Renaissance Numérique

AI Governance: Empowering Civil Society

Table of contents

↘

Intro|
duction

The meaningful participation of civil society is a challenge in global governance initiatives. In the context of artificial intelligence (AI)[1], organisations and groups such as the G7, the G20, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) – which merged with the OECD in 2024 – have all sought to participate in a global effort to build a common understanding of the transformations induced by artificial intelligence. Most recently, the United Nations presented its strategy on how to enhance global cooperation around the governance of artificial intelligence. In these efforts, the voice of civil society is often sought after, but questions remain regarding the extent to which it is accounted for. The preoccupation regarding the meaningful inclusion of civil society representatives in multi-stakeholder governance processes is not new, and continues to be an important source of debates unfolding in the background of international governance discussions.

Virtually all parties designing policy and governance initiatives claim to rely on inputs from civil society organisations. But including civil society in high-level decision making is difficult. How

---

1.   In what follows, we use the terms AI systems and AI interchangeably. We refer to the definition of the OECD of an AI system: a "machine-based system[s] that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infer, from the input [they] receive, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments."

to identify relevant contributions amongst thousands of sollicitations? Are civil society organisations truly representative? At which stages of decision-making are they most useful? Do they need a voting right in some instances for their participation to be truly meaningful? How to make the best use of their limited availability when tens of similar initiatives run in parallel? It is rarely clear how international or national institutions address these difficult questions. Few provide clear information about the processes through which civil society is recruited and participates in governance, for example.

This report examines the role of civil society in the governance of AI. It explores both the current state of participation and the barriers that civil society organisations face. It is structured as follows. The first section provides general considerations about the participation of civil society in the global governance of AI: what is the global governance of AI, why involving civil society in efforts to shape it matters, and concrete examples of how civil society currently takes part in those efforts. The second section highlights key challenges associated with civil society's involvement in the global governance of AI, such as risks of tokenisation, geographic representation imbalances, lack of funding and time, and increasing need for coordination. The report concludes on a call to action ahead of the upcoming AI Action Summit that will be held in Paris on February 10 and 11, 2025.

This publication is the result of the three *AI Dialogue*s organised by Renaissance Numérique over the course of 2024. These dialogues gathered more than 60 experts from academia, civil society, policy and industry to discuss key issues related to the global governance of AI. More information on the themes addressed and previous publications from this stream of work, can be found in the "About the *AI Dialogues*" section.

Civil society in the global governance of AI

01

↘ What is civil society?

Civil society is an ambiguous term. In this report, it refers to the collective of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), advocacy groups, social movements, trade unions and individuals that operate independently from the state and private sectors, often in the public interest. Civil society plays a crucial role in advocating for rights, holding governments accountable, and promoting democracy. Understood as an aggregate of organisations and experts, civil society advances the interest of citizens and individuals in public discourse and democratic processes. Civil society thus assembles and amplifies individual voices in the public sphere. While some works tend to focus on civil society organisations (CSOs) only, which are a structured subset of civil society, this report considers all forms of civil society actors, in their great diversity. This allows us to include actors like academia and whistleblowers in the discussion.

↘ What is the global governance of AI?

The global governance of AI refers to the frameworks, policies, and mechanisms used to guide the development, deployment, and use of artificial intelligence globally. Concerns about the need for a global governance of AI and the challenges that arise in making it a reality have gained traction with the success of machine learning in the late 2010s, and recently with the fast and widespread adoption of large language models and so-called generative AI. Both of these waves have been simultaneously sources of optimism regarding the potential of AI for society and of concerns regarding the risks it poses, such as amplifying discrimination and surveillance and, more recently, causing environmental damage. In this context, effective AI governance seeks to balance innovation with safeguards against potential harms. It aims to ensure AI technologies are ethical, safe, transparent, and aligned with societal values.

Governance involves a mix of laws, technical standards, and best practices, shaped by a variety of actors such as governments, international organisations, private companies, and civil society. In the second interim note of its *AI Dialogues* series, Renaissance Numérique identified the "spaces" where global AI governance is debated and implemented, based on *Veale et al.* (2023). These include (the lists are non-exhaustive):

→ **Domestic regulations:** the EU AI Act, China's AI regulations, the U.S. Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence.

→ **International agreements:** the OECD Recommendation on AI, the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI.

→ **Ethical codes and declarations:** the OECD Principles on AI, the G20 AI Principles, the Bletchley Declaration.

→ **Standards:** ISO/IEC 38507 (on the governance implications of the use of AI), the IEEE 7000 series (focused on ethics and societal considerations for AI), the work of CEN-CENELEC JTC 21, which is developing European AI standards aligned with the EU's AI Act.

→ **Contracts and licensing:** an emerging form of private trans-national governance over AI systems, which involves using contractual terms to limit how AI and its outputs are used, inspired by open-source software's intellectual property (IP) regimes.

→ **Industry self-governance:** Platforms providing AI-as-a-Service are important governance players. They set internal rules that drive the development of AI systems. Industry self-governance is not always made public. It sometimes draws on ethical codes such as the OECD Principles on AI.

→ **Events:** the UK AI Safety Forum, the AI Seoul Summit, the Internet Governance Forum, the Paris AI Action Summit.

A whole set of actors interact in those spaces, with the objective of shaping the global governance of AI: legislative assemblies, inter-governmental organisations, standards organisations, industry, professional associations, NGOs, academia...

↘ Why does including civil society in AI-related decision making matter?

State actors and businesses see great potential in artificial intelligence to advance their interests, such as improving the efficiency and quality of public services and generating revenues. Some of these developments are beneficial but they may inadvertently cause harm that are not known at the moment the systems are put in place. For example, the Netherlands fiscal authority has launched a system to detect frauds, which was later proved to cause discrimination. One contribution of civil society is to bring to light the perspective of those that are affected by AI systems in global AI governance, to make sure that the goals and claims of those deploying AI systems are not in conflict with the public interest or the interests of certain communities. Civil society organisations thus play a key role in bringing to light emerging issues related to the deployment of artificial intelligence, and proposing concrete solutions for the development of remedies.

