

Women in AI Daring Circle – FAQs

Background

The future of artificial intelligence promises to provide unprecedented opportunities to solve some of the world's most pressing societal issues, from improving the way we detect and treat diseases such as cancer to upskilling employees in the digital economy. At the same time, it carries risks if not developed and deployed responsibly. As AI is based on existing data, its deep learning algorithms already exhibit gender and racial biases which could consequently amplify discrimination.

With new breakthroughs, increased data availability and improved computational powers, the potential of AI systems continues to grow exponentially. If (gender) inclusion is not considered now, it will be difficult to go backwards. It is also a crucial moment from a policy point of view. Regulation around AI is moving fast, with policymakers across the globe racing to ensure the uptake of AI across the economy, while debating the legal and ethical frameworks that should govern it.

The Women & AI Daring Circle

[The Women & AI Daring Circle](#) is committed to increasing the participation and visibility of women influencing the development of AI systems, as well as to capitalise on AI's potential to benefit women and all of humanity. The objective of the Daring Circle is to determine how women can empower AI and AI can empower women and society.

The Daring Circle recognises the importance of shifting global narratives for achieving this - a balanced approach to AI technologies is necessary to ensure that companies and governments act and guarantee that women (and all other members of society) are involved in the process of shaping AI and can share in the prosperity brought about by its advances.

The Circle is led by Microsoft with partners AXA, BNP Paribas, Google, L'Oréal, and Publicis Groupe, in collaboration with knowledge partner FTI Consulting and institutional partner UNESCO. Through a programme of research and consultation, the Daring Circle is committed to outline concrete steps to drive greater inclusion and empowerment of women through AI and to create targets and initiatives that organisations can work towards. In parallel, the Circle will harness the power of the Women's Forum to gather and showcase compelling examples of AI empowering women and women shaping and driving forward AI.

The objectives of the Daring Circle are as follows:

- Encourage companies to take action and commit to women's inclusion in the AI ecosystem
- Showcase the value of women in the AI ecosystem and the value of AI for the advancement of women
- Amplify the results of the Daring Circle's work to the wider Women's Forum community as well as at its key regional and global events
- To establish a list of 'best practices' through the actions of companies in the Circle for others to implement positive changes in their organisations

- To tap into the expertise of the Daring Circle's members and subject matter experts to advance the conversation around AI and highlight its potential to address specific challenges women face in society

The Daring Circle recently launched a **Call to Action**, which can be viewed [here](#), for public authorities and corporates to commit to applying a gender-lens to their AI development and implementation, supporting the involvement of more women in the deployment of AI initiatives and technologies.

It calls on governments and businesses to work together to promote the inclusion of more women in the development and deployment of AI technologies and initiatives. The Call to Action will be launched in two phases:

- Phase 1 - in signing a Call to Action, the partners of the Daring Circle commit to building a gender-inclusive AI ecosystem in their organisation, and to share back to the Women's Forum the nature of, and learnings from, the actions they have taken. A summary of these actions will be shared by the Daring Circle on a quarterly basis with the aim of catalysing widespread action in the AI ecosystem
- Phase 2 – will be launched in the first quarter of 2020 and will call on all key stakeholders to commit to working with each other on specific challenges that women face which can be addressed by AI. The aim is to shift the debate to the transformational potential this technology has to address gender and other inequalities.

Frequently Asked Questions

About AI

What exactly is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

Many different definitions of AI exist. The Oxford Dictionary defines AI as “The theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.”

The basic principle of AI is that it allows computer programs to learn, rather than needing to be programmed to perform specific tasks.

Why is AI important now?

AI has the potential to tackle pressing global challenges such as climate change or key healthcare concerns, but it could also exacerbate certain social challenges. AI is already a reality, but with new breakthroughs, increased data availability and improved computational powers, the potential of AI systems are growing exponentially.

What are some examples of AI in practice today?

