**SUMMARY REPORT**

**First Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI**

*3 February 2022, 14.30 - 16.30*

**BACKGROUND**

Following the historic adoption of the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and in view of the broad expression of interest by Member States to form a Group of “Early Adopters/Friends” of the Recommendation, Ambassador Adam Almulla, Permanent Delegate of Kuwait to UNESCO, convened an initial coordinating meeting on 3 February 2022. This meeting was open to all Member States of UNESCO and the invitation was circulated through the Chairs of each Electoral Group. The meeting followed a series of presentations and exchanges on this topic with UNESCO’s regional groups by the Assistant Director General for Social and Human Sciences (SHS ADG), Gabriela Ramos.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss, among other issues: (a) the format, the goals and the functions of the network; (b) the plans of the Secretariat to assist Member States in the implementation of the Recommendation and its provisions, following the mandates provided with by the Recommendation; and (c) the ways Member States can support and enrich the of the Recommendation at the global, regional and national levels.

**SUMMARY OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE GROUP OF FRIENDS**

Over 100 participants from 54 Member States took part in the meeting. Ambassador Almulla opened the discussion, underscoring the great support of member countries for the development of the recommendation, and their interest to keep contributing to its implementation through the establishment of a group of friends. He underscored that the focus of the group was precisely to advance implementation, and to accompany the Secretariat in the development of the tools mandated by the Recommendation. He also shared the possible lines of work for the “Early Adopters/friends groups. He then gave the floor to SHS Assistant Director-General of UNESCO Gabriela Ramos, who delivered a presentation on the follow up process as established by the Recommendation. She mentioned the concrete provisions for member states to advance implementation, including through regulatory and legislative changes, and institutional developments such as the Ethics Commissions on Ethics of Artificial Intelligence.

She also reminded members of the tasks that are assigned to the Secretariat, in the development of the Ethical Impact Assessment, the Readiness Methodology, and the analytical work to understand the policy settings that are conducive to the development and deployment of ethical Artificial Intelligence. To deliver on this, there are several considerations, including the possibility of organizing a Global Forum on ethical AI; on establishing a facility of Experts to support the work (including through leading institutions from member states, women experts to advance ethical AI, or experts that can support through development cooperation programs); and the establishment of an Observatory of Ethical AI -as mentioned in the Recommendation-. She requested member’s support, at the intellectual and financial level, and thanked Japan who is already providing financial support for the implementation of the Recommendation in Africa.

**Member’s feedback**

Over 20 Member States took the floor to share their perspectives and recent national developments in AI. They all reaffirmed their readiness to continue working together, after the major breakthrough members achieved at the adoption by standing ovation of the Recommendation.

Member States converged in stressing their readiness to engage with each other and with the Secretariat in making the Recommendation count. They noted its added value and expressed unanimous support for UNESCO’s efforts to assist in its implementation.

*Discussion on the functioning of the Group of Friends*

There was general agreement to have a Group of Friends as a platform for countries to come together and have a space for an exchange amongst themselves and with the Secretariat. The objective of these dialogues would be to share best practices, information and knowledge. This can lead to synergies, e.g. by capitalizing on the assessments already launched by Germany and Saudi Arabia. Other objectives: identify specific gaps and challenges; and decide where and how to focus capacity-building efforts, keeping in mind the different challenges faced by each country.

There was consensus that the Group should be called a “Friends Group” and that it should remain informal, open ended and flexible. At the same time, there was agreement that it should be action-oriented, focused and with clear deliverables, in line with the Recommendation.

Almost all members that took the floor expressed their support for Ambassador Almulla to chair the Group, given his leadership role in the development of the Recommendation. There was no alternative proposal. Members also welcomed the presence and participation of ADG SHS Ramos, and her team, and the support they provide to member states.

A large group of members mentioned that to be effective, the Group should be convened in different formats, including the Permanent Delegations by themselves or doing it at an expert format, when needed. It was noted that one useful function of the group would be to connect the work of UNESCO with policy makers back home, including at Ministerial level, and to organize meetings of the friends’ group on a policy makers format. They also stressed the importance of including in this Group of Friends external stakeholders including the private sector, academics and others, on a needs basis. The networks of UNESCO in this field, including Chairs and Category II Centers were also mentioned.

*Discussion on the implementation of the Recommendation*

Member States emphasized the importance of capacity-building, highlighting the   
Ethical Impact Assessment (EIA) and the Readiness Assessment Methodology as critical tools and key priorities for a successful implementation of the Recommendation. The need to design capacity-building programmes to help Member States bridge the digital divide was also underlined.

