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INSTITUT DE HAUTES  
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DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

# Multistakeholder Approaches to AI Governance in Geneva

APPLIED RESEARCH  
PROJECT

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## Executive Summary

This final report explores how International Geneva<sup>1</sup>, as an important seat of diplomacy and multilateralism, can strengthen its role in global AI governance through more inclusive, coordinated, and action-oriented multistakeholder approaches. Drawing on a literature review, interviews, and a focus group, this analysis reveals that while Geneva holds unique advantages, such as neutrality, multilateral presence, and technical expertise, AI governance remains fragmented and politicized, with significant gaps in coordination, accountability, and representation. Despite Geneva's potential, challenges in engaging the private sector and bringing together diverse actors limit access and inclusive dialogue. Nevertheless, this report identifies concrete opportunities for Geneva to serve as a trusted space for governance and standard setting, bridging technical and political spheres to complement rather than replicate global AI governance efforts. This report presents key findings from interviews conducted between March and April 2025 with selected AI specialists from academia, government, international organizations (IOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector.

### Key Recommendations

1. Use Technology to Improve Accessibility and Inclusion
2. Improve Multistakeholder Engagement and Governance
3. Enhance Geneva's AI Ecosystem
4. Coordinate Events for Representation
5. Build or Finalize Structures and Institutional Frameworks
6. Shift the Focus from Risk to Opportunity
7. Communication, Translation and Awareness
8. Data Sharing, Monitoring and Enforcement
9. Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing, especially in the Global South

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<sup>1</sup> The city of Geneva has a long tradition of hosting international organizations. The term International Geneva designates this particularity. The world recognizes it as much a center of expertise in matters of cooperation as a center of multilateral diplomacy. Organizations present in Geneva include, but are not limited to, UN agencies, permanent missions, embassies and consulates, international NGOs, and academic institutions, notably EFPL hosted at the Campus Biotech.  
"International Geneva," CAGI, accessed June 1, 2025, <https://www.cagi.ch/en/international-geneva/>.

## Table of Contents

<b>I</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>3</b>
I.1	LITERATURE REVIEW	3
I.2	INTERVIEWS	3
I.3	FOCUS GROUP	4
<b>II</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>5</b>
II.1	THE EVOLUTION OF GLOBAL DIGITAL GOVERNANCE – A TIMELINE	5
II.2	THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT AND "GOVERNING AI FOR HUMANITY"	5
II.3	THE GDS'S OBJECTIVE 5 AND HLAB-AI'S AI RECOMMENDATIONS	6
II.4	MULTILATERALISM AND MULTISTAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS	8
II.5	GENEVA'S ROLE IN GLOBAL AI GOVERNANCE	9
II.6	CASE STUDIES	10
II.7	KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE LITERATURE	12
<b>III</b>	<b>ANALYSIS</b>	<b>12</b>
III.1	WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS IN THE FIELD?	12
III.1.1	<i>What initiatives are most relevant in AI governance?</i>	12
III.1.2	<i>Where to draw inspiration from?</i>	13
III.2	WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES AROUND AI GOVERNANCE ACTIONS?	14
III.2.1	<i>Disconnect between Technology and Policy</i>	14
III.2.2	<i>Lack of clarity over priorities, initiatives, and basic concepts</i>	15
III.2.3	<i>Conversations are not representative and inclusive</i>	16
III.3	HOW CAN WE PAVE THE WAY FOR SMARTER AI GOVERNANCE?	17
III.3.1	<i>Who should take the lead in AI Governance?</i>	18
III.3.2	<i>How can we ensure accountability for stakeholders' actions?</i>	19
III.3.3	<i>How can we increase inclusion and diversity in AI Governance?</i>	20
III.3.4	<i>How to leverage M&amp;E mechanisms?</i>	22
III.4	WHAT MAKES GENEVA UNIQUE FOR AI GOVERNANCE?	22
<b>IV</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>26</b>
IV.1	USE TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION	26
IV.2	IMPROVE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE	26
IV.3	ENHANCE GENEVA'S AI ECOSYSTEM	26
IV.4	COORDINATE EVENTS FOR REPRESENTATION	26
IV.5	BUILD OR FINALIZE STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS	27
IV.6	SHIFT THE FOCUS FROM RISK TO OPPORTUNITY	27
IV.7	COMMUNICATION, TRANSLATION AND AWARENESS	27
IV.8	DATA SHARING, MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT	27
IV.9	CAPACITY BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING, ESPECIALLY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH	28
<b>V</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>28</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>29</b>

# **I Methodology**

The research methodology adopted a mixed-methods design incorporating three data collection techniques: a comprehensive literature review, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The data obtained through these complementary methodological approaches were predominantly qualitative in nature, enabling in-depth analysis of the research questions.

## **I.1 Literature review**

Academic literature on multi-stakeholder strategies and International Geneva's positioning within global governance frameworks was extensively reviewed to establish the foundation for subsequent phases of the research project. The literature review examined best practices in multi-stakeholder approaches, particularly through six detailed case studies, which informed additional data collection activities centered on AI governance and shaped the overall conceptual framework for this study's recommendations.

Based on key findings and prevailing scholarly perspectives on multi-stakeholder engagement best practices, four core pillars emerged from the literature review: Leadership, Accountability, Inclusion, and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E). Subsequently, interviews and focus group sessions were conducted to examine these four dimensions more comprehensively within the context of AI governance in International Geneva.

## **I.2 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights from a range of stakeholders on AI governance and its implications for multi-stakeholder engagement strategies. Participants were selected from diverse sectors, including academia, civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations (IOs), the private sector, and government, to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives. In total, 20 one-on-one interviews were carried out, each focusing on gathering primary data regarding the views, concerns, and expectations of interviewees on AI governance. Interviewees were selected in accordance with the research partners, based on their prominent roles in AI governance in Geneva.

These interviews provided essential insights into the opinions of stakeholders from various sectors regarding the immediate risks and challenges of AI. They also explored specific topics around multi-stakeholder collaboration, notably on leadership,

accountability, inclusion, and monitoring & evaluation (M&E)., examining how these areas are currently being perceived and potentially addressed within the scope of AI governance. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible, detailed responses while ensuring that the overall direction of the conversation remained focused on the research objectives.

All participants were informed of the confidentiality regulations governing the interviews. Individual responses remained anonymous to ensure maximum transparency and openness from the participants, with only their stakeholder groups being disclosed.

