

SECTION 1

Introduction

The Global Network Initiative (“GNI”) is the leading multistakeholder forum for accountability, shared learning, and collective advocacy on government and company policies and practices at the intersection of technology and human rights. GNI sets a global standard for responsible company decision-making to promote and advance freedom of expression and privacy rights across the technology ecosystem.

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (“AI”) is increasingly influencing the information environment with associated impacts on human rights, including freedom of expression and privacy.² While there is substantial literature on the conduct of AI risk assessments, much of it focuses on broadly defined concepts of AI safety, AI ethics, and responsible AI, which are not grounded in international human rights norms and do not provide clear, consistent guidance on identifying and mitigating human rights risks.³ Other analyses provide taxonomies of government interventions in AI, but again without focusing on human rights.⁴ Meanwhile, resources related to human rights and AI often do not focus on the significant roles played by governments in the development of relevant national and international AI landscapes.⁵

And yet governments around the world are increasingly intervening in the infrastructure, development, and deployment of AI systems, with significant implications for human rights. Governments influence AI through policies, regulations, deployments, and investments that can either safeguard or undermine a broad range of human rights, including but not limited to the rights to freedom of expression, privacy, and non-discrimination. The framework provided by international human rights law provides many benefits, including a shared, global set of norms to evaluate interventions by state actors and to hold them accountable.⁶ A rights-based approach helps ensure that government action supports transparency, due process, accountability,

² For the purposes of this Brief, GNI will use the [OECD definition of AI](#) as “...a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment.” For the avoidance of doubt, this Brief is not limited to Generative AI.

³ For example, NIST’s [AI Risk Management Framework](#) or the [UK Government’s AI Management Essentials Tool \(AIME\)](#), among others.

⁴ For example, CFR’s [Taxonomy for Navigating the Global Landscape of AI Regulation](#)

⁵ For example, ECNL on the [rights impacts of LLMs in content moderation](#), The Future of Free Speech and CDT’s [Artificial Intelligence & The First Amendment](#), CDT’s [AI Governance Lab](#) and BSR’s [Human Rights Across the Generative AI Value Chain](#). Some literature from GNI members do provide a focused analysis of some government interventions in AI, such as Article 19’s [Red Lines for AI](#) on government surveillance.

⁶ Pielemeier, J., “[AI & Global Governance: The Advantages of Applying the International Human Rights Framework to Artificial Intelligence](#),” UN University Center for Policy Research (Feb. 26, 2019).

protecting individuals from harm, promoting global trust in AI governance, and providing the necessary legal recourse and remedies should individuals be subjected to any harm.

GNI, through its multi-stakeholder AI Working Group (“AIWG”), has produced this Policy Brief (“Brief”) to help clarify and articulate the human rights implications of government interventions in AI, and put forward rights-respecting recommendations for government, company, and civil society stakeholders. This Brief draws upon responsible business conduct frameworks, insights from GNI’s multi-stakeholder membership, and GNI’s seventeen years of work seeking to uphold freedom of expression and privacy across the tech sector.

This Brief presents a high-level framework for understanding government interventions. It is intended to help government officials across various branches, levels, and roles, as well as other stakeholders, understand the implications of government action on the rights to freedom of expression, privacy, and non-discrimination, so that decisions can be designed and scoped in accordance with human rights principles. All government actions should be evaluated across the full range of cultural, civil, economic, labor, political, and social rights. While this Brief focuses on freedom of expression, privacy and non-discrimination, which GNI considers to be particularly salient to AI, the interpretative principles outlined in Section 5 can and should help inform broader human rights analyses.

The Brief is informed and substantiated by scenarios that were publicly available or foreseeable as of late 2025. While it does not provide in-depth or conclusive analysis on any such examples or scenarios, the Brief is intended to help inform such analysis by GNI, its members, and other key actors going forward. In this Brief, we use hyperlinks when referring directly to specific examples or concepts, while using footnotes where additional explanation or description is needed.