Member States stressed the necessity of peer-learning and the sharing of good practices among themselves on the approaches, methodologies and experiences in implementing the Recommendation.

Finally, Member States stressed that the implementation of the Recommendation should be contextualized and tailored to national and regional realities, with capacity-building focused on very specific themes, according to the needs of the countries.

*Discussion on deliverables*

In accordance with these considerations, Member States proposed concrete actions to be conducted within the framework of the Group of Friends.

Many Member States called for the creation of an online platform, which would serve as a hub for sharing information, knowledge and experience in the ethics of AI, as well as scaling up best practices. This is in line with the Recommendation provisions to establish an Observatory of Ethical AI.

Member States expressed a strong wish to provide experts and mobilize public and private partners to support the implementation of the Recommendation, and advance communication tools.

A survey to analyse the needs and interests of Member States was another idea that received widespread support. Roundtables and discussions could be held on a regular basis, based on the results of the survey, in order to share knowledge and information on specific topics. It was also suggested that ministerial-level meetings could be held once a year to maintain momentum and demonstrate commitment to the instrument.

**PROPOSAL OF NEXT STEPS**

In response to the wishes expressed by the Member States during the meeting of the Group of Friends, the Secretariat proposes to advance with the following elements:

* **Facilitate quarterly meetings of the Group of Friends** with a concrete agenda, including (but not limited to) the following items:
  1. **Exchange among Member States** on their progress on the implementation of the Recommendation;
  2. **Update from the Secretariat on the progress in different initiatives**, including the development of the tools, the establishment and functioning of the networks (including the Women4EthicalAI and the AI Experts without borders) and other initiatives set up to accompany the implementation of the Recommendation (such as the Observatory of Ethical AI, the Global Forum on the Ethics of AI and the Digital Anthropology Initiative);
  3. **Organize policy debates** to advance the different areas of the Recommendation.
  4. **Other items to be included**, based on requests of Member States.
* **Send a survey to Member States** where they can prioritize deliverables mentioned in the Recommendation and indicate their contribution in terms of experts/expertise and funding;
* **On the basis of the results of this survey: mobilize and engage the expertise offered by Member** **States** and partners in the form of national experts and national, regional or international institutions, to enrich UNESCO’s capacity-building and knowledge-generation efforts. The Secretariat will work with the Member States to invite these experts and institutions to join the relevant networks and work on the deliverables with the assistance and coordination of the Secretariat.
* **Create an online platform** to facilitate peer-learning and experience-sharing between Member States, where Member States can indicate specific needs, including as part of the comprehensive Readiness Assessment approach.
* **Submit to Member States an overall framework of implementation** – including an action plan, timeline, and indication of funding needs - for the Group of Friends to consider providing the SHS Sector with the financial support needed to deliver on its important mandate and carry out it the ambitious plans.

**Annex: Prioritization of Activities / Deliverables to support the Implementation of the Recommendation**

*Please indicate your interests and possible contribution, if any, in the list of activities below.*