Stakeholder Group	Number of Interviewees
Academica	3
Civil Society Organizations	5
International Organization	4
Private Sector	1*
Government	7

*\* Despite efforts to include a larger number, only one actor from the private sector was available to be interviewed.*

### I.3 Focus Group

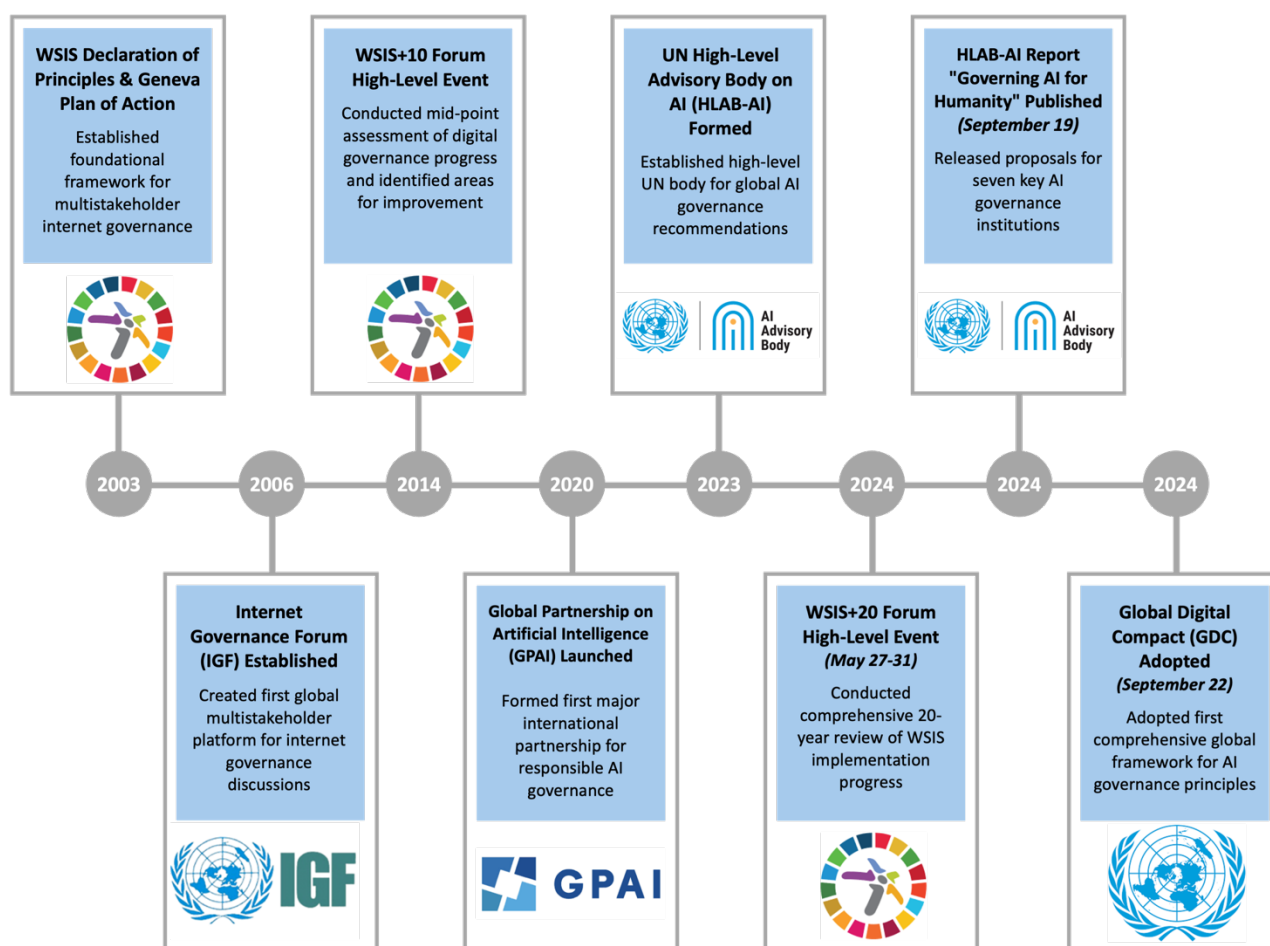
A focus group was convened to further explore ideas for multi-stakeholder engagement strategies for AI governance in Geneva. The focus group comprised of five participants from distinct stakeholder groups, who were selected in collaboration with the research partner based on their prominent roles in AI governance in Geneva. This method specifically examined participants' views on the four key pillars identified through the literature review: Leadership, Accountability, Inclusion, and M&E.. This approach provided a comprehensive view of stakeholder perspectives and highlighted current issues and actionable strategies for promoting effective multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Stakeholder Group	Number of Interviewees
Civil Society Organizations	2
International Organization	1
Government	2

## II Literature Review

### II.1 The Evolution of Global Digital Governance – A Timeline

This timeline charts the evolution of global digital and AI governance, from its inception to the present day. Beginning with the foundational WSIS Declaration of Principles & Geneva Plan of Action, it illustrates how digital governance frameworks developed through key milestones. Recent developments demonstrate accelerated focus on AI governance, from the establishment of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) in 2020, to the formation of the UN High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence (HLAB-AI) in 2023, culminating in the adoption of the Global Digital Compact in September 2024. This progression reflects growing international recognition of the critical importance of digital and AI governance.



### II.2 The Global Digital Compact and "Governing AI for Humanity"

The Global Digital Compact (GDC) is a comprehensive global framework for digital cooperation and governance of artificial intelligence adopted by UN member states on September 22, 2024, at the UN Summit of the Future (United Nations 2024). A few days prior, on September 19, 2024, the UN Secretary-General's High-level Advisory Body on



Artificial Intelligence (HLAB-AI) published their final report "Governing AI for Humanity," which details global governance mechanisms for Artificial Intelligence. The GDC provides directives for implementing several of the entities proposed by HLAB-AI and incorporates many of their recommendations (Global Partners Digital 2024a).

Civil society actors have praised the GDC for its human rights foundation and goals to bridge digital divides (Wainaina and Marani 2024; European Commission 2024). Similarly, academics highlight the GDC's potential as an important framework to strengthen national and international software-based systems, increase accountability, and address fragmentation in digital transformation processes (Cerf 2024; Correa et al. 2023). Concerns have been raised, however, about the vague language used and the risk of failing to address structural inequalities (Reiland 2024; Finlay and Betancourt 2024; Hendrix 2024). Digital technology companies are urged to take on a leadership role within the private sector in addressing the global digital divide (Gwyn 2024). However, some scholars express concern that the involvement of big technology corporations could create conflicts of interest and that the GDC may struggle to resist their significant agenda-setting power (Correa et al. 2023; Gurumurthy and Chami 2023). Furthermore, reservations have been expressed regarding the limited capabilities of Global South actors to fully engage in digital transformation, which may result in a failure to address the global digital divide (Gurumurthy and Chami 2023).

