

Research Brief – October 2022



# Reflecting on AI ethics – Perspectives from the Global AI Ethics Consortium

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Since its launch, the Global AI Ethics Consortium has brought together 36 experts from academic and research institutions on six continents. Now, more than two years into this endeavor, the IEAI team reached out to our GAIEC members and gathered their reflections on the most relevant aspects of AI ethics. In this special Research Brief, 16 experts from diverse fields, sectors, and locations shed light on this issue's complexity and current relevance.

The [Institute for Ethics in Artificial Intelligence](#) celebrates its third anniversary this month. At our launch in 2019, it was one of the first Institutes of its kind, and AI ethics were not high on the agenda. In the meantime, many things have changed.

In recent years, it is clear that AI ethics and governance are being taken much more seriously at the European and international levels. The growing number of institutes and centers working on the topic of AI ethics, the large volume of research papers, and the numerous AI ethics-related events happening worldwide underscore the progress being made. Therefore, the effort to make sure that technologies are beneficial to society needs to be a globally collaborative one.

The increasing importance of AI ethics also made clear the need for an identifiable and deliberate effort to discuss the diversity in how AI ethics are understood, implemented, and valued across the world. Out of these needs came a push to create the [Global AI Ethics Consortium](#) (GAIEC) in April 2020.



***The time for analyzing how AI is deployed - whom it affects, how it affects them, and what its broader social and economic impacts are - is now. [Excerpt from the GAIEC State of Purpose]***

Since its launch, the GAIEC has brought together 36 experts from academic and research institutions on six continents. Academia, with its

open-mindedness and its broad access to different disciplines and cultures, is an ideal place to connect and build international research communities, collaborative networks, and global consortia working together on AI ethics-related issues.

Now, more than two years into this endeavor, the IEAI team reached out to our GAIEC members and gathered their reflections on the most relevant aspects of AI ethics. In this special Research Brief, 16 experts from diverse fields, sectors, and locations shed light on the complexity and current relevance of this issue.

*“Having discussions with experts from all over the world is the only way to understand these issues better and gain a holistic view of the limitations, ethical risks, and benefits of using AI.” - **Christoph Lütge***

#### **Four Themes – Thirteen questions – Sixteen Experts**

In order to capture a diverse array of perspectives from experts around the world on AI ethics, the IEAI team prepared a brief questionnaire. Our questions were purposefully broad and open-ended for each respondent to answer based on their interests and expertise. The following sections synthesize the experts' responses, highlighting commonalities, varying viewpoints and distinctions

##### **A. Where is AI Ethics going?**

Our first theme asked a series of questions about where AI ethics is headed. Respondents were asked about what they see as the next steps for the topic of AI ethics and what the most important question or challenge is related to the responsible use of AI right now. They were also asked about the role of AI regulation and what the AI community may be overlooking when it comes to governance.

When it comes to the next steps, many of our experts touched on the overarching idea of applying AI ethics-related principles to the real world. For some, this means moving towards institutionalization and instrumentalization of AI ethics principles that allow for implementation in actual AI systems. However, the need to first have

community consultation and a common language between disciplines and cultures on what AI ethics actually is remains a challenge in this regard.

*“AI ethics means many different things to different people, given their backgrounds and interests. Although this diversity is a good thing as it makes the field fertile, it also poses the danger of resulting in incommensurable perspectives where no one really agrees with anyone else and therefore, there is no common ground to move the field forward.” - Aditya Johri*

Issues such as the rule of law, regulation, and sustainability were also mentioned as areas in which AI ethics needs to engage with more.

The interdisciplinary and multicultural nature of the respondent group and the field of AI ethics was highly reflected in the diversity of answers related to the most important question in AI ethics. The complexity of the word cloud in Figure 1 displays this clearly. Topics mentioned were rarely overlapping and ranged from lack of inclusion and diversity, data access, and fake news to misaligned goals between economic and political stakeholders, threats to democracy, and informed citizenry.



Figure 1 – Word Cloud: Important Issues in AI Ethics

*“We need to grow an entire ecosystem for AI ethics (interdisciplinary scholars, mature research programs, regulation, development of concrete norms, enculturation of norms, common language, oversight infrastructure, and broad education programs). Solving just one or a few of those won't be sufficient to meet the*

*challenges raised by applications of AI.” - John Basl*

In terms of the future of AI regulation, our experts have a strong consensus that a commonly accepted regulatory framework would not be likely anytime soon and may need a new way of thinking. Many argued that regional, local or third-party approaches are preferable, at least at this point.

*“Aligning values and practices across diverse heterogeneous institutional contexts and differing incentives in certain industries and country contexts is the main challenge.” - Nitin Sawhney*

*“Developing a regulatory framework based on a collaborative ethic requires reflection... The challenge of the new millennium is to become thinkers, to become philosophers: to be able to reflect.” - Viviana Polisena*

Finally, when asked about what policymakers, developers, and the AI ethics community are overlooking right now, many of our experts conversely answered that there is actually too much to consider right now in AI ethics, making the implementation on the topic of ethics or responsible AI often vague and hard to define. The lack of practical experience of policymakers, structural inequalities in the decision-making systems, and a lack of diversity, education, and citizen engagement were some of the other issues raised by our respondents.