AI is already part of our everyday life and is becoming ever more present throughout existing and new industries. Examples include:

- Devices and apps: smartphones/homes/cars, voice assistants, camera modes and navigating apps are all examples of AI-powered technology
- Healthcare: predictive diagnosis, personalised treatment and virtual services to empower patients
- Agriculture: precision agriculture that helps protect natural resources
- Business processes: AI has the ability to make transactions and products better, faster and cheaper
- Education: Individualised teaching and learning support including for students with learning difficulties; virtual learning
- Other examples include: natural language generation, speech recognition, machine learning platforms, AI optimised hardware, deep learning platforms, biometrics, robotic automation, cyber defence, compliance, content creation, emotion recognition, image recognition and marketing automation

About women and AI

Why is gender inclusiveness in AI a crucial consideration?

Women tend to be more vulnerable to the negative impact AI may cause and less implicated in the designing and deployment of the technology.

Studies on AI and inequality have highlighted the reality of this issue.

- [Researchers at Princeton](#) detected ways in which computers interpreting human language learn from human biases.
- [MIT and Microsoft](#) have highlighted how poorly facial recognition software identifies darker faces, especially when those faces belong to women.
- A study by [UNESCO](#) argues that voice assistants are often women by default which preconditions users to fall back upon antiquated and harmful perceptions of women as unquestioning helpers. Additionally, the study found that voice assistants respond with flirty attitudes to verbal sexual harassment.
- Women are not only underrepresented in data utilised for machine learning, they also make up a mere 22% of AI professionals worldwide, according to one recent [survey by LinkedIn and the World Economic Forum](#).
- [The International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) projects that 11% of jobs currently held by women are at risk of elimination as a result of AI and other digital technologies.

Yet the potential of AI remains vast, and Mitali Banerjee, an assistant professor at Hautes études commerciales de Paris (HEC), argues that if built correctly, machines can carry out unbiased evaluation of merit in a way that humans cannot.

Businesses and organisations can mitigate bias in machine learning systems by having more diverse AI project teams. Research by academics at [Carnegie Mellon University, Union College and MIT](#) suggest that teams with more women are better at collaborating, while a [McKinsey study](#) in 2017 found that ethnically and gender diverse workforces perform better financially. Businesses should increase the number of people from under-represented groups at senior levels who lead AI systems development and deployment at companies across all departments, and academic workplaces should ensure greater diversity in all spaces where AI research is conducted, included AI-related departments and conference committees.

Businesses can also support gender neutrality and equality in machine learning systems by, for example, instituting a formal review structure to assess new projects, products and deals, as it is the case at Microsoft and Google. Another option is to have talks and training events for employees, such as the ones based on the [“Ethics in Technology Practice” project](#), which was developed at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University and which was delivered to 100 employees.

What is the opportunity of AI to empower women?

AI has the potential to empower women and other minority groups in many (often yet to be explored) ways:

- Education: AI has the potential to give individuals access to education that they may not otherwise have (e.g. in areas that are remote or where women cannot leave their homes)
- Recruitment and hiring: Companies can use AI powered recruitment software to identify candidates with the right skills for certain positions: automating parts of the process to allow for a greater pool of candidates to be considered, as well as addressing aspects of unconscious bias. [Unilever](#) has reported a 16% increase in the diversity of its hires after adopting similar AI-based digital hiring
- Career progression: Beyond hiring, AI could offer solutions to improve the retention and advancement of women employees by analysing internal workforce data to make recommendations that would help narrow the gender gap e.g. when it comes to performance reviews and salary promotions
- Change in ways of working: Family and home care responsibilities traditionally fall disproportionately on women. AI could help by automating some of these tasks, freeing up time for women to learn core skills and enter the workforce and for both men and women to work more flexibly
- Safety and security: According to [UN Women](#), it is estimated that 35% of women around the world has experienced either physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Devices powered by AI can help prevent domestic abuse and violence e.g. through alerts, as well as support surveillance in cities
- Health and wellbeing: AI tools can be developed to help diagnose health conditions which women primarily suffer from e.g. Google have been working on a tool to detect breast cancer
- Detect bias: ironically, AI can also be utilised to identify and correct societal bias. For instance, [Disney](#) recently started using an algorithmic tool to analyse scripts and track unconscious bias

What barriers need to be addressed for women to drive AI action?

