations were intended to serve as a guiding compass for policymakers and high-level representatives in addressing critical issues, shaping policies, and driving positive change on local, regional, and global scales.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all the young leaders, the trainers, facilitators, mentors, and experts who contributed their time, knowledge, and passion to make this event series a resounding success. We also express our appreciation to Microsoft and IRCAI for their unwavering support and commitment in bringing this initiative to fruition.

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence plays a critical role in addressing some of the world's most pressing sustainability challenges. AI-based technologies have evolved into a primary tool to help us detect changes in climate patterns and track the impact of human activity on our environment. AI algorithms are also commonly used to analyze large data sets (e.g., obtained from satellite imagery or social media feeds) to gain a better understanding of what different communities really need for a more sustainable future.

But to what extent are recent AI innovations really meeting the needs of future generations? If AI is not developed and deployed responsibly, it may also undermine our efforts to create a more sustainable world. There is growing evidence of how the use of biased data or algorithms can perpetuate and magnify existing inequalities and exclude important segments of society. Many AI systems also lack an adequate mechanism for transparency and accountability, leading to a loss of public trust in such technologies.

To find out how Artificial Intelligence can actually serve the needs of our future generations, the British Council developed a project aimed at

- engage young people in using AI for common good by building skills
- offer opportunities to young people for sharing and creating innovative ideas and
- facilitate dialogue with policy makers, entrepreneurs and researchers for upscaling their potential to influence the future of AI for social action.



Timeline

The AI for the Common good constitutes one of the four strands of the British Council's Stronger Together initiative, a program that aims to connect young leaders with policymakers, academics, businesses and civil society organizations.

Featuring two focus groups and four hackathons across Europe, the programme was designed to produce a set of recommendations to be presented at a final dialogue in London between young leaders and high-level policy representatives on March 7, 2023.



Focus group 1

The first focus group was held in October 2022. The session kicked off by three speakers who drew from their respective areas of expertise to show what AI could do for our common good. João Pita Costa presented his own AI-powered SDG Observatory, a tool aimed at identifying the latest trends in achieving our Sustainable Development Goals and supporting evidence-based policy.

Vanessa Nurock provided insights on ethical frameworks and how they can help us assess potential difficulties arising from the adoption of AI technologies. Veronika Stabej better explained the role of policy makers:

How do governments and international organizations use the insights they receive from industry, academia, or focus groups like this one?

In the second part of the focus group, young participants shared their own perspectives. Using an online whiteboard, they shared their hopes and fears about AI and discussed how AI can help us address two specific sustainability challenges: the impact of AI on social (in)equality and the potential of AI to help us mitigate and/or adapt to climate change, formulating an initial set of policy recommendations.