CSOs raise awareness and call attention to key issues that could otherwise be overlooked: for instance, the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, biases leading to discrimination against minorities or populations that are already vulnerable, the effects of certain recommendation algorithms on young people's mental health, or the environmental impact of AI. It can also help define methods for assessing these issues and devising solutions, in the public

interest, and carry out in-depth investigations, building on existing practices and lessons learned from other sectors and industries.

Bringing to light the perspective of affected individuals and communities in the context of artificial intelligence is challenging, for three reasons. First, because the consequences of AI are not limited to one domain and span across multiple sectors. The groups affected by AI differ significantly across contexts: in the military, debates focus on the regulation of autonomous or dual use weapons, while in the insurance sector, discussions revolve around defining accountability for AI-based decisions. Second, because the transformations induced by AI occur on a global scale. Each region may face particular issues that are difficult to anticipate from another part of the world. For example, the impacts of AI on marginalised communities vary across regions. Systemic discrimination and surveillance technologies pose risks worldwide, but these threats are most pronounced in areas where local minorities face persecution from state authorities. Third, because AI evolves rapidly and each new use case leads to potential new issues. Constant technological evolution thus leads to a multiplication of emerging problems and affected communities.

Civil society also provides solutions that contribute to shaping the development of artificial intelligence in directions not driven by State and corporate interests. It brings independent expertise in policy discussions. Many civil society organisations, as well as researchers, provide technical expertise. Some of them, like AI Forensics, conduct independent technical investigations into opaque and influential algorithms. Others are specialised in the red teaming of advanced AI models and systems. Last but not least, CSOs contribute indispensable legal, human rights and policy expertise to discussions that could otherwise be driven by technical considerations.

↘ Considerations from the *AI Dialogues*

The modalities of inclusion of civil society differ in the various *fora* of AI governance listed in the previous section. During the second *AI Dialogue*, organised by Renaissance Numérique in Brussels, participants sought to highlight general trends relative to the involvement of civil society in governance initiatives, both at a general level and in the specific case of AI governance.

A participation that varies across stages of decision making

At a general level, participants noted that civil society has unequal power across the various stages of decision making in public contexts. Figure 1 hereafter shows the degree of implication of civil society at various stages of decision making when decisions are made by an organisation or an institution. Examples are the drafting of a law or the elaboration of standards. Decision making processes can usually be decomposed into five steps. Stakeholders must first set the agenda by defining the issues at hand, why they must be addressed, etc. They formulate a series of principles and actions for improvement at the drafting stage. The decisions must then be validated by the institution, usually using governance processes such as votes. At the implementation stage, the decisions are put to action, and later evaluated at the review stage.

Figure 1 - Civil society participation at various stages of decision making
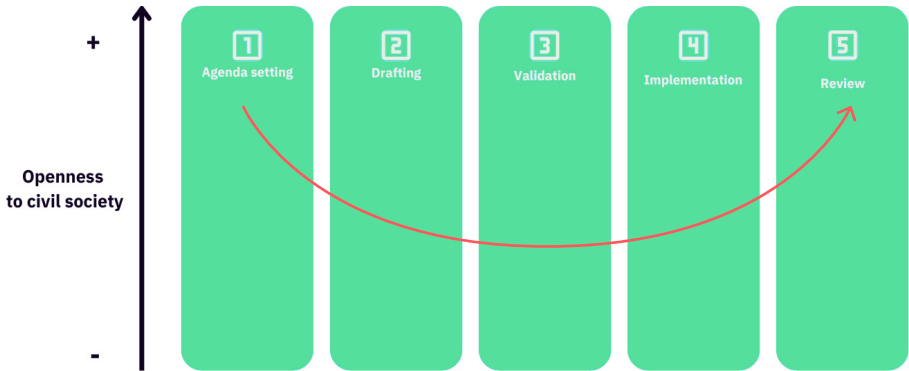


Source : Bertrand de La Chapelle

Each of these stages is more or less open to civil society interventions. For example, at the agenda setting stage, civil society generally has a broad range of levers to shape opinion, such as organising events, publishing joint statements and mobilising media and publics online. On the contrary, its mode of intervention is more limited at the validation stage. It can organise one-on-one meetings with parliamentarians in the case of domestic regulations; NGOs can also vote directly in some standardisation efforts. At the review stage, civil society's latitude to act increases again and it can produce reports and communication to raise awareness on potential inefficiencies.

In addition, governance sites are not all open to the same sorts of interventions. The curve of participation in domestic regulation may be much more "U-shaped" than in standardisation efforts, for instance. In the first case, civil society can attempt to make AI regulation a national concern and exert strong pressure on law makers. In the second, there may be only so much they can do in setting the agenda if discussions are taken behind closed doors.

A participation that depends on the openness and hardness levels of initiatives

Participants in the *AI Dialogues* made another observation regarding the involvement of civil society in the specific case of the governance of AI. Figure 2 hereafter maps some major global AI governance initiatives and ranks their level of openness to civil society.

