



**4<sup>th</sup> ASEF Higher Education Innovation Laboratory (ASEFInnoLab4)  
on Universities Role in AI Innovation Ecosystems**

**JOINT STATEMENT  
AND THE LAUNCH OF THE ASIA AND EUROPE FOR AI (AE4AI) NETWORK**

The 4<sup>th</sup> ASEF Higher Education Innovation Laboratory (ASEFInnoLab4) was co-organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and Fudan University in Shanghai, China, on 23-28 October 2023. It brought together 20 academics and managers of higher education institutions to discuss how can higher education take action on enhancing universities' role in AI innovation ecosystems. Participants of ASEFInnoLab4 co-created this Joint Statement to highlight areas of importance and to launch the Asia-Europe for Artificial Intelligence (AE4AI) Network to address these areas through a peer-to-peer collaboration.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerges as a profoundly transformative technology, offering immense potential for higher education as well as sustainable economic, environmental, and human development. AI technology has recently reached an unprecedented level of capability, empowering large-scale implementation of AI and at the same time, it has permeated almost all aspects of human life. Alongside AI, benefits, risks, and challenges have manifested with the transition from Narrow Intelligence to Generative AI that require a comprehensive global approach covering state and non-state actors and public-private sectors to create an environment of trust and openness for the future of AI.

At present, prominent risks include the potential of AI to contribute to or bring about future undesirable critical scenarios, the loss of human agency that comes with an unlimited increasing reliance on algorithms, inequality in access to AI knowledge and capabilities, shortage of experts, rising risk of proliferation of lethal autonomous weapons, and AI-aided misinformation and disinformation that curtail our ability to experience reality and discern fact from fiction.

Being a global challenge, AI requires a global perspective. This underscores the critical need for robust collaboration among different stakeholders of higher education institutions in Asia and Europe. Collectively, they can become critical hubs of innovation and knowledge centres laying down guiding principles to inform policymakers and build an ecosystem for a future where AI is a force of good for government, businesses, and our societies.

**Thus, with this Joint Statement, we establish the Asia-Europe for Artificial Intelligence (AE4AI) Network and express our intent to pursue the following sets of guiding aspirations, principles, and actions on AI Governance, AI in Education, and AI for Sustainable Development:**

## AI GOVERNANCE

We recognise the difficulty of regulating AI due to its complex nature and rapid development which leads to having various fragmented efforts in place but with no coherent legislation to govern and guide them. The current absence of regulations has led national, regional, and global institutions to come up with diverse guidelines to encourage responsible design and deployment of AI. Legislative efforts generally aim at striking a balance between security and development but remain fragmented. Regulation may lead to short-term economic losses; but long-term benefits from AI that is trustworthy, ethical, secure, humane, and standardised are foreseen to outweigh these.

We call for the collective task of fostering a global initiative for knowledge exchange and building consensus on key AI concepts, priorities, security and standards as a first step towards meaningful governance of AI. Current guidelines stand as sources of key values that should be integrated in AI efforts moving forward, such as security, openness and transparency, ethical deployment, the use of AI for sustainable development, instilling human-centred values into AI, and establishing co-accountability and shared responsibility.

Thus AE4AI Network puts an emphasis on:

*On AI governance*, we encourage states to seek balance between data protection and data openness which is crucial for successful development of AI. Efforts to regulate AI must not only be for risk management, but also for sustainable development. Global standards must be developed for both data and algorithms to help more equitable distribution of data, tools, technologies, and benefits for all societies.

*On building an AI ecosystem*, there is a need to define and shape societies' understanding of equitable AI implementation for individuals and organisations in recognition of the importance of knowledge- and awareness-building in empowering collective action for AI.

*On approaching AI regulations*, we encourage the use of scenario-thinking and foresight-informed methods that could help identifying the key drivers for short-term and long-term developments. By analysing these scenarios, we aim to establish frameworks, build partnerships, create common regulations, and cultivate common values.

Action Lines:

- Set up the Asia-Europe Policy Centre for AI Governance to:
  - Organise a periodic exchange and report of state-of-the-art AI safety techniques;
  - Perform analyses on the job tasks in which AI is likely to replace humans;
  - Publish policy briefs on insights and recommendations directed to regulators, focused on key insights: in AI safety, to determine the needs for our workforce capability development, curricula adaptation and higher education reinvention, as well as the specific needs for AI regulation, that our new reality will bring;
  - Organise awareness-building events that disseminate the policy briefs and facilitate the necessary multi-stakeholder discourse.

## AI IN EDUCATION

With the emergence of AI and its prolific use in education and research, universities are urged to cultivate an environment conducive to the nurturing of a high-demand skill set among learners effectively addressing the changing demands of the job market. Institutions of higher education play a pivotal role in realising the transformative potential of AI in education.

We aspire to equip the forthcoming generation with the competencies and outlook needed for propelling technological innovation, nurturing economic growth, and equitable societal development through the exploration of pioneering pedagogical methodologies, robust industry alliances, and the facilitation of entrepreneurship. Building and sustaining intellectual curiosity, encouraging the use of AI to adapt to the future, developing an AI literacy framework, and investing in innovative AI curriculum are some priorities we must bear in mind as educators.