It is crucial to diversify the pipeline from the beginning if AI diversity is to be addressed - that means getting more women to develop and design AI tools. But this is not enough.

- The skills and expertise necessary to integrate AI into the workplace need to be addressed. [An article](#) by the World Economic Forum argues that although good work is being done in order to have more women in STEM fields, industry-wide agreements are required in terms of policies and incentives to get women onboard in tech companies
- It is also essential to include women in the processes and clearly define what role women will play in ensuring technologies are safe, fair and effective in practice
- Training data for large scale models need to capture the richness of our societies in order to avoid creating new-fangled systems of discrimination
- Our systems need to be monitored and audited in order to make sure they are not reproducing bias and/or having unintended consequences

About the Call to Action

What is the Call to Action about?

Research led by the Women & AI Daring Circle, of different organisations, including the Women's Forum ecosystem of partners, has identified a striking implementation gap in organisations between the perceived importance and presence of practices to ensure gender is considered in AI development and the existence of those initiatives.

In this context, the Daring Circle recently launched a Call to Action for public authorities and corporates to commit to applying a gender-lens to their AI development and implementation, supporting the involvement of more women in the deployment of AI initiatives and technologies.

The piece calls on governments and businesses to work together to promote the inclusion of more women in the development and deployment of AI technologies and initiatives. The Call to Action is launched in two phases:

- Phase 1 - in signing a Call to Action, the partners of the Daring Circle commit to building a gender-inclusive AI ecosystem in their organisation, and to share back to the Women's Forum the nature of, and learnings from, the actions they have taken. A summary of these actions will be shared by the Daring Circle on a quarterly basis with the aim of catalysing widespread action in the AI
- Phase 2 – will be launched in the first quarter of 2020 and will call on all key stakeholders to commit to working with each other on specific challenges that women face which can be addressed by AI. The aim is to shift the debate to the transformational potential this technology has in addressing gender inclusion and other inequalities

It aims to spark a public conversation around the role of women in driving inclusive AI, and around opportunities to empower women and society overall through AI.

Why is the Call to Action important now?

Applications of AI are progressing fast so we need to address fundamental issues early on. If (gender) inclusion is not considered now, it will be difficult to go back. It is also a crucial moment from a policy point of view. Regulation around AI is moving quickly, with policymakers across the globe racing to ensure the uptake of AI across the economy, while debating the

legal and ethical frameworks that should govern it. This call builds on existing initiatives in this space, including the EU Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI and the OECD Principles on Artificial Intelligence, with a specific focus on women's empowerment. For the technology to be inclusive and to benefit all members of society, it is important to act now. This Call to Action, across its two-phased approach, looks to:

- Drive tangible action in organisations to bring a gender-lens to AI development and implementation. Potential solutions include:
 - o Responsible AI trainings for all functions
 - o Formal assessment of the impact of AI practices in relations to gender, including through analytics
 - o Procedure and governance of responsible AI within the organisation to encourage openness and transparency in AI development
- Spark a public conversation, which kicks off at the global Women's Forum event in Paris in November 2019 and which will be shared across both traditional and online media, around the role of women in driving inclusive AI and avoiding gender bias in the technology, opening up the opportunities for AI to be applied to address gender inequality in society

How was the Call to Action informed and created?

The Call to Action is one output of the last 18 months of work, informed by a programme of research.