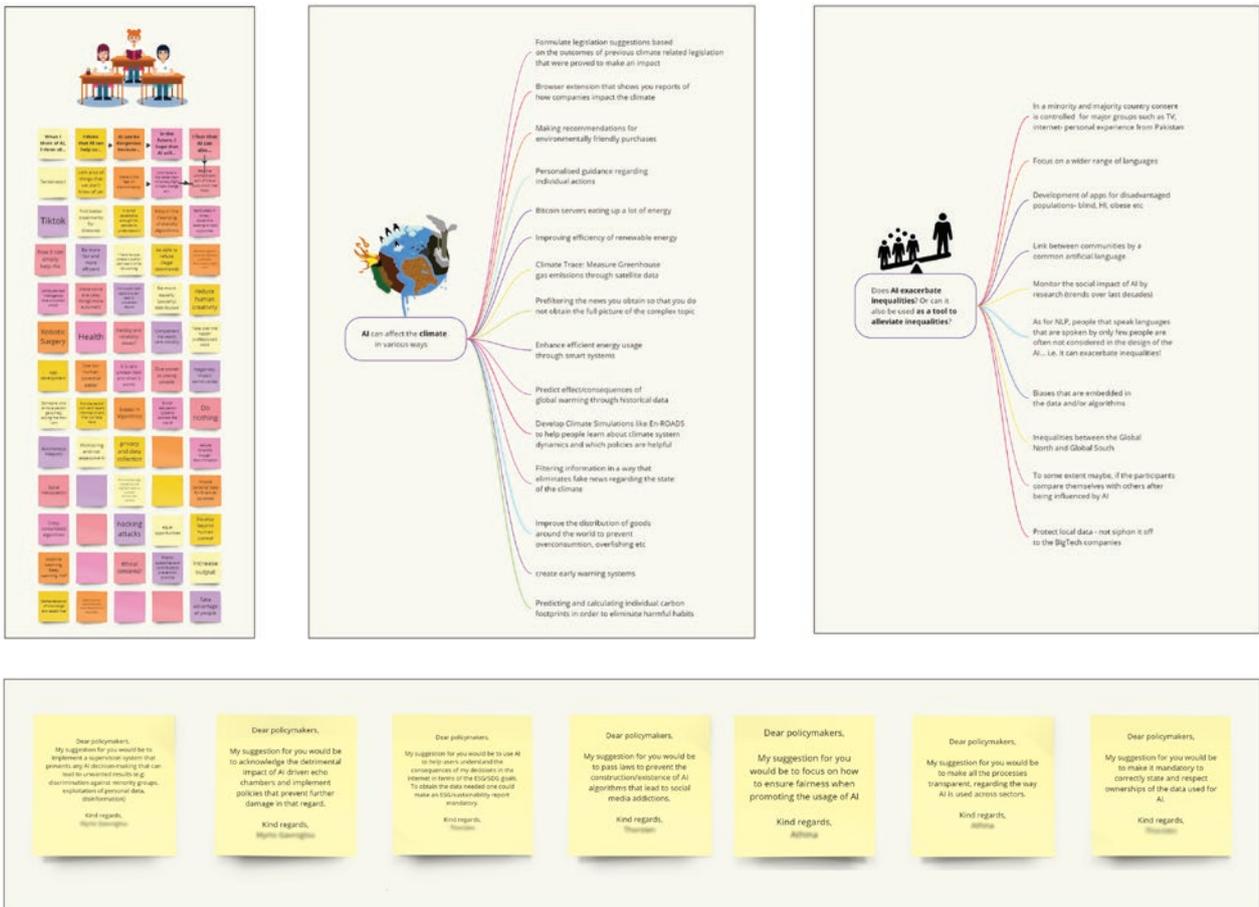


Figure 2: Output from focus group 1 held in October 2022

Focus group 2

The second focus group, held in February 2023, centered on AI equity, diversity and inclusion. By reflecting on their own proposed projects from the hackathons, participants highlighted how ethical challenges might arise in the various steps of developing and deploying their own ideas: What does it mean to truly take an "ethics by design" approach? How do they best account

for potential discrimination biases in data collection? How can specific testing, monitoring and Hypercare methods help avoid relevant ethical complications? Does AI really offer a solution at all, or might a non-technical approach in fact work better? At the end of the session, participants composed another set of policy recommendations.