Figure 2 - Global AI governance initiatives and their level of openness to civil society [2]
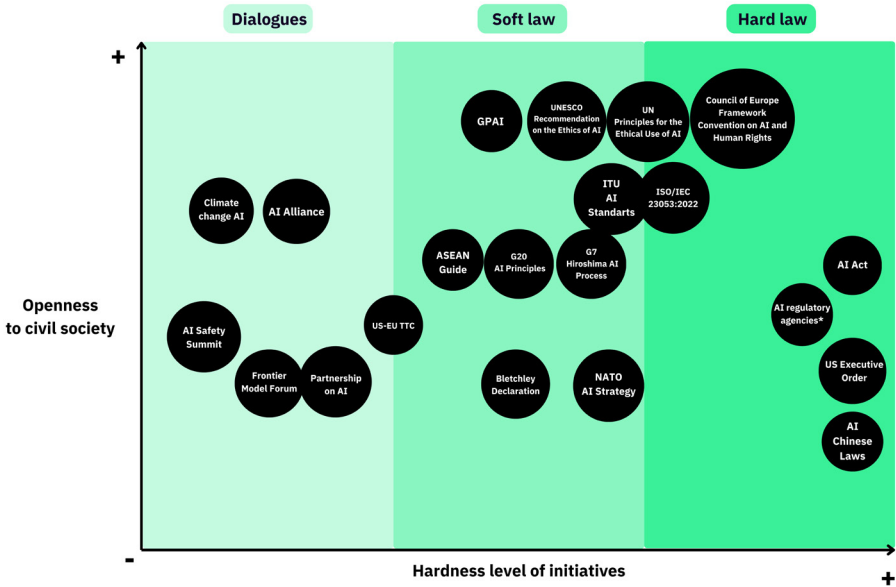
The initiatives listed here are more or less institutional and binding and are distributed on an axis that goes from dialogue to soft law to hard law. On one hand of the spectrum, events have no institutional hardness and principles are merely debated without concrete

---

2. This figure results from exchanges between participants during the second *AI Dialogue*, organised by Renaissance Numérique on June 27, 2024 in Brussels. It shows some of the key organisations involved in the current global AI governance landscape and their main initiatives. It does not intend to be exhaustive. It may also evolve over time.

implications. Principles debated publicly turn into soft laws when they are transformed into industry self-regulation principles or ethical codes of practice drafted by either states, intergovernmental organisations or businesses. Contracts and licences as well as international agreements are more constraining and move closer towards hard laws. At the far end of the spectrum, domestic regulations have the highest degree of institutional hardness.

These initiatives can also be spatialised according to the extent to which they include civil society. Events tend to be inclusive of civil society (although there are exceptions, like the past international summits on AI). On the contrary, government decisions such as the U.S. Executive Orders are not always based on consultations with civil society. Industry ethical codes, contracts and licences and self-governance mechanisms are also not always inclusive of civil society.

↘ Concrete examples

Taking the considerations highlighted above into consideration, we provide examples of participation of civil society organisations in several contexts where AI governance is debated and implemented. We have categorised these examples according to their degree of institutionalisation, meaning the extent to which the participation of civil society is governed by institutional procedures.

Low institutionalisation

Civil society organisations can undertake voluntary initiatives aimed at fostering public debates and discussions about the governance of AI. They can organise a series of events to bring together experts from diverse backgrounds to encourage productive discussions. This can lead to the publication of reports and policy papers that are promoted in the media. Institutions may participate in the discussions, but the initiatives are not run by the institutions themselves. The outcomes of the discussions can then be presented to

institutions. The *AI Dialogues* may serve as an example of this type of participation.

Civil society organisations can also make public new data about public and expert opinion. In preparation for the AI Action Summit, set for February 10-11, 2025, in Paris, The Future Society, the AI & Society Institute (ENS-PSL), Sciences Po's Tech & Global Affairs Innovation Hub, the French Digital Council (CNNum) and Make. org organised an online public consultation. This platform invited citizens, civil society organisations, and academic researchers to join discussions and vote on proposals to shape policy debates. The results of this consultation demonstrate strong public support for robust AI regulation and a vigilant approach to AI development, emphasising the need for inclusive, multistakeholder governance.

Civil society actors can also create tools that drive the development of AI in new directions or that address specific issues. For example, the French association GenAI Impact developed EcoLogits, a tool that tracks the energy consumption and environmental impacts of using generative AI models such as those of OpenAI, Anthropic and Mistral AI.

Civil society organisations sometimes engage in strategic litigation to bring legal cases to court. In 2020, a coalition of interest groups and associations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, Sex Workers Outreach Project Chicago, Illinois Public Interest Research Group, and Mujeres Latinas en Acción, sued Clearview AI on behalf of their members, clients, and program participants. The case aimed to determine whether Clearview AI violated privacy rights under Illinois state law.

Finally, civil society conducts advocacy activities by making evidence public and calling upon regulators to conduct further investigation. AI Forensics and Amnesty International, for instance, conducted an investigation into TikTok's recommender systems to evaluate potential effects on teens' health. They published a report in November 2023, which caught the attention of the media. The

European Commission then launched formal proceedings against TikTok under the DSA in February 2024.

Medium institutionalisation

CSOs also participate in initiatives in collaboration with institutions. For example, the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union held a public consultation to gather citizens' perspectives on artificial intelligence (see box hereafter). Over three weekends, a group of citizens discussed emerging risks and potential solutions related to AI.

Another common mode of participation is open consultations by public or institutional players. Recently, the European AI Office hosted a consultation on trustworthy general-purpose AI models under the AI Act. Similarly, the OECD and the Global Partnership on AI held a public consultation on AI risks. Participating in these initiatives generally requires minimal resources and coordination for civil society organisations, although it does require legal and technical expertise. This process is also time-consuming, as questionnaires can extend over dozens of pages and contain very precise questions (see section on "Access to non-financial resources" in the "Obstacles to civil society participation" section).

It is often unclear how policymakers incorporate input from these consultations, and participants are rarely given feedback on how it was used. Nonetheless, these consultations provide significant benefits to legislators and international organisations. They help identify gaps in existing legislative efforts and demonstrate a commitment to incorporating civil society's views and acting in the public interest.

Citizen's panel on Artificial Intelligence

Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union

The Citizen's panel on Artificial Intelligence initiated by the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union is one example of a collection of public opinion. The panel was organised by Missions Publiques, an independent organisation that conducts citizen panels across the world[3].

60 people participated in the citizen's panel. These were selected at random from a sample of 16,000 invitations sent out across Belgium. The aim of the panel was to bring together all strata of the population in terms of age, gender, levels of education and other demographic criteria. The panel sought to reflect a wide range of perspectives and experiences rooted in people's lived experiences. It met over three weekends between February and April 2024.

