



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



International Research Centre  
on Artificial Intelligence  
under the auspices of UNESCO



*Event Report*  
**IRCAI Launch 2021**



### ***Note from the organizers***

With your expressed support, and with a commitment to full transparency and dialogue, we continue our efforts at the international level to harness the potential of Artificial Intelligence to address some of the thorniest challenges of our time, whether in global health, climate change, or the influence of Fake News. The stakes could not be higher and the perfect storm of challenges could not be more urgent. Our main goal 6 months into IRCAI remains to develop a collaborative partnership with researchers and practitioners. We continue to grow in our enthusiasm and commitment to impact the key challenges of our time as captured in the Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations. Our vision is for IRCAI to create this global partnership through a series of concrete projects already underway that we believe together can conjure up what a fully functioning IRCAI can achieve while focusing on ethical solutions that are well grounded in science. The solutions to global challenges must also be put into practice, and this can only be achieved by incorporating the viewpoints of all stakeholders, including international organizations with which IRCAI actively collaborates.

## Summary of the event

On March 29 and 30 2021, a launch event of the International Research Center on Artificial Intelligence under the auspices of UNESCO - IRCAI, which was founded by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and has its headquarters at the Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana, Slovenia, was held. 1083 registered participants from 123 countries attended and were addressed by esteemed speakers on the first day of the event. Participants came from all geographical regions of United Nations: African, Asian-Pacific, Eastern European, Latin American and Caribbean and Western European states. Non-registered participants were also invited to watch the event via live

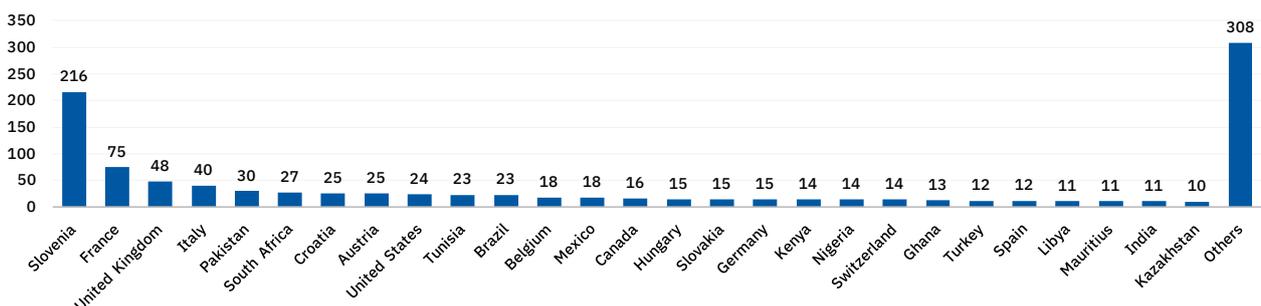
streaming on YouTube. The launch was created with input from 33 active speakers and panelists.

Among the esteemed speakers of the first day were the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr. Borut Pahor, the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Ms. Audrey Azoulay, the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of Slovenia, prof Simona Kustec, the Minister of Public Administration of Slovenia, Mr. Boštjan Koritnik, prof Boštjan Zalar, Director of the Jožef Stefan Institute, and Mr Anthony Whelan, Digital Policy Adviser from the Cabinet of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

## Participating Countries



## Number of Participants by Country



The sequence of events leading to the establishment of IRCAI and the results of the Center’s work to date were presented by its Director, prof John Shawe-Taylor. The second part of the first day focused on building a global artificial intelligence community in a panel discussion that included several speakers from African countries. The second day of the event focused on presentations of the results of IRCAI activities, opportunities for collaboration, and the use of artificial intelligence tools to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Presentations were made by IRCAI Program Committee representatives Aidan O’Sullivan, Colin de La Higuera, Catherine Holloway, and Delmiro Fernandez-Reyes. Analysis of 6 Regional Consultations on the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI and IRCAI Ethics and Regulation approaches were presented alongside of panel discussions on the issues of the need for policy coming into action on AI. Besides, IRCAI Funding and Innovation Program: Social Impact Bonds, AI policies around the world and AI Global Observatory were

presented by IRCAI affiliates Daniel Miodovnik, Mark Minevich and Marko Grobelnik. The presentations included 5 reports co-authored by IRCAI representatives: Artificial Intelligence in Sub-Saharan Africa, Artificial Intelligence Needs Assessment Survey in Africa, UNESCO Ethics of AI Recommendation Regional Consultations, Opinion Series Reports: UNESCO Ethics of AI Recommendation Regional Consultations, Responsible Artificial Intelligence in Sub-Saharan Africa and Powering Inclusion: Artificial Intelligence and Assistive Technology.