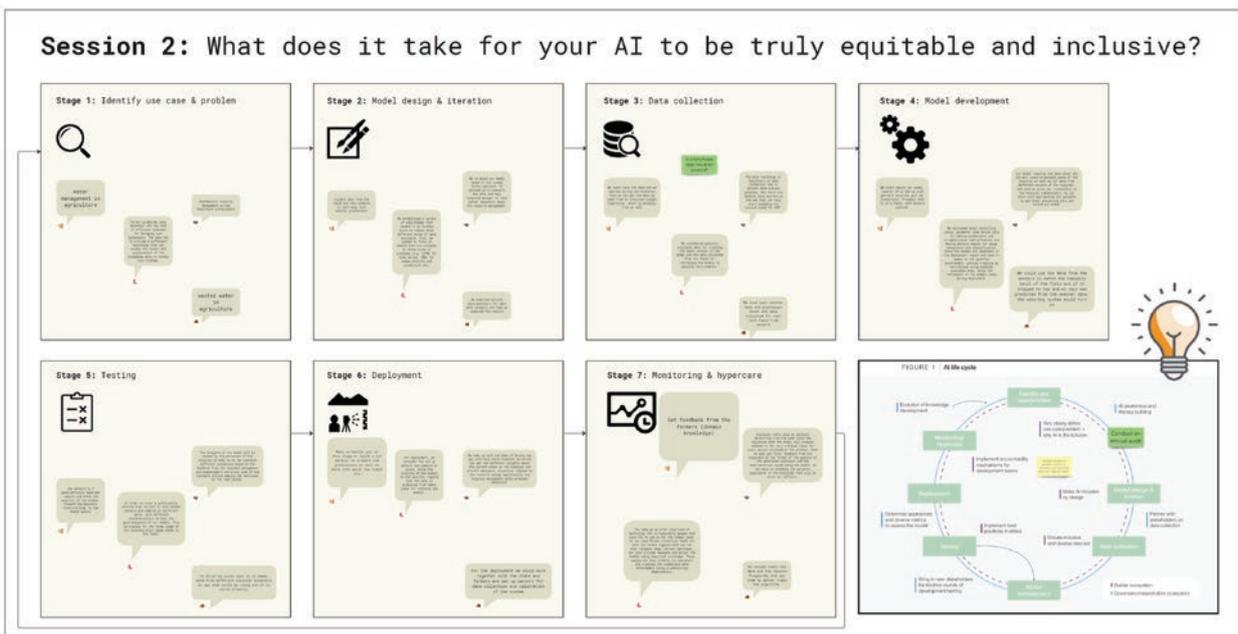
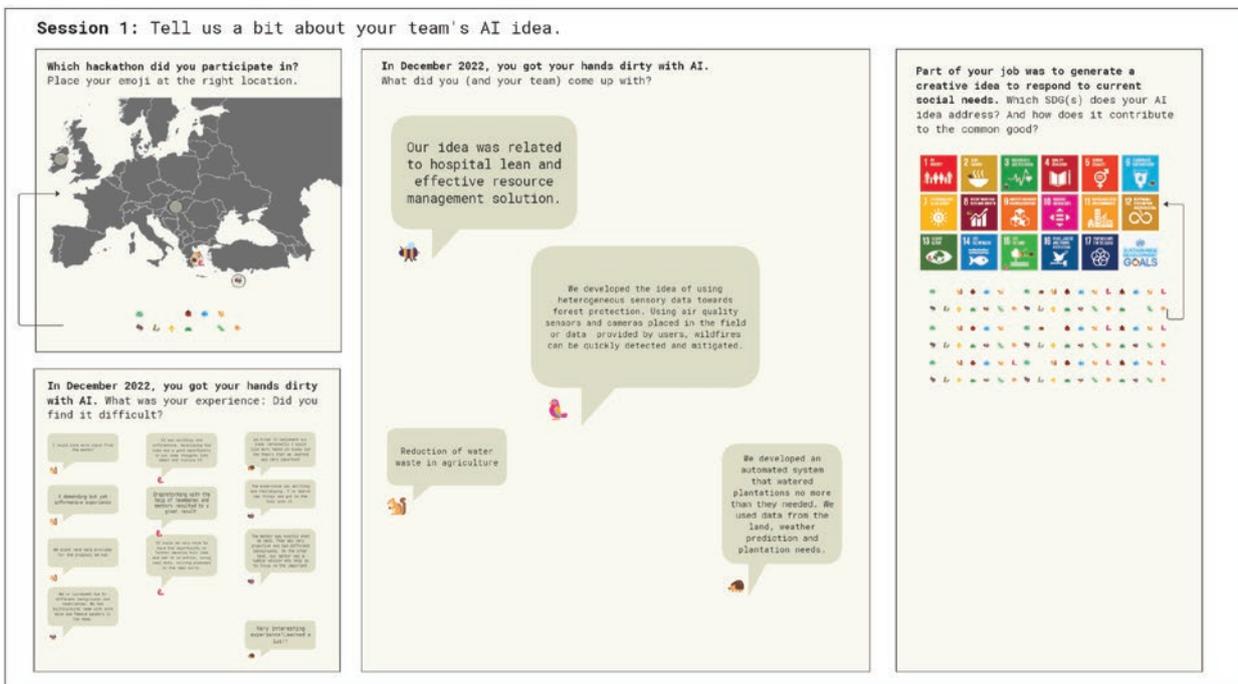