The accompanying HLAB-AI report also faces criticism for prioritizing international cooperation over normative coordination and potentially limiting multistakeholder engagement through centralization (Global Partners Digital 2024a). Despite these shortcomings, the GDC and HLAB-AI report represents a critical step toward addressing digital inequalities (Hendrix 2024; Gurumurthy and Chami 2023).

## II.3 The GDC's Objective 5 and HLAB-AI's AI Recommendations

**Objective 5** of the GDC specifically outlines the international governance of artificial intelligence, stating:

*We recognize the need for a balanced, inclusive and risk-based approach to the governance of artificial intelligence (AI), with the full and equal representation of all countries, especially developing countries, and the meaningful participation of all stakeholders.*

(United Nations 2024, para. 50)

The GDC further commits member states to advance AI governance through four key actions:

*We have a unique opportunity, through this Compact, to advance international governance of artificial intelligence in ways that complement international, regional, national and multi-stakeholder efforts. We will:*

*(a) Assess the future directions and implications of artificial intelligence systems and promote scientific understanding (all SDGs);*

*(b) Support interoperability and compatibility of artificial intelligence governance approaches through sharing best practices and promoting common understanding (all SDGs);*

*(c) Help to build capacities, especially in developing countries, to access, develop, use and govern artificial intelligence systems and direct them towards the pursuit of sustainable development (all SDGs);*

*(d) Promote transparency, accountability and robust human oversight of artificial intelligence systems in compliance with international law (all SDGs).*

(United Nations 2024, para. 55)

**The report "Governing AI for Humanity,"** published by HLAB-AI, outlines seven recommendations<sup>2</sup> to address gaps in the current AI governance landscape:

**1. An International Scientific Panel on AI:** Establishing an independent international scientific panel on AI with diverse multidisciplinary experts serving voluntarily

**2. Policy Dialogue on AI Governance:** Launching a twice-yearly intergovernmental and multistakeholder policy dialogue on AI governance at the UN

**3. AI Standards Exchange:** Creating an AI standards exchange bringing together representatives from standards organizations, technology companies, civil society, and the international scientific panel

**4. Capacity Development Network:** Creating an AI capacity development network linking UN-affiliated centers to provide expertise, compute resources, and AI training data to key actors

**5. Global Fund for AI:** Creating a global fund for AI with independent governance to receive public and private contributions and disburse them through the capacity development network to facilitate access to AI enablers for local SDG empowerment

**6. Global AI Data Framework:** Creating a global AI data framework developed through a process initiated by a relevant UN agency such as UNCITRAL and informed by other international organizations

**1. AI Office within the Secretariat:** Creating a light and agile AI office within the UN Secretariat, reporting to the Secretary-General, to serve as the coordinating hub that supports and catalyzes the report's proposals while partnering with other processes and institutions

<sup>2</sup> UN Secretary-General's High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence, *Governing AI for Humanity* (New York: United Nations, 2024), 10-20.



## II.4 Multilateralism and Multistakeholder Partnerships

Global challenges are becoming increasingly complex, limiting any individual state's ability to control the necessary resources and expertise (Abbott and Biersteker 2024). The effectiveness of multilateral systems, such as the United Nations (UN), is increasingly challenged by transnational issues that require collective action, while geopolitical competition hinders such cooperation (Haass 2010; Patrick 2023).

In response to these limitations, multistakeholder partnerships have emerged as an essential complement to traditional multilateralism. Unlike purely multilateral approaches, these partnerships incorporate non-state actors and offer greater flexibility, regional expertise, and innovative policy solutions to address complex global challenges that exceed the capacity of individual states and multilateral agreements (Widerberg et al. 2023; Biersteker 2020; Cannon 2020).

Despite their potential, multistakeholder partnerships face significant structural challenges. Their voluntary nature contributes to commitment gaps, implementation difficulties, and accountability issues (Abbott and Biersteker 2024). Research demonstrates that partnerships work better with binding commitments and clearer oversight mechanisms, suggesting that pure voluntarism may undermine effectiveness (Beisheim and Simon 2018).

Furthermore, global multistakeholder partnerships have been criticized for lacking adequate representation from the Global South, private sector, and civil society. Critics view them as "simply another vehicle for [Global North] governments to pursue their interests outside the UN negotiations" (Widerberg et al., 2023, 167). Consequently, partnerships must prioritize the inclusion of Global South and marginalized actors to ensure both effectiveness and fairness.

To address these challenges, frameworks like Nonet et al.'s (2022) Ecosystem Management Approach<sup>3</sup> and Pattberg and Widerberg's (2014) Nine Building Blocks model<sup>4</sup> provide adaptable structures, though they emphasize tailoring each partnership to its specific functions rather than following a universal template.

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<sup>3</sup> Nonet et al.'s (2022) Ecosystem Management Approach is an interdisciplinary, participatory framework designed to help stakeholders understand their roles within multistakeholder ecosystems. The approach centers on 'cognitive roles' (sponsors, champions, influencers, and facilitators) that key actors embody to ensure clear communication and consistent messaging across all participants.

<sup>4</sup> Pattberg and Widerberg's (2014) Nine Building Blocks model provides a comprehensive framework for designing effective multistakeholder partnerships through nine essential elements including partner selection, institutional design, governance mechanisms, and performance monitoring. The model emphasizes that these building blocks must be configured and adapted based on each partnership's unique context, objectives, and operational requirements.

## II.5 Geneva's Role in Global AI Governance

Geneva's strategic position lies in its role as a global governance hub and geopolitically neutral ground. Through examining the existing literature, this report observes the need for streamlining and strengthening existing governance and multistakeholder frameworks, rather than adding to the already oversaturated landscape (Komaitis 2023) (Roberts et al. 2024) (NETmundial 2024). Equally important, "the borderless nature of AI demands an international approach, so no region or country is left out of the debate" ("AI for Good Impact Report" 2024). However, prominent AI governance discussions have largely been led by developed countries and large corporations, lacking inclusive representation of all relevant stakeholders (NETmundial 2024; "AI for Good Impact Report" 2024). Geneva possesses significant institutional advantages for effectively addressing the issues of fragmentation and exclusion in global AI governance, such as:

- **Unparalleled multilateral density:** 43 international organizations, 184 permanent missions, and 750 NGOs concentrated in one city (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA 2024; Genève internationale 2024)
- **Operational scale for global coordination:** 5,000 annual meetings with over 500,000 delegates from all continents, demonstrating proven capacity for large-scale multilateral and multistakeholder coordination (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA 2024)
- **Proven track record in digital multistakeholderism:** Birthplace of institutionalized multi-stakeholder internet governance through the 2003 Geneva Declaration of Principles and Geneva Plan of Action, establishing foundational frameworks for inclusive digital governance (Haggart, Tusikov, and Scholte 2021)
- **Cross-sectoral platform integration:** 16 specialized platforms<sup>5</sup> spanning human rights, digital cooperation, trade, health, and humanitarian issues, creating an interconnected governance ecosystem (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA 2024; Genève internationale 2024)
- **Comprehensive AI event ecosystem:** Regular high-level AI conferences in and around Geneva, including (Haggart, Tusikov, and Scholte 2021) (ITU with 40+ partner organizations), [Partner2Connect](#) (ITU), [AI Policy Summit](#) (RegHorizon/ETH), [Applied Machine Learning Days](#) (EPFL), [Geneva Cyber Week](#), [Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week](#), and [GIGA Connectivity Forum](#) (ITU/UNICEF)
- **Established governance infrastructure:** Home to key organizations including the [International Telecommunications Union \(ITU\)](#), and frameworks like [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\)](#), positioned to implement AI governance through established pathways (Kurbalija 2024)
- **Global humanitarian and rights nexus:** Recognized as "the world's humanitarian capital,"<sup>6</sup> serving as an international center for humanitarianism, human rights, refugee affairs, migration, and health governance, providing essential ethical frameworks for AI development

<sup>5</sup> Platforms," Genève internationale, accessed 26/05/25, .

<sup>6</sup> Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, "Why Geneva," December 18, 2023, <https://eiehub.org/about/why-geneva>.

## II.6 Case Studies

Through desktop research, this report examines prominent global governance platforms to identify best practices for effective multistakeholder cooperation. The selected case studies span diverse governance models: traditional multilateral approaches (UNFCCC - state-led), pure multistakeholder frameworks (IGF - all stakeholders as equals), and hybrid approaches (GCM, GPAI, WSIS, NETmundial) with varying degrees of state versus multistakeholder leadership. These cases enable examination of institutional evolution across three decades (1992-2024), allowing the report to distill successful approaches and identify practices to avoid for achieving efficient, inclusive global AI governance.

Case Study	Good Practice	Lesson Learned
<b>UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (1992)</b> International treaty established at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to address climate change. Operates through annual Conferences of the Parties (COP) with 198 parties. Secretariat based in Bonn, Germany. Includes all UN member states plus the EU, with decisions made by consensus among parties.	Creates high visibility "key moments" and events like COP that generate global attention and media coverage for pressing issues (Volcovici 2023; Death 2011)	Voluntary commitments without formal accountability mechanisms lead to slow progress and enable states to avoid penalties for unachieved pledges (Mantlana and Jegede 2022; Tso and Mehling 2021; Krasno 2023)
<b>Internet Governance Forum (IGF) (2006)</b> Multistakeholder platform established by UN General Assembly following the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Convened annually by the UN Secretary-General with rotating host countries. Includes governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, and academia. No decision-making mandate - serves as discussion forum.	Adapts dynamically to technology's rapid evolution by continuously adding emerging issues like AI, fake news, and IoT to its agenda (Meireles 2024; Rewerski 2023)	Lack of decision-making powers and limited tangible outcomes, making it primarily a discussion forum rather than an action-oriented body (DeNardis and Raymond 2013)
<b>Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (2018)</b> Non-binding intergovernmental agreement adopted by 152 UN	Establishes comprehensive reporting and monitoring mechanisms through International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) with	Non-binding agreements heavily depend on political will of Member States, potentially making them ineffective instruments with limited

member states in Marrakech, Morocco. Developed through extensive consultations coordinated by the UN. Operates through the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) every four years, with implementation supported by the UN Network on Migration.

### **Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) (2020)**

Multistakeholder initiative launched by G7 countries to bridge AI theory and practice. Currently has 29 member countries with secretariat hosted by OECD. Operates through working groups on responsible AI, data governance, and AI for climate/pandemic response.

### **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20 (2024)**

20-year review of the original 2003-2005 WSIS process, led by ITU in collaboration with UNESCO, UNDP, and UNCTAD. Held in Geneva, bringing together governments, private sector, civil society, and international organizations. Culminates in high-level review in 2025 to assess digital transformation progress since 2005.

### **NETmundial+10 (2024)**

10-year follow-up to the 2014 NETmundial meeting, organized by Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.br) in São Paulo. Brought together 700+ participants from governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, and academia from 60+ countries. Produced non-binding multistakeholder statement on strengthening internet governance processes.

structured state-led progress reviews involving all relevant stakeholders (UN Migration Network 2022; GCM paras. 44, 48 2019)

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Requires member alignment with OECD AI recommendations, creating substantive policy coherence while emphasizing transparency and evidence-based decision-making (Rastogi 2024; OECD, n.d.)

Implements preparatory processes with all UN agencies to address previous criticisms and build upon lessons learned for improved inclusivity (ITU 2024)

Conducting periodic reviews (10-year anniversary) to assess progress, acknowledge changed circumstances, and update governance approaches based on evolving digital landscapes (WEF 2024; Global Partners Digital 2024b; Internet Society, n.d.)2025-06-04 10:48:00 AM

influence on state behavior (Höflinger 2020)

Fragmented organizational structure with oversight divided between Montreal and Paris limits member state agency and creates challenges in achieving cohesion and financial stability (Wyckoff 2024)

Limited exchange of diverse opinions and marginalization of people and communities from policymaking debates, despite broad participation (Lee 2024; Pohle and Santaniello 2024)

Without concrete implementation pathways and accountability mechanisms, multistakeholder governance initiatives risk becoming more commemorative than transformative in addressing contemporary digital governance challenges (Internet Society, n.d.; Global Partners Digital 2024b)

## II.7 Key Takeaways from the Literature

Through desktop research, this report observes that the global AI governance landscape suffers from oversaturation and fragmentation, requiring streamlining and strengthening of existing frameworks rather than creating new ones. While multistakeholder partnerships offer greater flexibility and innovation than traditional multilateralism, analysis of existing multistakeholder platforms demonstrates that they face structural challenges including commitment gaps due to their voluntary nature, implementation and accountability issues, and limited representation from Global South and marginalized actors.

Geneva emerges as uniquely positioned to address these governance challenges through its unparalleled multilateral density, comprehensive AI event ecosystem, and proven track record in digital multistakeholderism. Effective global AI governance requires moving beyond commemorative initiatives toward actionable frameworks with clear accountability mechanisms and genuine Global South inclusion. Strategic use of Geneva's institutional advantages could consolidate rather than multiply governance efforts, improving efficiency, effectiveness, and inclusion.