This research combined an online survey and qualitative interviews of experts within the partner organisations and with academic experts. An invitation to the online survey was sent to employees from a diverse group of organisations, both partners of the Women's Forum, members of the EU AI Alliance, and other organisations and groups working with AI. Four types of roles within each organisation were targeted; Chief Technology Officer or equivalent roles, Chief Operating Officer or equivalent roles, Head of Diversity & Inclusion or equivalent roles, and developers. The survey has received 246 responses to date. The survey was launched on 8th July 2019 and is still in the field. Eleven qualitative interviews were carried out during this same period.

Who can sign the Call to Action?

We invite partners of the Women's Forum, as well as other institutions, other organisations, to join the Daring Circle and sign the Call to Action.

When is the Call to Action successful?

Success is to have the Daring Circle partners commit to a one-year goal, and take concrete action towards it in Phase 2 of the Call to Action. This includes developing solutions, sharing information and best-practices as well as working with women and communities to better understand their challenges when addressing AI. The Call to Action will be considered successful once partners and signatories have acted upon their commitments and shared the actions they have taken to leverage learning and encourage others to undertake similar action.

What are the organisations that sign the Call to Action expected to do?

Organisations that sign up to Phase 1 of the Call to Action are asked to commit to applying a gender-lens to their AI development and implementation and report back to the Daring Circle in 2020.

How can I get involved with the Women & AI Daring Circle?

If you would like to get involved with the Daring Circle, follow us on social media, share our work and make sure your company signs the Call to Action. For other enquiries please contact: Sophie.lambin@womens-forum.com

About the Women & AI Daring Circle

What is the Women's Forum and the Women & AI Daring Circle?

The Women's Forum for the Economy & Society convenes throughout the year to include women's leadership perspectives and apply them to the social, environmental and economic issues of our time. The Daring Circles - year-round working groups comprised of corporate, institutional and knowledge partners, as well as independent experts - are focused on issues where women are disproportionately affected and where their leadership is paramount.

The Circle is led by Microsoft with partners AXA, BNP Paribas, Google, L'Oréal, and Publicis Groupe, in collaboration with institutional partner UNESCO and knowledge partner FTI Consulting.

Through a programme of research and consultation the Women & AI Daring Circle is committed to outline concrete steps to drive for greater inclusion and empowerment of women through AI and to create targets and initiatives that organisations can work towards. In parallel, the Circle will harness the convening power of The Women's Forum to gather and showcase compelling examples of AI empowering women and women shaping and driving forward AI.

What makes the Daring Circle different?

The Women and AI Daring Circle stands alongside existing initiatives with a specific focus on exploring the AI ecosystem with a gender-lens, casting a light on women empowering AI, and AI empowering women. The Women's Forum, along with its partner companies, provides a great platform to advocate for inclusive AI. Its annual meetings, regional meetings and year-round engagements are an opportunity to explore and showcase inclusive practices and to demonstrate the value of women's perspectives towards empowering AI.

How does the Daring Circle enhance the number of women involved in AI and the benefits of AI for women?

The AI Daring Circle aims to become a leader in promoting inclusion of women in AI by:

- 1. Gathering empirical evidence:**
 - Finding compelling examples of AI empowering women and women shaping and driving forward AI
- 2. Defining what "good" looks like:**

- Identifying the practices that companies are deploying to engage women in the design of AI systems
 - Capturing the impact of these, including metrics used, and drawing out the commonalities and attributes of good practice
 - Creating evidence-based **guidelines and recommendations for policymakers**, stakeholders and other interested parties in the AI ecosystem
- 3. Building awareness of the benefits of women's inclusion in AI:**
- Showcasing a living catalogue of examples of women empowering AI and AI applications that can empower women as well as all people within organisations and communities to promote positive narratives
 - Sharing the latest research and best practices being developed to address issues related to AI and women in the design, development and deployment of AI technologies, systems and services across diverse sectors e.g. technology, cosmetics, healthcare, finance and retail
- 4. Pledging to act:**
- Developing a Call to Action drafted by Daring Circle members – outlining concrete steps to drive for greater inclusion and empowerment of women through AI and creating targets and initiatives that organisations can work towards