Figure 3, 4: Output from focus group 2 held in February 2023

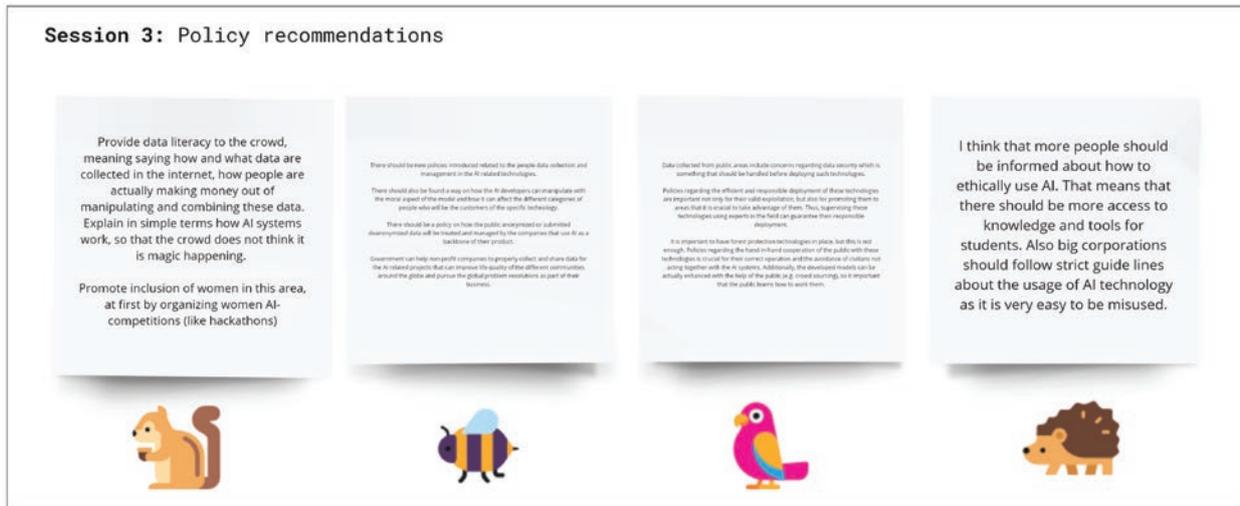


Figure 5: Output from focus group 2 held in February 2023

Hackathons

In December 2022, two AI for the Common Good hackathons were facilitated in Athens, Greece and Nicosia, Cyprus; in February 2023 a relevant hackathon was organised in Budapest, Hungary and another one in March 2023 in Dublin, Ireland. In these hackathons young people with a background in AI and social innovation were asked to get their hands dirty and explore how AI can be applied to work towards the common good. While moderators and experts in the four locations provided the students with an overarching global issue to work on, the small teams of students then identified a more specific use case. The students then gathered a relevant set of data, before designing and reiterating their AI algorithms to come up with a best possible solution. Project proposals ranged from wildfire detection or water waste reduction tools to algorithms to render the distribution of hospital resources more efficient. The winning teams were finally awarded with a study visit to the UK and took part in a final dialogue event in London.

Winning ideas:

Cyprus: *UDIVE team*'s idea revolved around the autoregulation and control of healthcare emissions by suggesting how long should a patient stay at the hospital.

Greece: *PowAir team*'s idea revolved around the prevention of forest fires by collecting and manipulating data through AI technologies.

Hungary: *Team Algorithm* presented a solution for the problem of food waste, with their B2B answer to overstocked stores and perishable food by demand forecasting and dynamic pricing.

Ireland: *Little Life project team* developed a system that would monitor key health indicators of a pregnancy (both maternal and foetal) and raise the alarm early if the overall 'score' was outside of healthy parameters, ensuring medical intervention would be sought in good time.

Study Visit to the UK

Winning teams from Cyprus, Greece and Hungary were awarded with a study visit to relevant projects and institutions in the UK, 6-8 March 2023 in order to test their ideas and get inspiration by experts in the field.

Among others they visited the UCL AI Centre, Faculty AI and met with Diversio and Holistic AI. They were connected with stakeholders at local level in order to get feedback and support on how they could implement their ideas.