This literature analysis reveals four pillars of successful multistakeholder cooperation: leadership, accountability, inclusivity, and monitoring & evaluation, which formed the foundation for our stakeholder interview methodology to gather expert perspectives on these critical governance elements.

## III Analysis

The following section highlights the main findings from interviews conducted between March and April 2025, with selected specialists in the AI space primarily based in Geneva. The interviewees come from diverse backgrounds in academia, governments (and missions), civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, and international organizations (IOs). The findings below reflect the most common views across all stakeholder groups, as well as unique perspectives on ways forward.

### III.1 What Currently Exists in The Field?

#### III.1.1 What initiatives are most relevant in AI governance?

*Beyond the GDC and the related AI Scientific Panel and AI Dialogue, the WSIS, IGF, and AI for Good Summit were the most frequently mentioned*

**events** across all stakeholder groups. However, over 15 other AI-related events and initiatives were also cited<sup>7</sup>.

Stakeholders across CSOs, UN bodies, and governments emphasized the enormous value of "specialized events," which enable more localized discussions and tailored solutions while demanding fewer resources from marginalized actors to participate, thereby ensuring increased representativeness.

Several government representatives from both the Global North and Global South, as well as CSOs, highlighted the lack of communication and coordination among AI-related events. This results in duplication of efforts and wastes opportunities for discussions to build upon and support one another in advancing the field. Major criticism from IOs, the private sector, academia, and CSOs also focused on the lack of action and practical results from these events, which tend to prioritize discussions and awareness over concrete outcomes.

A Geneva-based CSO remarked that AI-events are not *"as oriented towards action-oriented collaboration, but it has ingredients to do that. It is already convening, and the convening power is quite significant."*

### III.1.2 Where to draw inspiration from?

1. **Paris Agreement:** Good example of accountability and enforcement
2. **ICAIN<sup>8</sup>:** Good example of how to bring different voices and perspectives together
3. **EU AI Act:** Good model for engagement and representativeness of user and developers (2+ year bottom-up consultation process with civil society, user associations, and private companies)
4. **Open-Ended Working Group:** Good example of action-oriented strategy (France/Egypt initiative for effecting "plan of action" with implementing bodies)
5. **Switzerland's direct democracies:** Require support from all stakeholder groups for decisions to pass, resulting in more sustainable outcomes

<sup>7</sup> Those included events such as the AI Summit in Paris and the AI Safety Summit in London, as well as events and initiatives organized by the Commission of Science and Technology for Development events (CSTD), the G7, G20 and G77, the OECD, and the EU and Council of Europe (mainly around the EU AI Act). Additionally, several thematic-oriented events were also cited, amongst them AI and human-rights, AI and conflict, AI Ethics and AI and Health. Finally, there were also regional, national and sub-national based events mentioned as complementary to the global ones.

<sup>8</sup> International Computation and AI Network, <https://icain.ch>



### III.1.3 How do interviewed stakeholders perceive the GDC?



## III.2 What Are the Main Issues Around AI Governance Actions?

### III.2.1 Disconnect between Technology and Policy

Interviewees from international organizations, academia, and the private sector agreed on a significant *lack of AI savviness amongst decision- and policymakers*. AI technical experts are notably absent from discussions and decision-making processes at global, regional, and national levels. Interviewees raised concerns that very few policymakers have a true understanding of the topics being discussed, making them vulnerable to being misled or even manipulated.

Based on insights from academia, governments, the private sector, and international organizations, *the pace of technological advances significantly outpaces policymaking actions*. This gap is particularly pronounced for holistic and all-encompassing approaches, such as those toward which AI governance is trending, as these require extensive discussions before reaching tangible outcomes.

Stakeholders have almost unanimously identified the *challenging current geopolitical scenario* as one of the biggest barriers to global AI governance and effective, inclusive multi-stakeholder *collaboration*.

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*“The development of a whole set of [AI] regulatory frameworks, to some extent are now being modified in the face of changing geopolitics. What might have been possible just a few years ago in terms of general agreements are going to be under different sorts of strain”- says an Academia representative*

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### **III.2.2 Lack of clarity over priorities, initiatives, and basic concepts**

When discussing AI governance, all stakeholder groups noted that it is rare to have a shared understanding of fundamental concepts, including *what constitutes AI and what constitutes governance*. Some clarification questions that arose when asking for stakeholder perspectives on multistakeholderism in AI governance included: *"When you talk about stakeholders, are we talking about which ones in particular? All of them, including member states? Or all other members?"* and *"When talking about AI governance, are you referring to multilateral, international AI governance or governance at any level?"*

Since AI can be approached through many different lenses, CSOs have observed a lack of effort to streamline shared consensus on these fundamental concepts. Consequently, it remains *unclear what needs to be properly addressed* (whether users, data and knowledge systems, hardware infrastructure, or algorithmic processes), and which actors bear responsibility for addressing them. Stakeholders show divergent priorities between technological development and user-centered rights-based approaches. The *model of governance and decision making is also not clear*. There is no consensus among interviewees about who is responsible for making final decisions or what the roles of stakeholders like CSOs and the private sector should be. Should they be engaged in a consultative capacity or through a co-design approach?

This lack of clarity about AI governance extends to existing efforts and initiatives, as mentioned by almost all stakeholder groups interviewed. *Communication across AI efforts and regulations has been described as insufficient* and sometimes perceived as nonexistent, with no dedicated or adequate effort to integrate one discussion into another and move forward cohesively. Multiple siloed initiatives across New York, Geneva, and other global locations (distributed among IOs, UN agencies, and individual regional and national regulations) are seen as intensifying fragmentation and effort duplication.

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*“Global AI governance is characterized by a “patchwork” of initiatives and the various stakeholders. It is on one hand important that different actors are considering and giving relevance to the governance of AI, but at the same time there is a sort of exhaustion of resources and of attention.”- says a CSO representative.*

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Governments, CSOs, and the private sector advocated for *integrating AI governance discussions within broader technology governance frameworks to* leverage existing institutional mechanisms and establish a foundational baseline for technology governance.