A call for collaboration has also been launched to join IRCAI which is actively working on 10 projects to be implemented in 2021. These are all designed to scale and deploy AI to achieve the Global Challenges that the Center has set out to achieve. IRCAI is seeking partnerships with, International Organizations, Governments, companies, NGOs, universities, research institutes, AI consortiums and government agencies around the world to implement these projects.



### PARTICIPATED

**123**  
Participating Countries

**1083**  
Participants

**2**  
Ministers

President of the Republic of Slovenia  
Director-General of UNESCO  
Cabinet of EC President



### LAUNCHED

**2**  
New Reports on AI

**10**  
Initiatives

**4**  
Technical Platforms

**5**  
Programme Committees



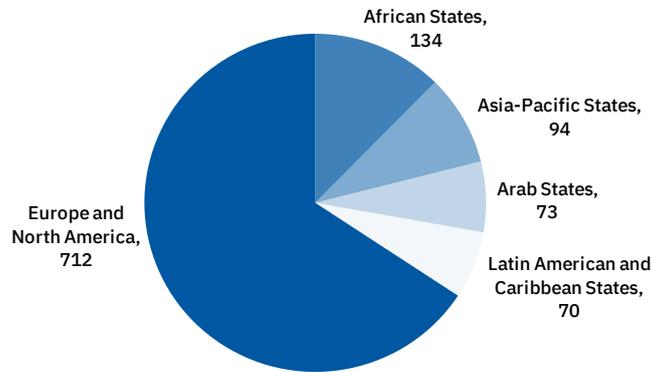
### ANNOUNCED

Top 100 Call for Projects

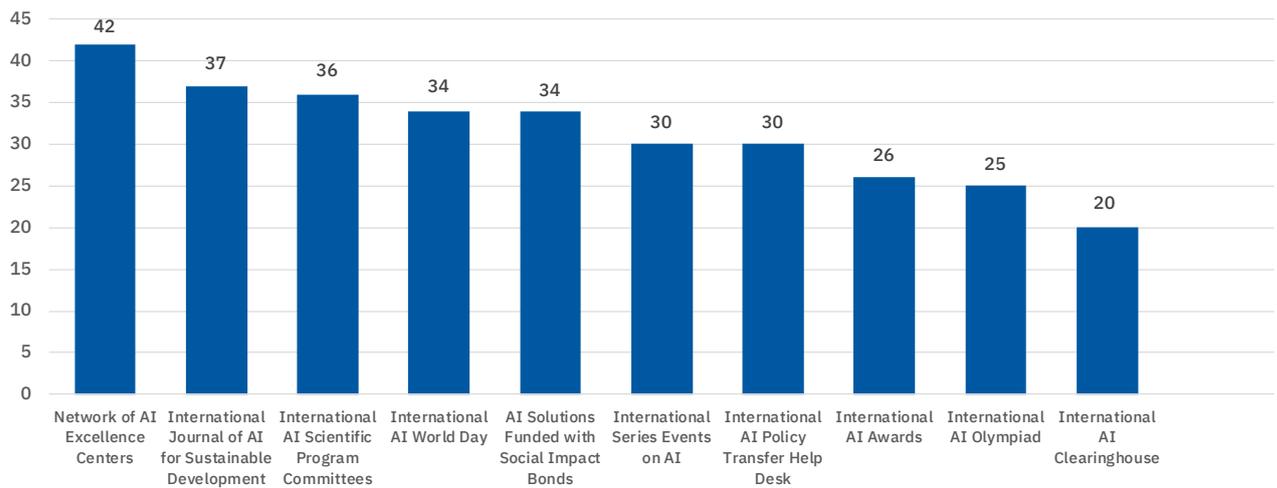
International Journal

Analysis of 6 Regional  
Consultations on the  
UNESCO Recommendation  
in Ethics