The panel formulated nine key messages reflecting their preoccupations regarding the impact of AI on jobs, how AI transforms learning, the economy of AI and the risk of monopolies, the role of scientists in the governance of AI, the environmental footprint of AI, information integrity, the role of the European Union and the role of common people in the development of AI.

---

3.   Missions Publiques participated in Renaissance Numérique's third *AI Dialogue*, in Paris.

High institutionalisation

Civil society organisations can also be included in the expert groups of standardisation bodies or international organisations. For example, civil society participates in expert groups such as the Global Partnership on AI Experts Community and the OECD.AI Network of Experts. On the standardisation side, the European standardisation body CEN-CENELEC has set up a Joint Technical Committee on artificial intelligence (JTC 21). JTC 21 develops European standards to provide manufacturers the presumption of conformity with the EU Artificial Intelligence Act. According to the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL), three organisations represent civil society in JTC 21: the European consumer voice in standardisation (ANEC); the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC); and the Environmental Coalition on Standards (ECOS).

Another example of an expert group CSOs can join, in theory, is the one required by the AI Act. Article 67 of the EU AI Act establishes an Advisory Forum to meet twice a year to provide technical expertise. The text states that "The membership of the advisory forum shall represent a balanced selection of stakeholders, including industry, start-ups, SMEs, civil society and academia." The European Center for Not-for-Profit Law notes some civil society organisations are already working with the European Commission: themselves, Access Now and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties. It calls upon all civil society organisations to coordinate in order to "put public pressure on the Commission, especially to ensure an equal number of seats for civil society."[4]

Finally, civil society organisations can also seek to influence discussions unfolding in semi-public environments. Discussions between world leaders in groups like the G7 and G20 can have important repercussions on the governance of AI. Both the G7 and the G20 have special tracks for including civil society.

---

4.   ECNL (August 2024), Towards an AI Act that serves people and society, p. 22.

Table 1 - Examples of civil society participation in global AI governance[5]

Types of civil society participation	Contributes to	Level of institutionalisation
Reports, events, participation in public debates	Public awareness	Low
Strategic litigation	Lawsuit	Low
Open consultations, online and offline	Public awareness Legislation	Medium
Hearings before legislative assemblies	Legislation	Medium
Participation in expert groups	Standards International frameworks Legislation	High

5.   An alternative version of this table was discussed during the third AI Dialogue and bene-fitted from participants' insights. See also the IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum.

Obstacles to civil society participa|tion

02

Feedback from the Drafting Process of the Digital Services Act

"Civil society organizations indicated that the following factors enabled engagement:

→ Successful coordination between CSOs presenting a unified voice.
→ Alignment of high-level goals between CSOs, policymakers and regulators, which facilitates better relationships.
→ The unprecedented level of openness on the side of the Commission, possibly enabled by the sense of urgency linked to the ongoing violations by online platforms.
→ The novel nature of the DSA, where CSOs managed to establish themselves as providing expertise crucial for the success of the law.

At the same time, CSOs highlighted several challenges which hold important lessons for both the DSA and the AI Act implementation [...] across three topics:

→ Civil society coordination and access to funding.
→ Gaps in expertise and national-level involvement.
→ Engagement with the European Commission."

Source: European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (2024), Towards an AI Act that serves people and society, p. 51.

Various reports highlight the challenges civil society faces in participating in AI governance[6]. In this section we expand on some of the main issues mentioned. Participants in Renaissance Numérique's third *AI Dialogue* discussed these challenges at length. When relevant, we include quotes whilst preserving participants' anonymity.

---

6.   See, for example, European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (2024), Towards an AI Act that serves people and society; Ada Lovelace Institute (2023), Inclusive AI Governance: Civil Society Participation in Standards Development; Obvia (2024), Expanding the Democratic Imaginaries and Empowering Civil Society.

↘ Representation of
affected communities

Geographical representation of civil society organisations

AI is deployed in various geographies simultaneously, affecting multiple cultures and legislations. Still, in their report *Governing AI for Humanity,* the United Nations (UN) note that a large majority of UN countries are not involved in any of the seven main international AI governance initiatives[7]. Countries from Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America, in particular, are mostly not involved in global AI governance efforts (see Figure 3 hereunder).

Figure 3 - Representation in seven non-United Nations international governance initiatives.

Sample: OECD AI Principles (2019), G20 AI principles (2019), Council of Europe AI Convention drafting group (2022–2024), GPAI Ministerial Declaration (2022), G7 Ministers' Statement (2023), Bletchley Declaration (2023) and Seoul Ministerial Declaration (2024).

INTERREGIONAL ONLY, EXCLUDES REGIONAL
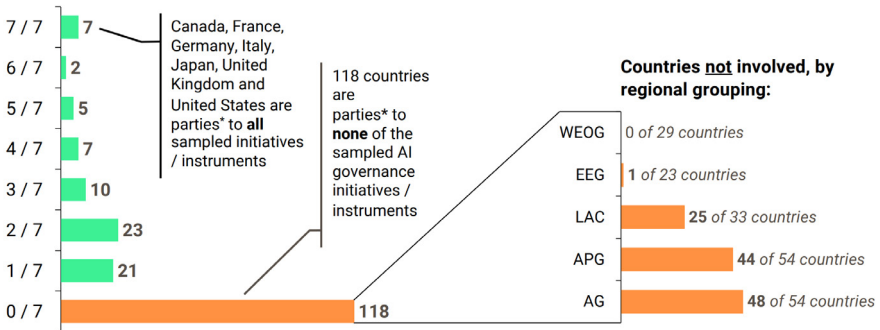
Source: United Nations (2024), Governing AI for Humanity: Final Report, p. 9

We find a similar disparity in civil society. The Digital Civil Society Lab of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society has

7.   The OECD AI Principles (2019), G20 AI principles (2019), Council of Europe AI Convention drafting group (2022–2024), GPAI Ministerial Declaration (2022), G7 Ministers' Statement (2023), Bletchley Declaration (2023) and Seoul Ministerial Declaration (2024).

built an AI Civil Society Database[8]. The figure below shows the geographical distribution of the organisations listed in the database, excluding commercial entities. Civil society organisations representing the interests of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America make up a small minority of all organisations working on "safe", "responsible", "trustworthy" or "ethical" AI.