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*“There's the question of what exactly we do not have that we need to put in place specifically for AI. If we look at immediate risks with protection of data, knowledge and protection of intellectual property rights, safety and liability, there's already lots of regulations in place that, if applied carefully, would solve some of these issues. Can we make sure these mechanisms work before we come up with something new, just because this is a new technology? Because then next year, we'll have the exact same conversation about quantum computing, and two years from now who knows what else will be coming up? We might not need to come up with new regulation every time a new technology appears.” says an AI expert working at a CSO in Geneva.*

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### **III.2.3 Conversations are not representative and inclusive**

The lack of inclusivity in AI governance efforts is well-noted, yet critical questions remain: *who is actually absent from these discussions, and what barriers prevent their meaningful participation?* Enhanced representation of *"Global South stakeholders"* emerged as the primary pathway to achieving greater

inclusiveness. This encompasses specific demands from all stakeholder groups to better include: member states from developing nations; companies and private sector entities beyond dominant technology firms; academic research institutions with more diverse geographical and thematic focuses than established actors; and civil society organizations that authentically represent local communities and end-users, including women, youth, humanitarian sectors, and populations with limited or no connectivity and digital literacy.

These *underrepresented actors lack the requisite resources and expertise for meaningful engagement*. Given the proliferation of initiatives, events, and discussions, they cannot access the financial, personnel, temporal, and logistical resources necessary to participate comprehensively, much less prepare adequately. This research alone identified over 15 "key" AI events occurring across different locations in the Global North. Even when these stakeholders manage to participate and secure appropriate platforms for their voices, many lack the specialized expertise and technological knowledge required for substantive engagement in these highly technical discussions.

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*"There is an uneven level of development on this front. So, there is a need to carry everybody along, have a deliberate attempt to bring onboard the underrepresented regions to create more inclusivity in AI governance. That way, you have a truly multilateral forum."* says a government representative from the Global South

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### III.3 How Can We Pave the Way for Smarter AI Governance?

#### Identified Baseline Principles to AI Governance

- 1. Less discussions, more actions:** Initiatives need more practical implementation.
- 2. Explore the positive side of AI:** Do not focus only on the harm and dangers of the technology.
- 3. Ensure AI is embedded into international and human rights law:** Step away from strict business focus and ensure there are human rights strong presence in AI governance, such as the OHCHR proposal on adding a human right advisory linked to the GDC.

- 4. No one-size fits-all:** Efforts should be centralized and coordinated, but with enough flexibility for tailored geographical and thematic adjustments and developments based on the specific needs and contexts.
- 5. Do not try to govern everything:** Not all solutions will fit all stakeholders, and specific geographical or thematic initiatives are positive and beneficial (as long as they communicate with each other).
- 6. Identify and initiate the discussion on a “low-hanging fruit” topic:** Initially focus global AI discussions on matters of reduced conflict of interest between powerful governments, such as AI applications in military settings. This can support mitigating the conflicting geopolitical scenario of lack of consensus, conflict and dispute in the AI arena. and allow for AI discussions to move forward.

### III.3.1 Who should take the lead in AI Governance?

While multistakeholder engagement necessitates meaningful participation from all actors, the United Nations and national governments have been identified by IOs, governments, academia, and CSOs as the principal leaders in AI governance. *International organizations, particularly the UN, are perceived almost unanimously across stakeholder groups as facilitators of multistakeholder dialogue*, though their role in final decision-making remains limited. The UN was specifically designated by the private sector and CSOs as responsible for providing institutional frameworks and mechanisms that enable meaningful engagement across all stakeholder groups. Stakeholders expressed expectations for the UN to lead discussions on standards-setting and digital sovereignty while ensuring enhanced inclusiveness and capacity-building. To fulfill this mandate, it should leverage the expertise and leadership of its various specialized agencies, each addressing different dimensions of AI, while improving inter-agency coordination.

Observations from IOs, academia, CSOs, and numerous governmental representatives themselves demonstrate that national *governments are recognized as the primary authorities for substantive decision-making and regulatory framework development*, including the implementation of international legal instruments (encompassing human rights principles and high-level governance principles), which should be grounded in internationally recognized standards.

As one AI academic specialist observed: *"At the end of the day, much will come down to the countries. I would argue that they continue to be the main decision-makers, and we're seeing this play out particularly strongly now."*

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*"If you want things to happen, it always helps to have the highest level of political engagement. Does it mean that the political commitment has to go so much into all the details and the nitty-gritty? Likely not, that would risk jeopardizing the development of AI. But the political engagement should focus on applying international law, ensuring that human rights are being promoted and defended, agreeing on high-level principles, including the ones that are left behind, and ensuring that all Member States engage with those communities at their national level. I think it is also a commitment to ensuring that commitments are not only words, but they [governments] engage, commit, and actually build and implement them,"*  
added a Geneva-based governmental representative.

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### **III.3.2 How can we ensure accountability for stakeholders' actions?**

Interviewees noted that *corporations and governments bear the greatest responsibility for AI governance and implementation*. Representatives from Western governments, CSOs, and academia reinforced that *the most substantive accountability mechanisms are operationalized at the national level*, where more robust and effective legal frameworks and judicial systems exist. Governments are recognized as responsible for ensuring that national and regional systems comply with international law and that multistakeholder principles and international AI guidelines are transformed from discourse into concrete policies and actions.

A point of highest convergence across all interviewees, with particular emphasis from governments and CSOs, is the demand for corporate accountability in designing solutions that adhere to principles such as safety and privacy, aligned with international law and human rights frameworks. Critically, such elevated accountability expectations are coupled with the understanding that *international accountability mechanisms and regulatory frameworks should facilitate rather than deter private sector engagement in AI governance discussions*, being developed through collaboration and coordination with industry stakeholders. The international development of standards, mechanisms, and guidelines should be co-developed with all stakeholder actors, ensuring enhanced transparency and buy-in from all parties involved, as well as providing tangible benefits to the private sector through increased standardization that facilitates global operationalization.



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*“There's a lot of confusion and fragmentation because different countries are regulating [Artificial Intelligence] differently. There's no way of tracking which software is used in what context and how. But AI products and services are often offered globally, so that creates a lot of regulatory mess and regulatory conflict. From a business perspective, it creates obstacles to develop and sell models in different markets.”*

says an academic, expert on AI.

*“It is quite important to ensure that for the businesses there's a level playing field, both for ensuring certainty for the [human] rights holders but also ensuring certainty for the companies of what is the expected conduct.”*

complements an UN expert on business engagement.

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### **III.3.3 How can we increase inclusion and diversity in AI Governance?**

For marginalized actors to participate meaningfully, governance structures must create accessible spaces for their engagement. Stakeholders across all groups identified a critical need to *reconceptualize participatory leadership models* that prioritize geographical, sectoral, and generational diversity while avoiding centralization around dominant actors. *Leadership rotation* among civil society organizations and governments was proposed by a Global South governmental representative as an effective mechanism to ensure diverse voices are heard and prevent any single actor from dominating discussions. An alternative approach involves exploring *regional frameworks* to bridge national and global deliberations. Governmental representatives from Europe and Asia, alongside CSO and academic stakeholders, have advocated for regional representation as a means to amplify the voices of marginalized or "weaker" nations and to better contextualize and tailor solutions to local needs.

