United Nations | Committee of Experts on Public Administration 2025

Ensuring transparency and accountability of artificial intelligence systems in public administration *

Summary

Building on its previous work, the Committee studied ways of ensuring transparency and accountability of artificial intelligence systems in public administration. Various strategies were highlighted relating to the development of steering and oversight mechanisms, and establishment of safeguards to mitigate bias and protect fundamental rights. Supreme audit institutions could play an important role in this area by developing common approaches to auditing artificial intelligence use in public administration, among other actions.

Steering and oversight mechanisms to guide deployment

The Committee noted that the use of artificial intelligence in the public sector was growing, which offered numerous potential benefits, such as enhanced operational efficiency, reduced costs and improved service delivery and decision-making in most policy areas relevant to the Goals. There were already many useful lessons to be learned from national and international experiences, for example, with respect to the use of risk-based approaches to technological diffusion, wherein the benefits of artificial intelligence systems were harnessed first in low-risk, high-benefit policy domains.

At the same time, deployment of such systems posed potential ethical, regulatory and operational risks that had not been sufficiently addressed and required continued attention. To that end, Governments should be encouraged to focus on establishing the necessary structures, rules and procedures to direct the responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence technology in the public interest, ensuring that the functioning of such instruments was consistent with national and international law.

The adoption of clear ownership and accountability mechanisms for artificial intelligence initiatives was important for assigning responsibility, so that remedies could be sought if and when issues arose. Specific strategies to steer and supervise responsible deployment across the public sector included:

* This brief is an excerpt from the report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on its twenty-fourth session held from 7 to 11 April 2025. See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2025, Supplement No. 24 (E/2025/44-E/C.16/2025/9). The Committee is a technical advisory body of the Council tasked with providing policy advice and recommendations on issues related to governance and public administration for sustainable development. For more information on the Committee's work, please visit https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/intergovernmental-support/cepa.

• Creation of a robust governance structure and specialized supervisory body at the centre of government to coordinate deployment across the public sector in a consistent, strategic and responsible manner, assess and address potential risks, oversee and enforce artificial intelligence regulations, provide training for public servants and collaborate with sector regulators.

• Adoption of specific, inclusive, accountable and human-centric policies and strategies that supported national development objectives. Those needed to be linked to broader digital government strategies and/or connected with data governance strategies.

• Development of common guidelines that outlined ethical standards, operational protocols and compliance mechanisms.

• Employment of dynamic and continuously updated risk assessment protocols and customization of risk regulations on the basis of the identified risks, while imposing stricter oversight for systems deemed higher risk. Artificial intelligence developers also needed to be encouraged to proactively manage risk through regular reviews and self-assessment tools.

• Encouragement of experimental approaches and the testing of artificial intelligence applications in controlled environments to evaluate their reliability and societal impact, identify potential risks, refine algorithms and test fitness for purpose before wider deployment.

The deployment of artificial intelligence in government could also be supported through enablers to facilitate its uptake, such as: a solid and safe digital public infrastructure; a robust data infrastructure and governance frameworks; a high degree and high quality of digital connectivity to ensure digital inclusion; a high level of maturity of cybersecurity systems; adequate computing capacity and digital skills within government; and smart procurement rules and arrangements so that artificial intelligence was procured effectively and innovation encouraged.

Interdisciplinary cooperation and participation mechanisms to engage stakeholders in the development and evaluation process, alongside partnerships to support trust-building and reciprocal learning, could also promote transparency and accountability. Novel partnerships with private sector entities, including government technology start-ups, could lead to the co-creation of innovative digital solutions.

Safeguards to mitigate bias and protect fundamental rights

The Committee emphasized that safeguards and approaches to mitigate bias and protect fundamental rights should be adopted as a matter of priority to build public trust and so that the diffusion of the technology in public administration reinforced the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and left no one behind. The provision of robust human oversight was crucial to ensuring that artificial intelligence systems were ethical, transparent and accountable.

Specifically, Governments should take concrete steps to guard against bias by:

• Adopting ethical standards and mandatory procedures and embedding ethical and transparency considerations in the rules and protocols for government procurement of artificial intelligence.

• Adopting ex ante due diligence and impact assessment frameworks and ex post verification

processes, including public participation, self-assessment and monitoring.

• Developing protocols to allow for transparency, traceability and explicability of decisions reached using artificial intelligence.

• Following a human rights-centric approach in which governments actively informed individuals when they interacted with artificial intelligence and in which artificial intelligence decisions were broken down and explained.

• Ensuring public disclosure of the design, data sources and decision-making processes of artificial intelligence systems in a manner comprehensible to non-technical users.

• Providing opportunities for users to challenge decisions made using algorithms, provide feedback on the performance of those systems and have access to means of redress, including judicial review.

• Educating and raising awareness to address knowledge gaps and increase algorithmic literacy; supporting investigative journalism and oversight by civil society; and raising awareness among developers and users of algorithms of the importance of transparency and accountability measures.

The role of supreme audit institutions

The Committee observed that supreme audit institutions played an important role as part of the broader accountability framework for public administration. Efforts by countries to empower and adequately equip them with the knowledge and information technology infrastructure required to use artificial intelligence systems themselves and to audit their use by government entities required attention.

To that end, the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions was encouraged to: (a) establish clear ethical and operational guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence systems by its members; (b) assist less advanced supreme audit institutions in developing artificial intelligence applications; and (c) develop common approaches for auditing artificial intelligence use in public administrations.

Regulators could assist in shaping the audit landscape by providing guidance on best practices and establishing mandatory requirements for algorithm audits in high-risk sectors. Developing open-source frameworks for algorithm auditing could facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing among auditors, researchers and practitioners, which could lead to more consistent practices across different organizations.

► **The Committee's deliberations are supported by expert papers prepared by the members in advance of the session. For more in-depth analysis of this issue, see United Nations official document E/C.16/2025/4.**

Action by the Economic and Social Council

On 30 July 2025, the Council adopted resolution 2025/31 on the report of the Committee on its twenty-fourth session (as contained in E/2025/L.23). By this resolution, the Council:

> ***Recognizes*** **that supreme audit institutions have an important role to play in ensuring transparency and accountability of artificial intelligence systems in public administration, and encourages the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions to establish clear ethical and operational guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence systems by its members, assist less advanced supreme audit institutions in building artificial intelligence applications, and develop common approaches to auditing artificial intelligence use in public administration**.