The participation of local civil society organisations is often at odds with the globalised operation of commercial AI. Local organisations participate at a fundamentally different scale than large technology companies. As a result, some local feedback may be dismissed at a global scale. At the same time, affected communities do share characteristics across the globe, but AI has global, differentiated impacts. Organisations must therefore interact at a global scale to aggregate revendications and influence decision-making. This is all the more critical that the systems used in countries that are most represented in AI governance initiatives, are mostly produced in those which are largely underrepresented.

Figure 4 - Proportion of civil society organisations working on "safe", "responsible", "trustworthy" or "ethical" AI, by region

Geographic Distribution of Civil Society Organizations on AI
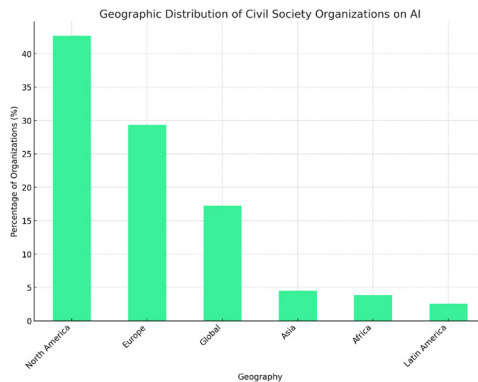
Source : AI Civil Society Database (N=130), Stanford Civil Society Lab

8.   The database is built through desk research on organisational websites, funders websites, and from news articles. It captures organisations that claim to be developing or researching tools to make AI "safe", "responsible", "trustworthy" or "ethical". Most of the research was completed between July and November, 2023 (e.g. before the CEO firing/rehiring at OpenAI). The database was downloaded on November 5, 2024.

The representation of the "public interest"
and the threat of longtermism

In addition, there are disagreements as to which "public interest" civil society organisations represent. The debate between long term and short term risks illustrates the risk of misrepresentation of interests by civil society organisations.

In the US, a significant part of tech entrepreneurs have been increasingly engaging in the effective altruism movement, which seeks to apply impartial and rational calculations to prioritise actions for the greater good. In 2019, leading figure of the effective altruism movement William MacAskill started advocating for "longtermism", a perspective that prioritises the improvement of society in the long run, with little consideration for issues in the short term.

A number of organisations financed by Silicon Valley billionaires have engaged in lobbying campaigns in the US and across the world to push the agenda of effective altruism and longtermism. In total, 21 such organisations are identified in the Stanford Civil Society Lab AI civil Society Database, 17 of which have offices in the US and the UK.

The emphasis on long term risks raises questions as it allows organisations to focus attention to exploratory, prospective risks and lessen responsibility for issues for which there is actual evidence, such as discrimination, monopolistic behaviors and information integrity. Incidentally, it serves the interests of those who are not affected by AI's harms in the present.

Access to non-financial resources

Access to non-financial resources for civil society organisations is limited. The first type of non-financial resource is expertise. Civil society organisations engage in a wide range of activities: they organise events, conduct advocacy initiatives, engage with the media, collect evidence, and participate in open consultations. As a result, they must master a variety of skills. Some organisations have strong technical skills but a limited understanding of legal jargon. Others possess strong legal expertise but lack comprehension of the technical aspects of AI. Still, others may excel in both technical and legal aspects but struggle to communicate effectively through the media. If they want to be efficient on all of those levels, CSOs must hire a variety of profiles.

The second type of scarce resource for CSOs is time. Figure 5 hereafter shows the significant increase in the number of AI standards over recent years. This report has documented the various initiatives related to the governance of AI. Answering many calls for input and participating in various expert groups is virtually impossible for many organisations. Engaging in these efforts presents a significant challenge for civil society organisations.

Participation in standardisation efforts is particularly problematic. Participants in the *AI Dialogues* noted that the opacity and complexity of the process to integrate standardisation efforts, the lack of awareness of these efforts, as well as the domination of industry, make it difficult for civil society to join standardisations bodies, observations shared by the Ada Lovelace Institute. Those that do take part in these efforts must be identified by the community and build their reputation over time.

Figure 5 - Number of AI-related standards (2018-2024)
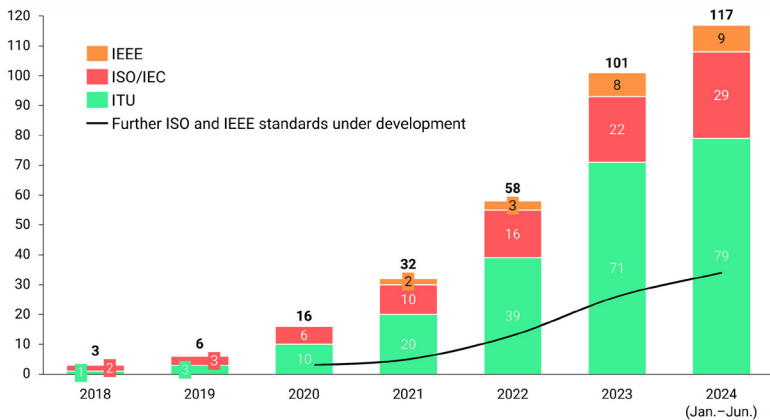
Source: United Nations (2024), Governing AI for Humanity: Final Report, p.13

↘ Funding and independence

One of the main challenges civil society faces is access to funding. Funding is necessary to run a variety of operations, including research, advocacy, outreach and capacity building. Still, it is rarely taken into account in existing legislation. As Kaminski *et al.* (2024: 49) note, existing laws on digital issues "rarely address [capacity building], and none, to our knowledge, fund [it] explicitly for impacted stakeholders."