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*"It is important to continue having regional discussions, because obviously AI is not one solution for everything. What you're trying to improve, or the challenges you're trying to solve with AI, might be completely different at a regional level because they depend on different contexts and needs. I think it is important to continue having these discussions not only at international levels but also at regional and local levels,"* remarks a governmental

representative

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Stakeholders broadly emphasized that *marginalized actors should not bear the sole burden of traveling to participate in discussions*; rather, Global North stakeholders must also engage in outreach by traveling to these communities.

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*"It is not easy for countries of the Global South, especially developing countries and least developed countries who lack funds, to come to Geneva or New York to participate in AI discussions. Not all countries can participate, but it is easier for government representatives because they have missions in Geneva and New York. At the AI for Good Summit, we saw that missions in Geneva could contribute and I could attend, but it is not easy for Global South stakeholders—private sector, academia, civil society, youth, women, and other groups—to participate in this kind of discussion,"* explained a governmental representative of a Geneva-based Global South mission.

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The IGF has been widely commended as one of the most effective examples of decentralizing events to regional and local levels while successfully integrating outcomes back into central discussions. Its consultation model helps ensure more diversified contributions and participation, although the forum has been criticized for its lack of actionable outcomes. Several stakeholders have identified hybrid meetings, regional representation through local networks, open-source solutions, and localized discussions as mechanisms to reduce the substantial costs of initiative engagement.

Stakeholder groups have consistently emphasized the need for concerted efforts to *develop knowledge and expertise among marginalized actors to enable their meaningful participation*. Financial subsidies to support participation and knowledge exchange between expert and non-expert stakeholders have been identified as key mechanisms to ensure marginalized actors can contribute their unique perspectives and interests to these initiatives. Existing efforts by the private sector and CSOs in Geneva are already focused on building AI expertise and demystifying AI concepts and technology, primarily targeting government representatives. The aim is for Member States to develop autonomous expertise and strengthen their domestic technological capacity, ensuring that AI knowledge extends beyond the exclusive domain of Big Tech. This would enable them to understand the technology comprehensively and engage meaningfully in policy discussions.

### III.3.4 How to leverage M&E mechanisms?

Specifically regarding the GDC, the United Nations was perceived by governments and international organizations as responsible for leading the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of AI governance. However, stakeholders lacked consensus on how this responsibility should be optimally structured and implemented.

*To prevent fragmentation and duplication in AI governance*, M&E frameworks should focus on addressing the primary issues identified in the previous section. These include *enhancing learning and knowledge-sharing of discussions, solutions, and outcomes within and beyond the UN system; ensuring initiatives maintain an action-oriented focus; and guaranteeing that international standards are applied and adapted to national and regional contexts*. To achieve these objectives, CSOs and IOs have identified several critical needs: improved and coordinated development of enhanced metrics to systematically assess initiative effectiveness and inform resource allocation; utilization of AI technologies to support issue identification; establishment of cross-verification mechanisms between initiatives and efforts; and continuation of public reporting and feedback mechanisms. The NetMondial +10, as detailed in the "Literature Review" section of this document, was identified by IOs and government interviewees as an exemplary model for assessing the value and limitations of multistakeholderism.

### III.4 What Makes Geneva Unique for AI Governance?

As a longstanding hub of diplomacy and humanitarian affairs, and home to multiple UN agencies, Geneva provides the infrastructure, culture, and legitimacy needed to host inclusive and coordinated approaches to AI governance. While Geneva's role in the AI ecosystem may not be to develop technological tools, it is uniquely positioned to shape the rules, frameworks, and values that guide their development and deployment. In an era marked by growing geopolitical fragmentation and rapid technological change, Geneva offers something rare: *a trusted, neutral meeting ground* with a proven ability to convene diverse actors around complex and cross-sectoral issues.

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*"What is special about Geneva is that the trust between stakeholders is a bit higher. It's a relatively small town, and people can meet fairly easily, so multistakeholder conversations really benefit from that,"* explained a human rights expert representing a UN organization

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## How does Geneva stand out?

- 1. Multistakeholder Expertise:** Geneva has decades of practice in inclusive governance, as it facilitated collaboration between states, civil society, international organizations, academia, and the private sector
- 3. Neutral Ground:** Its reputation as a diplomatic city, separate from powerful national capitals, enhances trust among stakeholders and encourages open dialogue. It also has a small and interconnected community that strengthens informal diplomacy and reinforces cross-sector peer learning.
- 4. Human-Centred Focus:** Institutions in Geneva, including the OHCHR, ILO, WHO, and ICRC, embed, among other values, human rights, development, health, and labour equity at the core of their mandates. The ecosystem is therefore deeply grounded in ethical frameworks that resonate with the sustainable use of AI.
- 5. Coordination Role:** Geneva hosts organizations that cover critical intersections of AI with various issues, including trade (WTO), health (WHO), migration (IOM), humanitarian law (ICRC), and telecommunications (ITU). The city also carries a tradition of engaging civil society and the Global South, promoting strong coordination capacities.
- 6. Norms Setting:** From humanitarian law to health standards, Geneva has long been a place where agreements are shaped through soft law, guidelines, and global frameworks that influence international policies.
- 7. Governance Hub:** Geneva already anchors initiatives like ITU's AI for Good Summit and offers a pragmatic and less politicized environment to foster capacity building, experimentation, and standardization of AI governance.

## What are the gaps in Geneva's multistakeholder landscape?

- 1. Fragmentation and Dialogue in Silos:** While numerous initiatives exist, they tend to operate in parallel rather than collaboratively. The absence of a coordinating mechanism or platform that enables different actors to convene, explore best practices, and collaborate on shared objectives results in missed opportunities for synergy between humanitarian, human rights, development, and technical stakeholders. Consequently, Geneva-based actors often lack

visibility into each other's AI-related work and events. Furthermore, many organizations compete for limited funding resources, which exacerbates fragmentation, competition, and institutional silos in Geneva.

**2. Barriers to Inclusive Participation:** Geneva's high cost of living and complex institutional architecture create significant barriers for Global South actors and smaller organizations with limited resources to participate meaningfully in conversations. While Geneva promotes inclusive values, access to high-level forums remains unequal, which limits the influence that underrepresented communities can exert in these discussions.

**3. Low Engagement from the Private Sector and Technical Communities:** While some Geneva-based forums engage with companies, the city hosts few world-leading AI developers and influential tech industry actors. Consequently, discussions risk becoming overly abstract or disconnected from innovation realities without meaningful participation from key developers and technical experts. One academic specialist specifically noted that Microsoft represents the only "big tech" presence in Geneva and emphasized the need for the city to host more leading private sector organizations to advance AI development and governance.