*“Failure to be people-centric. This is more than some vague notion of humans in the loop but needs to be grounded in recognizing that AI should be part of modern social relations and be capable of sustaining positive social bonding.” - Mark Findlay*

## B. Thinking about timelines – the short - and long-term roles for AI ethics

The second theme of our survey dealt with timelines for implementing AI ethics.

First, we looked at what measures can be developed and implemented right now while more comprehensive guidelines are still being developed. Common throughout many of the responses was the need for more engagement

with community stakeholders, as well as more awareness of diversity and cultural distinctions in creating guidelines and practices. There was also mention of the need to adopt multi-stakeholder and regional approaches and working groups with useful case studies. Vital is to include people with diverse backgrounds, genders, ethnic and minority contexts and not overlook the structural systems in which these efforts take place and how they may impact certain groups.

*“Guidelines for responsible AI should not be merely ‘inclusive’ - they should always consider how to amplify the epistemic influence and decision-making power of the most impacted and vulnerable groups. This is arguably more important than ensuring the perspectives included are global.”- Shannon Vallor*

On the opposite end of the timeline, there are longer-term roles for AI ethics as AI continues to embed itself at all levels of society, repositioning and reprioritizing the responsible use of technology. In light of this trend, we asked our experts how we can guide those from the technology sector and the policymakers in AI ethics in a practical, actionable, and culturally adaptable/inclusive way. An overarching theme in the responses was the need for increased awareness and education, both for the public and for those developing the tools. University courses, professionalization mechanisms, workshops, and more inclusive stakeholder engagement efforts are some tools that could help. Adopting common languages that foster discussion and understanding at a broader level and creating "communities of knowledge" were ideas woven into several of our respondents' answers.

*“We have to mentor companies, governments, and citizens, so they share the same reality to enter into dialogue to decide on what has and what should and should not be done.”- Richard Benjamins*

Finally, we asked how to ensure ethics embedding in *all* stages of the AI system life cycle. There was a fair amount of consensus among respondents that this will, in one way or another, involve strong human-in-the-loop processes. As AI systems are and will continue to be far too complex and complicated, looking for purely technical solutions to this problem may not be achievable. Early and

continuing education, training, and awareness of ethical considerations for developers is key, as is creating ethical ecosystems and cultures in companies. Regulation and other internal compliance and procedural mechanisms will also play a central role. Given the technology, this will be a continually adjusting process.

*“Each new technology raises new ethical questions.”- Rafael Calvo*

*“The best question is how to create a culture where AI ethics is a main concern for AI research, development, and implementation. Definitely, law plays an important role here, but so does capacity building and awareness raising.”- Christian Perrone*

*“This is a costly process. We need to reduce the burden on low-impact AI uses and increase the burden on high-impact AI uses. We need innovation and guidance.”- Fabio Steibel*

### C. Understanding AI Ethics around the world

Our third theme asked a series of questions on issues related to geography, culture, and perspectives on AI ethics. We first looked at the most important issues related to AI ethics, specifically in the countries or regions of our experts. There were some commonalities among the main concerns from all experts, but also some noticeable differences. There was, for instance, an overarching concern about privacy issues from European respondents. In Latin America and Asia, there was an increased focus on controlling risks to the public, human rights, the rule of law, and the impacts on minorities. In Ghana, there was concern with data inequality. Inequality in terms of reaping the benefits of AI was also more generally reflected in responses from experts from the Global South. In the US, a notably different concern was the increasing power of a few corporate players and its impact on governance.

*“Data bias is a major challenge because we do not have original datasets. Most of the data are generated outside the sub-region.”- Jerry John Kponyo*

We also looked at how we can better apply a cultural, geographical and, a temporal lens to AI governance. Cultural differences must be considered when developing AI systems, but we

often focus more heavily on global solutions. Respondents overwhelmingly suggested training and education on this important component of AI development and governance as vital. Improved stakeholder consultation was also a major suggestion. Creating avenues of participation and ensuring constant training on such issues can help develop better AI systems and technologies.

*“Training. Again and again. Not only in technology but also in the ethical dimension of technology and AI.”- José Luis Fernández Fernández*

*“It seems important to provide concrete examples of how AI could be adverse to human values.” - Jean-Gabriel Ganascia*

*“If we want to pivot from (a non-culturally sensitive approach), we need to come up with new institutions and new ways of creating the workforce and professionals who are trained in a fundamentally different manner.”- Aditya Johri*

We then pivoted to the important question of AI inequality between regions, asking what we miss when we center our conversations on AI ethics in the Global North. The focus on AI development and AI ethics in the Global North means, on the one hand, that we are overlooking relevant expertise from the Global South that could expand AI development globally and, on the other hand, that current AI-enabled tools often have limited applicability in a large region of the world because the diversity of available resources and needs are not taken into account. Lack of relevant resources in local languages, diversity in consultation, and the realities of the needs of the Global South are challenges in this respect.