Recording from the session:
<https://youtu.be/XOJLunldm4M>



Dialogue event in London

In collaboration with the British Council's business, research and innovation partners, a final policy dialogue was held on March 7, 2023 to provide a platform for exchange between young leaders and national, European and international policymakers.

Moderated by Dr. John Shawe-Taylor, Director of IRCAl, the young participants were asked to voice and discuss their own policy recommendations with Jack Watson, Head of AI Skills and Workforce, Office for AI, Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, Jim Dratwa, Leader of Ethics in Science and New Technologies at the European Commission, Emine Yilmaz, Professor of Computer Science at University College London, Alan Turing Fellow and Amazon Science Scholar and James Bridge, Secretary-General and Chief Executive UK National Commission for UNESCO.

The students' recommendations and remarks touched upon a wide range of aspects including our understanding of AI, our trust in AI, our say on AI, our addiction to algorithms and deciding on a common definition of AI.

Recording from the session:
<https://youtu.be/2Mc2E52oCOA>



Thank you for the invite to the panel. I very much enjoyed it and hope that my contributions were useful for the students. (...) I'm sharing a few words on the recommendations.

Overall, the students presented a well-reasoned and sensible selection of policy recommendations that were targeted at the right issues and opportunities. That the focus ranged from the cross-cutting, such as skills and data literacy, to the more specific, like algorithmic bias and decision making, showed that the students understood the breadth of issues that policymakers must tackle when it comes to AI. Their focus on core principles such as fairness, transparency and diversity is absolutely right and chimes well with the approach taken by governments, including the UK.

Jack Watson, *Head of AI Skills and Workforce, Office for AI,
Department for Science, Innovation & Technology*

Yesterday's policy dialogue was a resounding success. I thank you most ardently for the remarkable work which culminated in this excellent event. Please convey these thanks to all the participants, who helped turn this into such a fruitful achievement. So much learning and so much more to learn!

Jim Dratwa, *Ethics in Science and New Technologies,
European Commission and Secretary-General of the
EC International Dialogue on Ethics and Bioethics*

Congratulations on organising such an excellent project. What inspiring participants you brought - with their excellent recommendations and debate.

James Bridge, *Secretary-General, and Chief Executive
UK National Commission for UNESCO*

I would like to say a BIG thank you for inviting Diversio to the study visit event. I personally enjoyed the interaction and the questions from the students, wishing you and them every success in the future. Please do not hesitate to pass my email and LinkedIn details to the students to stay in touch as they wish.

Sunil Jindal (He/Him), *Head of Strategic Accounts, Diversio*

Thank you for your visit to the AI Centre, it was fantastic to meet you and the students and I look forward to the time when we meet again.

Dr María Pérez-Ortiz, *Lecturer, AI Centre, UCL Computer Science Director
MSc AI for Sustainable Development*

Understanding AI

"AI can be a powerful tool," Bori, a programme participant from Hungary, explains, but only "if people understand how it works." As the young Hungarian explains, curricula should not only focus on sensibilizing students on the mechanisms AI relies on. Rather, educational programs should also give students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience with AI applications themselves. Education can be seen as a way to democratize AI by familiarizing larger segments of society with how AI works, from a young age. Emine notes that, ironically, AI itself can in fact help granting access to suitable online courses. Yet, substantial efforts would still need to be made to ensure that AI-based recommender systems streamline relevant content to learners from diverse regional, financial and social backgrounds.

"AI can be a powerful tool, but only if people understand how it works." **Bori**

Trusting AI

Eugene (a programme participant from Cyprus) shared his take in a rather dystopian tone: "In times where we are told how algorithms can crack private messages, solve enigma codes and win a World War, how can we guarantee data privacy and security?". AI might be able to cater us with a whole set of innovations to tackle sustainability challenges, but if we want individuals to trust such AI and share their data, we need to provide them with proper oversight mechanisms to retain a sense of human agency. Adding on to that, Tassos (a Greek participant) notes that companies essentially "monetize" our personal data, so how can we ensure that innovation does not come at the expense of data privacy? Jack puts forward that data privacy has been at the forefront of various pieces of legislation lately including the General Data Protection Regulation-GDPR by the EU. However, "we must be wary not to adopt privacy regulation only at the end of the pipe", emphasizes Jim. This is because, all too often, it is only once that models are trained and the AI is developed that data privacy checks are executed.