*You are invited to add other appropriate activities at the end of the list.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pillars of Work** | **Activity** | **Description** | **Your interests and possible contribution**  (Please indicate your interest in this activity and possible contribution you may wish to make) |
| **Elaboration**  **of Tools** | 1. **Observatory of AI Ethics** | UNESCO will establish the Observatory of AI Ethics to gather state of the art analysis around the world on ethical AI, and the specific ways in which AI actors address ethical challenges. The Observatory will also include expertise generated through the implementation of the Recommendation and stocktaking of AI-related policies, programmes, operations and capacities in targeted countries. This will become a platform for sharing best practices and mutual learning among UNESCO Member States, to advance the implementation of the Recommendation, including collection and dissemination of progress, innovations, research reports, scientific publications, data and statistics regarding policies for AI ethics among members. It can further serve as a repository covering human rights-compliant and ethical development of AI systems. Academic institutions from member states could contribute to the Observatory. |  |
| 2. Elaboration of the **monitoring tools** (EIA and Readiness Assessment) | The Recommendation asks UNESCO to develop specific tools for the implementation of the Recommendation: ethical impact assessment (EIA) and readiness assessment methodology. **EIA** is envisaged to be a critical instrument in order to identify, monitor and assess benefits, concerns and risks of AI systems, as well as to predict consequences, mitigate risks, avoid harmful consequences and address societal challenges. It will work as a tool that AI actors can use to check alignment with the UNESCO standard of specific AI developments. **Readiness assessment** is envisaged to identify the status of countries in terms of preparedness to implement the Recommendation and support the capacity building efforts of countries to face the transformation that AI is leading to in all domains. Capacity in this regard means the ability to assess AI systems in line with the Recommendation, to ensure that the country has in place human capacity, both in the governmental institutions, and in the policies, laws and regulations to address the challenges brought by AI. Members can provide feedback in the development of these tools, and also pioneer its implementation. |  |
| **Clearing House**  **Initiatives** | 3. **Global Forum on Ethics of Artificial Intelligence** | UNESCO will develop and launch the Global Forum on Ethics of AI as an annual high-level flagship event to advance state of the art knowledge of the challenges raised by these technologies and take stock of the progress in implementation of the Recommendation. Member states are expected to host as support the Global Forum. |  |
| **4. Championing specific policy chapters in the Recommendation.** | The Recommendation provides for specific policy actions to operationalize the values and principles. The Recommendation identifies the following policy areas for these purposes: **ethical impact assessment**; **ethical governance and stewardship**; **data policy**; **development and international cooperation**; **environment and ecosystems**; **gender**; **culture**; **education and research**; **communication and information**; **economy and labour**. Besides the policy areas specifically linked to UNESCO’s mandate, the two areas that are of crosscutting and unique are the **environment** and **gender**. Championing will mean working with UNESCO in promoting better knowledge of the provisions in the policy chapters, elaborate policy briefs and organize events or roundtables on the specific issues. |  |
| 5. Pioneering the implementation of the EIA and Readiness Methodology and **share best practices**. | Pioneering EIA will mean utilization in the national context, and this will support finetuning and increasing its usefulness. This will also include developing guidance for the implementation of the EIA framework in the public and private sector and elaboration of an implementation plan in all stages of the AI system life cycle, based on rigorous scientific research. These best practices can be developed as inspiring examples (guidelines, lessons learned, etc.) to be shared with all members. |  |
| 6. **UNESCO Annual Flagship Publication on Ethics of AI**. | The Recommendation asks UNESCO to strengthen the research- and evidence-based analysis of and reporting on policies regarding AI ethics. It further asks it to collect and disseminate progress, innovations, research reports, scientific publications, data and statistics regarding policies for AI ethics, including through existing initiatives, to support sharing best practices and mutual learning, and to advance the implementation of the Recommendation. The core aspects of the Recommendation where the analytical focus should be placed are related to the governance of data,  transparency of algorithms, accountability regarding AI systems, and avoiding discriminatory outcomes on AI systems. |  |
| **Networks and Partnership** | 7. **Assigning experts** for a “Facility of Experts”, and Network of institutions for knowledge production. | The Recommendation mandates UNESCO to advance better understanding and analytical work on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. Member states could assign, on loan, experts that can work with the Secretariat in the elaboration of analytical pieces linked to the Recommendation. The Recommendation also calls for better understanding of policy effectiveness, and this needs additional expertise. |  |
| 8. Supporting the **network of experts on gender** and hosting their first meeting. | Given that women are severely underrepresented in the AI sector, close attention will be paid to gender equality and women’s empowerment at all stages of implementation. Broad participation of women will be ensured in all activities of implementation of the Recommendation. A **Women for Ethical AI Network (W4ethicalAI)** can be established to foster the implementation and deployment of the Recommendation, including the gender chapter by engaging leading women in industry, government, science and civil society. SHS has already received expression of interest of high-profile women that are interested in this field. |  |
| 9. Support the implementation of the Recommendation in Developing Countries by means of a **roster of “AI Experts without borders**”. | There is a strong call in the Recommendation to support the developing and low-income countries to advance ethical AI and to leverage its positive impact. Countries with strong development cooperation programs are encouraged to consider the implementation of the Recommendation into their priorities, so that the instrument ensures progress in AI uptake in all UNESCO’s regions. This requires financial and intellectual support, and further a roaster of experts can be established to provide assistance for such states, in the format of “*AI Experts without borders*”. |  |
| 10. Support the work to **design relevant institutions**, such as the Ethics of AI committees, as established in the Recommendation. | The Group of Friends is also intended to be a community of practice to engage in exchanging best practices on institutional developments that would be necessary to strengthen the implementation of the Recommendation. The Recommendation provides for examples of institution-building and includes a possibility for adding the role of an independent AI Ethics Officer or some other mechanism to oversee ethical impact assessment, auditing and continuous monitoring efforts and ensure ethical guidance of AI systems. Member States, private sector companies and civil society organizations, with the support of UNESCO, are encouraged to create a network of independent AI Ethics Officers to give support to this process at national, regional and international levels. |  |
|  | *Please indicate other activities that are top priorities for you:* | *Please describe these activities in a few lines:* |  |