*“We are missing the opportunity to centre the needs of the largest share of the human population, and to build AI systems that promote shared, long-term human flourishing rather than amplify existing global inequality (a cause of growing social harm and political instability).”- Shannon Vallor*

*“Probably the main aspect missing is the interplay between the opportunities that technology brings and the exclusion it can also create.”- Christian Perrone*

The next vital step is to better understand *how* we can overcome barriers to cross-cultural cooperation in AI ethics.

*“Discussing with people from these countries and notably by encouraging them to develop their own approach according to the real needs of their population can help to overcome barriers to cross-cultural cooperation in AI ethics”- Yves Pouillet*

## B. What’s next for Global AI ethics Consortium

GAIEC seeks to bring global awareness of the importance of ethics in AI, acknowledging at the same time the diverse contexts around the globe in which AI is employed. Our last theme, therefore, touched on the motivations and future goals of the GAIEC "itself".

GAIEC members are motivated by the idea of being part of an inclusive team, contributing to the efforts to manage the ethical issues associated with AI, and learning from different geographical and disciplinary perspectives. According to two of its founding members, the GAIEC allows them:

*“To understand what are the different views on Ethics.”- Jean-Gabriel Ganascia*



*“(To access a) network of experts from around the world.”- Rafael Calvo*

Regarding how networks like the GAIEC promote responsible innovation and the adoption of AI technologies in the rest of the world, respondents' answers centered around engagement and collaboration among academics in the form of research projects, publications, and conferences, but also with the public. There was also a theme of creating more tangible products and guidelines. This includes suggestions such as training and

workshops, but also providing translations of materials to increase inclusion.

*“To promote responsible innovation, we need to consider translating material into languages other than English.”-*  
**Mohammad Ershadul Karim**

Finally, we looked at the possible new areas of collaboration under the GAIEC umbrella. Suggestions included collaborating with NGOs, providing Ph.D.training, offering Junior Fellowships, examining the implications of the EU AI Act, maintaining an ethics best practice inventory, and developing training manuals and training for trainers.

### Final Thoughts

In its annual meeting on May 30th, the GAIEC members discussed priorities for AI ethics in the coming year. A key question was how an AI ethics approach can work with regulation and other forms of governance to strengthen AI governance right now. This question needs attention, as governance frameworks are starting to come into place this year. The [UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence](#) speaks to the timeliness and international nature of this debate. Even in the short term, it is important to

acknowledge and build in a mechanism for global perspectives and cultural inclusiveness as international guidelines are developed.

A consistent theme in the GAIEC consortium is the need to develop ways to train those from the technology sector and policymakers not only generally or abstractly in AI ethics but to do this in

a practical, actionable and culturally adaptable way. Ingraining the importance of this topic among practitioners and the public is not an overnight process but involves repositioning and reprioritizing the responsible use of AI at all levels of society.

The need to work on both short- and long-term governing mechanisms to promote a culturally aware and practical approach to the responsible use of AI is clear. The GAIEC plans to continue working on this topic in the coming year through discussions at events and research projects. Visit GAIEC's [webpage](#) to stay up to date on its activities.

*“AI ethics can be the compass that will help us navigate these uncharted waters of the new era that lies ahead, tackle challenges and shape our future.”- **Christoph Lütge***

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## Appendix – List of contributors (Alphabetical Order):

1. [John Basl](#) – USA
2. [Richard Benjamins](#) – Spain
3. [Rafael Calvo](#) - UK
4. [José Luis Fernández Fernández](#) - Spain
5. [Mark Findlay](#) - Singapore
6. [Jean-Gabriel Ganascia](#) - France
7. [Aditya Johri](#) - USA
8. [Mohammad Ershadul Karim](#) - Bangladesh
9. [Jerry John Kponyo](#) - Ghana
10. [Christoph Lütge](#) - Germany
11. [Christian Perrone](#) - Brasil
12. [Thierry Poibeau](#) - France
13. [Viviana Polisená](#) - Argentina
14. [Yves Pouillet](#) - Belgium
15. [Nitin Sawhney](#) - Finland
16. [Fabro Steibel](#) - Brasil
17. [Shannon Vallor](#) - UK

## What is the GAIEC?

In 2020, the [IEAI](#) led the way in creating the [Global AI Ethics Consortium](#) (GAIEC), joining forces with academic institutions, research centers, and distinguished members of academia worldwide to foster trust in data and technology and maximize the potential of AI while limiting its harms.

The GAIEC started as a network of experts interested in examining the responsible use of AI in the fight against COVID-19 but has since expanded to include other questions related to AI ethics.

Its activities include, amongst others, shared research development and outreach, participation in the [AI ethics – Global Perspectives](#) free online course as well as other [research projects](#), and the launch of initiatives such as [GAIEC Civil Society Repository](#) that aim to raise awareness and further promote the role of public and civil society participation in the AI ethics discussions and active involvement and [representation](#) in international conferences and fora such as the [Responsible AI Forum](#).

Through this work, the GAIEC aims to bring global awareness of the importance of ethics in AI and acknowledge the diverse contexts around the globe in which AI is employed.