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*"Funding is very tight and it's getting even more tight now. So, we're essentially in competition with each other. I think that's probably the biggest barrier to effective collaboration. People don't want to share when they're working on a project that they think maybe you are working on. You want to share your ideas with people because you're afraid that then they're going to take them and you're not going to get the money." - says a representative from a Geneva-based NGO.*

*"It's going to be easier for stakeholders in Europe to come together, for example, to attend meetings in Geneva. But it's not easy for countries of the Global South, especially developing countries and least developed countries. They lack funds to come to Geneva and participate in AI discussions at events like the AI for Good Summit. There's a participation gap—not all countries can participate equally. For government representatives, it's easier because they have missions in Geneva," explained a representative from a Global South permanent mission to the UN in Geneva.*

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Overall, in this rapidly evolving field of AI governance, *Geneva has the potential to offer a neutral, inclusive, and human-centered platform*. Several stakeholders, including a representative from a European mission, have reaffirmed that rather than replicating the high-level negotiations characteristic of political arenas such as New York, Geneva can further reinforce its position as a "governance hub". It can become a space where norms, soft law, standards, and best practices are co-developed, tested, and refined collaboratively to promote ethical and inclusive AI deployment worldwide.

### **Geneva's Role Could Include:**

1. Hosting expert-led, evidence-based discussions that bridge policy, ethics, and technical knowledge.
2. Providing a platform for voices from the Global South to actively shape AI governance norms with other actors, and not retroactively.
3. Connecting Geneva's unique sectors (e.g., humanitarian, development, trade) to foster holistic approaches to AI regulation.
4. Developing mechanisms to harmonize AI standards and facilitate interoperability across sectors, potentially through a Geneva-based coordination platform or regulatory board.
5. Positioning Geneva as the bridge between technical agencies and political spheres, including New York, to offer expert input and ideas that can later inform negotiations.



## IV Recommendations

### What Can the International Community Do?

The recommendations provided below do not represent the views of a single individual or stakeholder group but are rather a compilation of all inputs gathered throughout the literature review, interviews and focus group.

#### Use Technology to Improve Accessibility and Inclusion

- Make all meetings hybrid to reduce costs and increase participation from civil society and Global South stakeholders.
- Use AI tools (e.g. translation) to increase diversity of perspectives in discussions.
- Use offline engagement strategies (like community town halls, radio) to reach areas without internet access.
- Establish feedback loops and community reporting mechanisms to keep pace with rapid tech change and inform policymaking.

#### Improve Multi-Stakeholder Engagement and Governance

- Define shared terms: Clarify definitions of AI, governance, and multi-stakeholder engagement.
- Move from consultation to co-creation or co-design with communities.
- Implement a rotative system so different civil society groups can participate.
- Develop neutral platforms to mediate across geopolitical divides and promote inclusive engagement.

#### Enhance Geneva's AI Ecosystem

- Establish Geneva as a hub for AI governance and innovation by further advancing initiatives such as the Geneva AI Initiative.
- Develop an Instagram or social media page to share updates and events from Geneva's ecosystem (that are not just hidden in UN pages).
- Increase private sector engagement in Geneva, especially in newer initiatives.
- Develop year-round engagement mechanisms (not just annual summits), especially for the Global South.

#### Coordinate Events for Representation

- Hold more events and meetings in developing countries to ensure their perspectives are represented.
- Merge or streamline overlapping forums (e.g., back-to-back events) to reduce duplication.

- Promote regional coordination and initiatives to reflect voices of underrepresented areas.
- Use regional and local consultation models, such as the IGF, that feed into global discussions.

### **Build or Finalize Structures and Institutional Frameworks**

- Ensure the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance consider existing initiatives and have a clear complementary role.
- Build a coordination structure, with specialized roles in Geneva responsible for compiling the findings in Geneva and facilitating coordination with New York.
- Establish inspection regimes for AI systems following models in other tech treaties.

### **Shift the Focus from Risk to Opportunity**

- Focus AI discussions not just on risk and regulation, but also on how organizations can benefit from AI.
- Highlight contextual, local applications of AI (e.g., small actors tailoring AI to specific needs) during multistakeholder discussions.
- Promote open-source approaches for broader adaptability and transparency.

### **Communication, Translation and Awareness**

- Identify and support “translators” or “boundary-spanners” who can bridge technical, policy, and community silos.
- Launch toolkits and educational campaigns to demystify AI across institutions and public actors.
- Include youth voices in decision-making processes now as they represent future generations.

### **Data Sharing, Monitoring and Enforcement**

- Create secure mechanisms for data sharing across governments and organizations.
- Introduce public dashboards, independent audits, and voluntary commitments for accountability.
- Develop clear metrics and standards to monitor the impact of AI governance initiatives.
- Use open-access platforms for sharing lessons, including failures.
- Support community-led monitoring systems with disaggregated data collection.

## Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing, especially in the Global South

- Make AI capacity building (skills, data expertise, infrastructure) in the Global South a top policy priority for the next 3–5 years.
- Provide funding and logistical support to enable meaningful Global South participation.
- Offer digital skills programs for diplomats and other stakeholders.
- Build targeted, localized capacity-building initiatives in local languages and contexts.
- Incorporate qualitative storytelling and lived experiences alongside data in monitoring and evaluation.

## V Conclusion

This report aims to illuminate effective multistakeholder approaches to AI governance in Geneva. The study followed a structured methodology, beginning with a literature review on best practices for multistakeholder engagement, Geneva's role in these processes, and insights on AI governance frameworks, specifically the Global Digital Compact. The literature identified four essential dimensions of multistakeholderism: Leadership, Accountability, Inclusivity, and Monitoring & Evaluation. Based on these foundational pillars, over 20 interviews and a focus group with five participants were conducted to gather insights from different stakeholder groups on AI governance and Geneva's role in this process. These findings, combined with information from the literature review, were subsequently analyzed to produce this comprehensive report.

The research reveals several key takeaways: the literature highlights that inclusion, when paired with accountability, fosters legitimacy in multistakeholder cooperation. Additionally, stakeholders in Geneva largely agreed on the main gaps in AI governance and identified multiple opportunities for future progress in this field. With its unique concentration of multilateral institutions, Geneva is positioned to play a significant coordination role. Moving forward, *the international community must act collectively and inclusively to shape AI governance that is both effective and equitable*. This requires embracing new forms of cooperation, empowering underrepresented voices, especially from the Global South, and ensuring that governance frameworks remain agile, transparent, and rooted in practical needs.

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