Policy Analysis Paper 4: The Social Implications of the European Union Artificial Intelligence Act

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While the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AIA) was created before the launch and rapid expansion of generative AI, the Act sought to limit the possible negative social impact that AI may have across various industries. Much of the focus of the EU AIA is on the economic implications of integrating AI into the workforce; however, the Act also tackles the duality of possibilities of integrating AI into educational settings. The ethics of the EU AIA is based in the European Union Charter of Human Rights, yet the Act continues to be criticized by social groups for its ethical and societal issues. Although the EU AIA tries to cover various sectors in attempts to limit the negative social implications of AI, the impacts of technology tend to have unintended consequences that call into question the effectiveness of the risk-based approach the EU AIA depends on.

Article 4 of the EU AIA focuses directly on the implications of integrating AI into education and categorizes the education sector as a "high-risk domain" because of how impactful AI can be in education; the primary focus is to promote AI literacy among students and teachers while also "emphasizing the responsibility of educational providers to implement AI tools in a transparent and ethical manner" (Ivkovic et al., 2025, 551). The risk-based approach that the AIA focuses more on the "hard impacts of technology," or effects of technology that "are concrete and observable;" for example, physical changes or pollution as a result of technology (Marchiori et al., 2025, 30-31). However, using a social disruptiveness-based approach focuses on the "soft impacts of technology," or ways technology can impact mindsets, social norms, and collective values; the social disruptiveness approach would help to explain the implications of integrating AI into education (Marchiori et al., 2025, 30-31). When integrating AI into education, a range of factors have to be considered given that AI can be used as a productivity-boosting learning tool while also carrying the risk of diminishing foundational knowledge (Ivkovic et al., 2025, 552).

"AI literacy" is not defined simply as being able to use AI tools, but it also "encompasses an understanding of their functional capacities, technical limitations, potential risks, and broader implications for the educational process" (Ivkovic et al., 2025, 553). AI has the power to personalize learning, which allows for students to have a deeper understanding of the topics they are learning; however, AI can also be misused because of its problem solving capabilities, which begs the question: is AI being used as a learning tool, or as a substitute for critical thinking (Ivkovic et al., 2025, 556)? In areas such as Information Technology (IT), AI bears the risk of "over-automation and loss of fundamental knowledge" that can change the future of the profession entirely; this is an outcome that the US Department of Education cautions against in its statement warning that "AI must serve educational goals, not redefine them" (Ivkovic et al., 2025, 552). This is a reality that many professions that require degrees are facing, so educational institutions are held responsible by the EU AIA to find a way to integrate AI while also "preserving the integrity of the educational process" (Ivkovic et al., 2025, 552).

While the EU AIA is based in the ethical guidelines stated in the EU Charter, it can be argued that "AI systems may cause harms that are not specifically addressed by human and fundamental rights but are still ethically problematic;" this is a problem that spans both the education and career fields as AI continues to redefine society (Rudschines & Schneider, 2025, 56-57; Ivkovic et al., 2025, 552). By utilizing a social disruptiveness-based approach, the grey area created by the AIA may become more clear as highlighting soft impacts "not easily captured by legal regulation" (Marchiori et al., 2025, 32). While the current Act reflects the EU Charter, there are concerns that the application of the EU AIA are not strict enough due to the possibility of dual use, or AI systems being used appropriately at first then abused over time; this violates the ethical principle of *prima facie*, when ethical principles can be violated in justifiable cases

(Rudschines & Schneider, 2025, 57). As AI continues to grow and its integration expands further into society, regulation that reflects ethical principles and social norms will have to be prioritized to address the potential for societal and systemic risks: "...where there are insufficient justifications in place to violate ethical principles and hence social norms, AI systems are - from a societal perspective - undesirable and in certain cases even unacceptable" (Rudschines & Schneider, 2025, 57). While the social disruptiveness-based approach does have its drawbacks, when used in tandem with the risk-based approach of the AIA, it becomes more possible to address the hard and soft impacts of technology; the risk-based approach highlights the hard impacts of technology, while the social disruptiveness approach works to anticipates concerns and aid in governance for AI (Marchiori et al., 2025, 36).

References

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