"As organizations and individuals increasingly rely on AI, data privacy is more and more an alarming concern." **Eugene**

"Since we are still not clear about data ownership, it is hard to move on to the monetization of it." **Tassos**

Working together on AI

Irene (another Cypriot participant) framed her recommendation around the topic of multistakeholdership: "AI is a powerful tool", she resonates but adds that everyone should be able to incorporate their input. Persisting digital divides, for example, are why certain stakeholders are not part of the dialogue yet.

James notes that SDGs are a great framework to work towards “achieving an effective balance”. Frameworks like these can stand in good stead to mobilize different stakeholders to work towards a common AI agenda. Still, he acknowledges that more effort needs to be done to include the widest possible spectrum of society and bridge digital gaps.

“My recommendation is about the multistakeholder approach because AI is a powerful tool, but everyone should have access to it.”, **Irene**

Resisting the addictive nature of AI

Giannis (another participant from Greece) calls upon policy to take a harder stance on regulating the “toxicity” or addictiveness of social media content. He notes that the algorithms that social media platforms deploy do not merely personalize content to improve customer experience, but also to deliberately get their users addicted to the platforms. To alleviate his own social media addiction, the student took a rather radical decision: He completely quit social media.

“I have taken a very radical decision: I have stopped using social media for a couple of months. But if laws could limit the addictiveness of algorithms, maybe I will be willing to return to social media.”, **Giannis**

Defining AI

Eleni notes that “AI is a word that sells”. “But to what extent do people understand how it works?”, she adds. The student pointed at how the term is, in fact, widely misused with many entrepreneurs quite wrongly referring to their newest products as “AI”. This is why Eleni calls upon stakeholders to agree upon a common definition to set boundaries as to what is AI and what is not. Jim resonates with Eleni’s remark, pointing at the paradox that what we refer to as AI is always the “up-and-coming, groundbreaking tech product”, while innovations that have now become ubiquitous (such as Optical Character Recognition, which is based on ML and computer vision) would not quite fall under the same category anymore.

“If we took a shot every time we mentioned AI, we would all be drunk. It is a word that sells.”, **Eleni**

Recommendations

Participants of the first focus group emphasized that the adoption or implementation of any legal framework requires public consultation, with particular attention to youth participation. Having discussed the relationship between AI and the topics of climate and social inequalities, the participants' final recommendations went as follows:

1. Policy development must consider and acknowledge the harmful effects of AI-driven echo chambers. Action must be taken to prevent further harm in this regard.
2. AI should be used to help users understand the consequences of their decisions online with respect to ESG/SDG goals. To obtain the data needed, an ESG/Sustainability report could be made mandatory.
3. Legislation should prevent the development and existence of AI algorithms that lead to social media addictions.
4. In promoting AI use, the focus should be on ensuring fairness.
5. All processes related to how AI is used across sectors must be transparent and this should be secured by adequate policy.
6. It should be made mandatory to correctly identify and respect the owners of the data used for AI.

Participants in the second focus group emphasized that political and legal institutions should most of all actively stimulate AI practitioners and developers to adopt a more holistic approach in designing, developing and deploying technologies. On the discussed topics of AI for the common good and its social impact, this focus group's recommendations addressed the following five aspects:

1. Data literacy and mainstreaming AI: To debunk the mystique around AI and sensitize end users about the collection and monetization of their personal data. Educational programs must further incorporate related awareness- raising into their curricula.
2. Data privacy: Corporations should be subject to stricter guidelines as to how they manage personal and/or public data (particularly data collected from public areas). It should thus be mandatory to correctly identify and respect the owners of the data used for AI. All processes related to how AI is used across sectors must be transparent.
3. Diversity, equity and inclusion: More AI hackathons and relevant opportunities should be facilitated specifically destined at female AI developers.
4. Holistic AI: AI practitioners should be required, by legislation, to provide evidence on the full spectrum of how their technologies will affect different people, prior to the technologies' deployment.
5. Multi-stakeholder approach: Technologies can be a valuable asset in addressing global challenges, but their benefits can be merely harnessed under the condition of hand-in-hand cooperation with civil society.