Thus AE4AI Network puts an emphasis:

*On developing AI skills and content*, AI in education should promote an equitable access to AI learning and skills development and relevant competencies that would benefit learners across different disciplines. AI-embedded learning should provide opportunities to include low-level coding or no-code programming at all levels of education in Asia and Europe. In the pursuit of talent development in AI, higher education institutions have both the responsibility and capability to ensure that AI education is inclusive, ethical, and transformative.

*On increasing social awareness on AI*, we believe universities should take an active role in the open and accessible reskilling and upskilling of the public on the basics of AI, emphasising its risks, opportunities, as well as responsible, and ethical use.

*On formulating learning and teaching methodologies*, creation of self-paced learning opportunities, partnerships for shared accountability for learning processes, and provision of opportunities for meaningful interactions should be priorities. Concepts such as enabling spaces, outcomes-based education (OBE), nonviolent communication (NVC), reverse mentoring, the corporate perspective, and affirmative inquiry should inform methodologies to teaching and learning.

*On building institutional capacity to conduct policy dialogue and strengthen educational capabilities, resilience, and develop reliability*, there is a need to first address the lack of full engagement from stakeholders (policymakers, universities, etc.). Furthermore, international collaboration in addressing the challenges of adapting AI is key. It is also important to pinpoint where to catalyse change in universities and promote AI-friendly culture in higher education and provide incentives, especially in developing countries.

Action Lines:

- Create a self-paced course covering AI literacy empowered by Generative AI technologies. Consider the train-the-trainer approach targeting academics and local community members, in their local language. Consider segmenting the content along “learning about AI” and “learning with AI” categories, customized to the target group, and providing certification (e.g. micro credentials).
- Build a platform to incentivize open collaboration, by featuring information and partnership opportunities from various sources (e.g. EU funded projects, Leadership in Innovation

Fellowship, etc.). The key goal of the platform is to incentivize forming consortiums to work on AI in Education initiatives.

## AI FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Due to the cross-cutting, encompassing nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the role of AI in their achievement has become an important topic of discussion as the world races to meet global sustainability targets. We recognise the enormous potential of AI to accelerate efforts to achieve the SDGs, specifically in the promotion of economic growth, environmental conservation, and improving the quality of life of our peoples. Thus, AI development should be guided by the objectives of addressing pressing global problems of poverty, inequality in access, climate change, environmental degradation, food security, economic productivity, quality education, access to healthcare, energy security, gender and racial discrimination, and sustainable cities and communities.

Universities have a unique position to become leaders in AI for sustainable development. It is paramount that they foster multi-lateral collaboration and partnerships between different stakeholders (including public, private, and non-governmental) to conduct multi-disciplinary research which includes STEM and social sciences and address real-world multi-faceted issues.

Thus AE4AI Network puts an emphasis:

*On raising awareness on AI potential*, there is a need to increase knowledge on the full potential of ethical AI adoption for sustainable development to ensure intergenerational justice that promotes diversity and inclusivity, protects human rights, and enrich human agency through its capability to inform, guide, and direct.

*On promoting environmentally responsible AI*, sustainable AI designs and best practices for the development of AI should be used to balance carbon emissions generated in deployment. To make its responsibility tangible, AI should carry the bill for its carbon footprint.

*On contributing to socio-cultural dynamics of sustainable development*, focus should be given on addressing real and specific societal issues in increasing social capabilities and cultivating social cohesion through AI deployment and development. AI for sustainable development should generate feasible, trustworthy solutions that make humans more aware of interdependencies in their reality.

Action Lines:

- Create a virtual AI4SDG Asia-Europe open platform to facilitate awareness, showcase activities, highlight projects, and research that aligns with the 17 SDGs through:
  - Creating exposure and mobilising private-public partnership and funding;
  - Showcasing courses and train-the-trainer programmes across Asia and Europe focusing on the implementation of AI to achieve the SDGs;
  - Promoting and encouraging data-sharing and data sets used in the activities on the open platform;
  - Organising periodic forums to compare and exchange best practices with a view to foster open collaboration.

## CONCLUSIVE WORDS

Moving forward, the AE4AI Network will pursue the establishment of an online cooperation environment and continue to build academic and professional relationships as we embark on growing the network. As we begin our journey towards achieving the action lines in this Joint Statement, we will also be tapping diverse expertise and perspectives and facilitating knowledge exchange and tech transfer.

The Network will designate two contact persons —one for Asia and one for Europe— for each of the three (3) working groups focused on AI Governance, AI in Education, and AI for Sustainable Development. For our internal communications, the Network will utilize dedicated file-sharing systems, messaging apps, reliable video conferencing solutions and whenever possible, in-person gatherings. In terms of funding opportunities and sources, we will explore opportunities and tap existing resources at the regional and international levels.

We thank ASEF for facilitating the incubation of the Network and for their continued support in communications and the circulation of information, convening the members, inspiring action and promoting events.

26 October 2023, Shanghai, China

### Background:

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Co-organised by