There are significant disparities worldwide in the amounts of money available for philanthropic activities. In countries like the US, private philanthropic funds are orders of magnitude higher than in the EU (see Table 2 hereafter). In Europe, public funding constitutes a larger proportion of available resources compared to the United States. Despite the role of public authorities in financing public interest projects, the difference in funding may partly explain the higher number of civil society organisations working on AI in the United States, compared to other parts of the world.

Table 2 - Total amount of giving to fund and Public benefit organisations (PBOs) per country

Country	Total amount of giving to funds and PBOs	USD million
Argentina	ARS 5 019 million (2018)	72.0
Austria	EUR 630 million (2017)	704.0
Belgium	EUR 263.2 million (PIT donations) (2017)	294.0
Canada	CAD 9.6 billion (individuals) (2017)	7 100.0
	CAD 3.8 billion approx. (corporations) (2017)	2 790.0
Chile	CLP 276 479 million donations (2018)	358.1
	CLP 10 052 million inheritances (2018)	13.0
Czech Republic	CZK 5.9 billion (2017)	249.0
Estonia	EUR 9.4 million (2018).	10.5
France	EUR 2 545 million (PIT donations) (2018)	2 968.9
	EUR 112 million in donations reported by the real estate and wealth tax (2018)	130.6
	Between EUR 2.3 billion and EUR 2.5 billion in corporate donations (2015)	2 683.0 – 2 916.1
Germany	EUR 5.3 billion (2018)	5 920.0
Ireland	EUR 83.7 million 2018	93.5
Italy	EUR 705.5 million (2017)	788.4
Latvia	EUR 28 million (2017)	32.1
Lithuania	EUR 12.2 million (individuals) (2018)	13.6
	EUR 68 million (companies) (2018)	76.0
Mexico	MXN 47 659 million (2018)	2 477.0
Netherlands	EUR 845 million (including EUR 20 million from businesses) (yearly average from 2008-2014)	944.5
New Zealand	NZD 900 million approx. (2018)	577.0
Portugal	EUR 372 million, including EUR 59 million in goods in kind	415.0
Romania	RON 115.5 million in 2014-2017	26.0
Singapore	SGD 1 billion (2018)	715.0
Slovak Republic	EUR 14 million (2018)	15.6
Slovenia	EUR 29.6 million (2018)	33.0
United States	USD 180.5 billion in cash donations, USD 88.1 billion in non-cash donations, and USD 35.4 billion carried over from prior periods (individuals) (2017) C corporations USD 18.6 billion (2017), charitable bequests of USD 22.8 billion (2018)	345 400.0

Source: OECD (2020) Taxation and Philanthropy, p. 16

The bar chart hereafter shows the 20 most common funders of the 130 organisations working on "safe," "responsible," "trustworthy," or "ethical" AI listed in the AI Civil Society Database[9]. Private companies such as Google, Microsoft, and IBM are key players in the field, alongside large philanthropic foundations.

---

9.   There are 158 organisations in the database, amongst which 28 commercial entities.

Figure 6 - Twenty most common funders of organisations working on "safe", "responsible", "trustworthy" or "ethical" AI
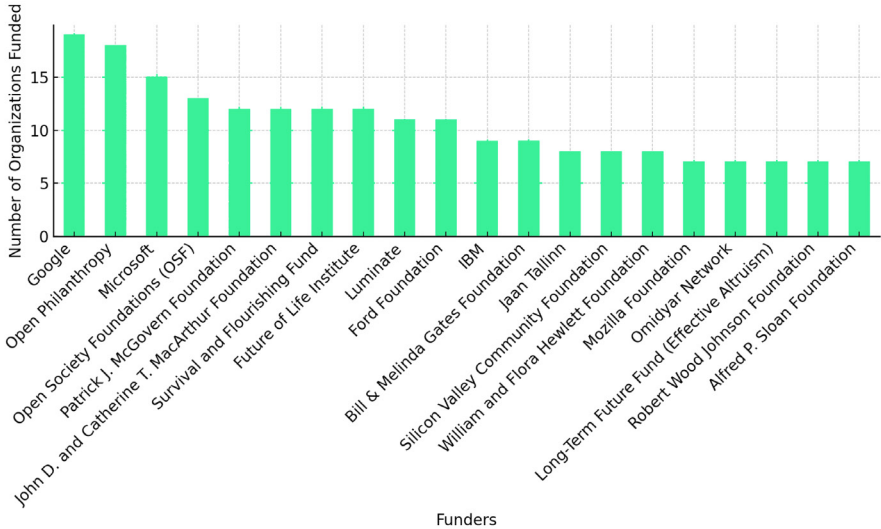
Source: AI Civil Society Database, Stanford Civil Society Lab

In the area of content regulation, the DSA sets strict rules for the designation of trusted flaggers. Very large online platforms (VLOPs) must prioritise notifications from trusted flaggers regarding illegal content. To prevent conflicts of interest, Article 22 of the DSA stipulates that applicants for this status must demonstrate they are "independent from any provider of online platforms". For organisations reliant on financing from these platforms, this may necessitate seeking alternative sources of revenue.

Public funding comes with drawbacks too. In some countries, political leaders may seek to intervene in the daily activities of civil society organisations and limit their ability to run their operations independently. During Renaissance Numérique's third *AI Dialogue*, participants noted that, as a result, trust in civil society can differ greatly in a country like Bulgaria, for instance, where it was proposed to ban NGOs that receive funds from abroad, and the United Kingdom, where CSOs are perceived in a relatively positive

manner. *"In the UK, there is much more trust in NGOs and they have much more legitimacy. Civil society is definitely legitimate, but it is distrusted in countries that have a far right government that is against civil society involvement"*, observed a participant. In addition, even when states do not seek to control civil society organisations, access to public funding may come with important transparency requirements. The European Center for Not-for-Profit Law notes that *"according to many CSOs, private funding is the only option, as European Commission funds come with burdensome requirements and are insufficient."*

Another key issue, when it comes to funding, is the relative rarity of operational or "core" funding for CSOs, i.e. funds that foster the mere running of an organisation. Many funding opportunities tend to focus on specific project proposals and development.

↘ The governance of civil society participation

Coordinating actions between civil society organisations

Civil society organisations must continuously engage with one another and with policy makers at both national and international levels to voice their concerns. Whether to conduct strategic litigation work, to have an impact on policy making or norms setting, or to represent the interests of impacted communities at working groups, coordinating is essential. This is a prerequisite to accurately and effectively represent the interests of all stakeholders and meaningfully influence decision-making.

There are a variety of ways for civil society organisations to coordinate. The Data and AI Civil Society Network, for instance, holds weekly meetings to discuss data and AI policy. All Tech is Human also keeps a database of existing civil society organisations as well as collaboratives and networks on AI.

Organisations already push a common agenda. One example is the civil society statement "An EU Artificial Intelligence Act for Fundamental Rights" published in November 2021. This statement was signed by 123 civil society organisations. It called on the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, and all EU member state governments to ensure that the forthcoming Artificial Intelligence Act achieves 9 goals. Similarly, in December 2023, a group of 50 civil society and human rights organisations from over 30 countries published a Civil Society Manifesto for Ethical AI. The manifesto seeks to safeguard rights and change the approach and narratives around AI and machine learning. The Asilomar AI Principles, which are AI governance principles coordinated by the Future of Life Institute and developed at the Beneficial AI 2017 conference, are another example. In all three cases, agreeing on a set of priorities and objectives gives both visibility and legitimacy to the requests and puts pressure on institutions.

Organising the participation of civil society

In February 2024, more than 350 civil society organisations asked the UN for a stronger inclusion of civil society in discussions about the summit of the future, lamenting that "civil society's engagement is limited to virtual consultations and written inputs at relatively short notice." Following the adoption of the Global Digital Compact in September 2024, 26 CSOs raised similar concerns in a joint statement, noting "lack of robust civil society engagement in the Global Digital Compact process".

Consulting civil society legitimates decisions by giving a voice to the people, thus providing a varnish of democracy. As such, it can be a powerful communication tool for legislative assemblies, governments, corporations and international organisations to advance their agendas. However, several problems go in the way of a meaningful participation of civil society. In their March 2024 challenge

paper on citizen participation in global governance, a group of civil society organisations[10] funded by the UN lists seven "sins of citizen participation", which we put forward in the table below.

Table 3 - "The seven sins of citizen participation"

Tokenism	You need to be seen [consulting] but have no intention of changing anything as a result
Bad questions	You ask a question that is too broad and/or complex to yield an answer that will influence what you will do
Not representative	You ask lots of people to contribute but don't hear from those who face high barriers to participation
No deliberation	You want input on a complex topic but expect people to have answers off the top of their heads
Benign manipulation	Convinced of your good intentions, you guide the process towards a pre-ordained result
Inflated expectations	You expect citizens to solve a problem that has experts stumped and/or you're not honest with them about being one voice among many
No accountability	You don't have a clear route to impact – so you fail to report back on what you have done with citizen recommendations

Source: Folly *et al.* (2024), Strengthening Citizen Participation in Global Governance, p. 10

These criticisms can very well apply to the involvement of civil society organisations in global AI governance efforts. The information collected by open consultations and surveys can be irrelevant if bad questions are asked. The organisations participating are not always representative of the people most affected by AI. There is also an important risk of tokenisation or benign manipulation.

---

10.   ISWE, CIPO, Blue Smoke, Southern Voice.

While civil society organisations are often consulted and sometimes invited to participate in technical decision-making, there is no obligation to take their voice into account. As the authors of a report on stakeholder participation note, *"no laws, to our knowledge, require that either companies or agencies must adopt stakeholder recommendations; rather, they suggest that they consult with and consider them."*[11]

In addition, the processes by which civil society's inputs are considered are often not transparent, allowing for selective attention to certain input over others. One participant during Renaissance Numérique's third *AI Dialogue* noted how difficult it was for civil society organisations to participate in standardisation discussions, pointing to the lack of clarity in the selection processes and the need to be connected to people inside the standardisation organisation (e.g. the Chair of the relevant working group) to be invited.

The European Center for Not-for-Profit Law calls for clearer and more transparent rules, for example for the selection and participation of civil society organisations in working groups such as the Advisory Forum of the EU AI Act. The risks of tokenisation of civil society participation are high and need to be addressed by greater accountability from local, national, regional and international institutions. Similarly, a paper by Young *et al.* (2024) identifies several avenues of investment to improve the participation of civil society in AI, including defining *"formal means for communities to designate representatives – or for self-appointed representatives to become more publicly visible and accountable."*[12]

---

11.   Kaminski, M. E., & Malgieri, G. (2024). Impacted Stakeholder Participation in AI and Data Governance. Forthcoming in Yale Journal of Law and Technology (2024-25), p. 50. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4836460

12.   Young, M., Ehsan, U., Singh, R., Tafesse, E., Gilman, M., Harrington, C., & Metcalf, J. (2024). Participation versus scale: Tensions in the practical demands on participatory AI. First Monday. https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/13642

AI Gover|nance: Our call to action

03

As this report has shown, funding limitations, lack of expertise or time, coordination difficulties, and risks of tokenisation, limit civil society's ability to fully engage in global AI governance efforts. Addressing these barriers is necessary to ensure civil society can advocate effectively for a responsible AI ecosystem.

Looking forward, strengthening civil society's influence in AI governance will require sustained commitment from governments, international organisations, and civil society itself. In the run-up to the Paris AI Action Summit, we request organisers to urgently implement three concrete measures to strengthen and facilitate the involvement of civil society in global AI governance, during and especially after the summit:

1 Support more open and transparent selection processes

Clarifying and opening the selection processes for civil society's participation in expert groups (in standardisation processes, within the European commission, etc.) and making them public, is essential to ensure fair representation and restore trust. Opportunities for civil society participation should also be widened: we recommend opening up the participation spaces organised by public authorities or private players to a wider spectrum of organisations, beyond the most established ones.

2 Impose a duty to respond to contributions

There are often no mechanisms in place to ensure that civil society contributions are actually taken into account.

We call on the summit participants to encourage the establishment of clear mechanisms for feedback and reporting on the integration of civil society inputs into AI-related policies and practices. These could be inspired by the OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes, which provide useful recommendations and concrete examples on how to "close the feedback loop".

3   Facilitate funding

Many civil society organisations have extremely limited resources. Setting up dedicated funds or processes to encourage their funding, would enable them to contribute effectively and sustainably to AI governance efforts. In connection with recommendation 1, it would also be useful to restructure the funding models of working groups, committees, technical groups, etc. to make sure funding is allocated to support the inclusion of civil society in these fora, in a transparent and independent manner.

By creating these conditions, civil society can contribute more meaningfully to shaping AI policies that protect public interests and address both immediate and long term risks associated with AI technologies. Ultimately, a robust and representative civil society presence in AI governance will be instrumental in developing AI systems that reflect collective values and serve the public good.

Simply consulting civil society in a superficial manner or highlighting its presence through media operations is no longer enough. It is now time to give civil society representatives a full and permanent seat at the table, so that they can become leading partners in the development of policies and guidelines, and in adjusting AI tools. The Paris AI Action Summit provides an opportunity to rebalance the powers between all the players who should have a say in the global governance of AI. Let's hope it won't be a missed opportunity.

Acknowledgments

↘

Elvire FRANÇOIS, Government Affairs Manager, Microsoft France

Carl GAHNBERG, Director of Policy Development & Research, Internet Society (ISOC)

Samira GAZZANE, Policy Lead, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, World Economic Forum (WEF)

Margot GODEFROI, Reporteur, *Conseil national du numérique* (French National Digital Council)

Amin HASBINI, Head of Global Research and Analysis Team (META), Kaspersky France and North, West & Central Africa

Theodoros KARATHANASIS, Research Fellow on Cybersecurity and AI Regulation, Grenoble Alpes University

Michael KENDE, Chair of The Board, Datasphere Initiative / Senior Advisor, Analysys Mason

Leda KUNEVA, Consultant, Clever Together

Alexandre LALLET, Director of Public Sector AI Offers, Docaposte

Pénélope LIOT, Digital Product Director in charge of the "Agora" app, French Interministerial Centre for Citizen Participation

Enguerrand MARIQUE, Visiting Professor (Tech Governance & Information Law), UCLouvain

Anthony MASURE, Dean of Research, HEAD – Genève

Yves MATHIEU, Founder and Co-director, Missions Publiques

Diana MOCANU, PhD student, UCLouvain

Sarah NICOLE, Policy & Research Senior Manager, Project Liberty Institute

Pierre NORO, Advisor & Associate Expert, Tech and Global affairs Innovation Hub, Sciences Po

Jean-Marc RICKLI, Head of global and emerging risks, Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP)

Philippe RIXHON, Managing Director, Philippe Rixhon Associates Ltd

Laurent SCIBOZ, Head of applied research Institute, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO)

Rayna STAMBOLIYSKA, President, RS Strategy

Alain STROWEL, Professor (IP & Media Law), UCLouvain

Nicolas VANBREMEERSCH,
Former Chair, Renaissance Numérique

William VAN CAENEGEM,
Professor, Bond University

Gladys YIADOM, Public Affairs
Manager, Kaspersky France and
North, West & Central Africa

Rapporteurs

↘

Fanny FORTAS, Project Assistant,
Renaissance Numérique

Nour KHAYAT, Volunteer,
Renaissance Numérique

Julian MAREL, Project Assistant,
Renaissance Numérique

Léo REINBOLD, Project Assistant,
Renaissance Numérique

Authors

↘

Théophile LENOIR,
Head Reporteur of the *AI Dialogues*

Jessica GALISSAIRE,
Studies & Partnerships Manager,
Renaissance Numérique

Jean-François LUCAS,
General Manager,
Renaissance Numérique

Louise Robert,
Graphic design

Smashing Stocks,
Cover illustration

About the *AI Dialogues*

In early 2024, Renaissance Numérique launched a three-day cycle of high-level seminars focusing on the global governance of Artificial Intelligence: the *AI Dialogues*. Inspired by a previous successful series, the *Metaverse Dialogues*, this project aimed at bringing together European and international experts to discuss international, European, national and local governance issues related to artificial intelligence (AI).

The first *Dialogue*, titled "Is International AI Governance Achievable?", took place in Geneva on 26 April, 2024. The second one, "The Multiple Actors of International AI Governance", took place in Brussels on 27 June, 2024. The last one, "How to involve citizens & civil society in the global governance of AI?", which greatly inspired this report, took place in Paris on 10 October, 2024.

Two interim notes were produced after the two first *AI Dialogues*:
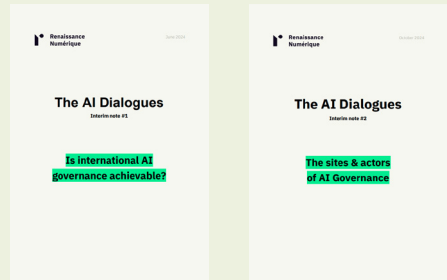
Visit the *AI Dialogue*'s website: www.ai-dialogues.org

This project was made possible thanks to Renaissance Numérique's Academic and Funding Partners. We warmly thank them for their support.

Academic Partners

Funding Partners

About Renaissance Numérique

↘

Founded in 2007, Renaissance Numérique is the leading independent French think tank dedicated to the digital transformation of society and its impacts on citizens. It works to shed light on the changes that this transformation is bringing about and to give everyone the keys to mastering it.

Renaissance Numérique is a forum for debate and positive confrontation of expertise and ideas. It brings together academics, public figures, non-governmental organisations and businesses. Its reflections, widely disseminated via contributions, publications and events, are brought to the attention of public and private players at French, European and international level.

Renaissance Numérique is a member of the Observatory on Online Hate run by the French Audiovisual and Digital Communication Regulatory Authority (Arcom) and of the organising committee of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) France.