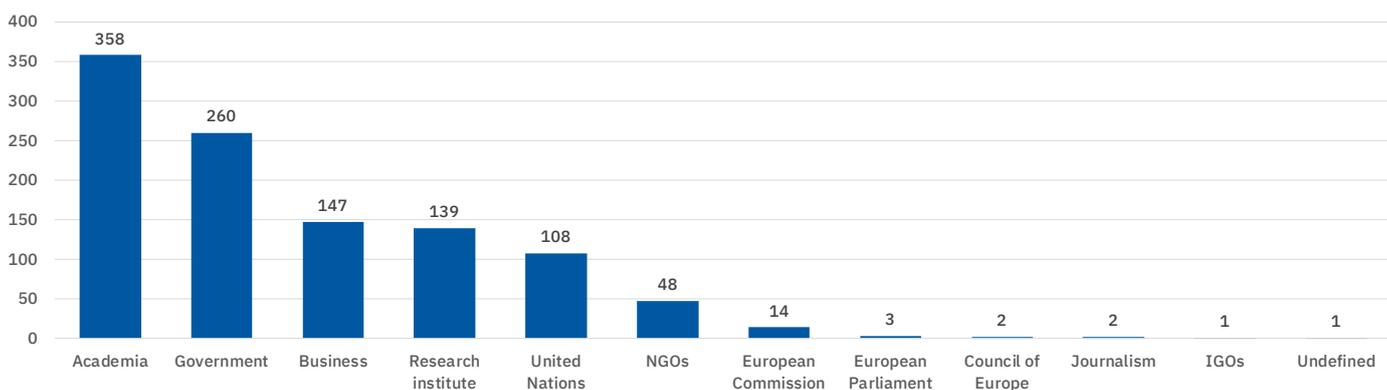
### Number of Participants by Region



### Number of Participants by Projects



### Number of Participants by Representative



### *Quotes by esteemed speakers at the Launch*

**“** *Artificial intelligence is a tool for a better life, for overcoming a pandemic, developing the economy and achieving the goals of sustainable development. It offers us great opportunities for progress, for more accessible and efficient public services, quality education and better access to information.”*

President of the Republic of Slovenia,  
Mr Borut Pahor

**“** *IRCAI has become a space that directs academic and human resources to research topics within the mandate of UNESCO, which, as you know, includes education, culture, science and information. Thanks to IRCAI, we now have the support of an entire team that is directing its diverse skills to ensure that artificial intelligence is used in a way that serves the common good. We are fortunate to have an ally like this to help make our ambitions reality.”*

Director-General of UNESCO,  
Ms Audrey Azoulay

**“** *Slovenia is proud to have assumed a leadership position in the response to this discrepancy by connecting AI and SDGs via IRCAI. In this respect Slovenia wishes to contribute to the SDGs by making the world's largest sustainable solutions platform even more effective and impactful.”*

Minister of Education, Science and Sport of Slovenia,  
prof Simona Kustec

**“** *Slovenia aims for high quality and ethical use of artificial intelligence that citizens can trust.”*

Minister of Public Administration of Slovenia,  
Mr Boštjan Koritnik

**“** *We hope to see the Jozef Stefan Institute with the help of IRCAI becoming an international hub for novel approaches in AI and Sustainable Development and give meaningful contribution to the achievement of UNESCO's strategic programme objectives and sectoral or intersectoral programme priorities and themes.”*

Director of the Jožef Stefan Institute,  
prof Boštjan Zalar

**“** *It is indeed a nice coincidence that the Slovenian Presidency is preparing to work with such an excellent asset on its doorstep, and we hope that this will also serve as a flagship for international efforts.*

Digital Policy Adviser from the cabinet of EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen,  
Mr Anthony Whelan

## *Launched initiatives and programs*

### ***The IRCAI Global Top 100 list for AI Projects on SDGs and how to engage with IRCAI***

IRCAI wants to give a voice to researchers across the world to present their best work, that's why we want to start a scoping study with the TOP 100 projects to unearth the amazing work being done by AI colleagues everywhere. We have built mechanisms for researchers, policymakers, industry and venture capital to join our new Global Network of AI Excellence Centres. For this purpose, we have also set up a governance structure with Terms of Reference, Governing Board, Steering Committee and Programme Committees.

Information and submission form available at <https://ircai.org/global-top-100/>

### ***IRCAI Activities in AI and Sustainable Development***

IRCAI has set up International Scientific Program Committees consisting of groups of experts around Grand Challenges solvable by AI to validate and create projects with partners from all the world's regions.

AI and Climate

AI and Education

AI and Assistive Technologies

AI and Healthcare

AI & Circular Economy

### ***A call for collaboration on 10 projects to be implemented in 2021***

IRCAI is actively working on 10 projects that will be implemented in 2021. These are all designed to scale and use AI to achieve the Global Challenges that the Center has pledged to tackle. We are looking for partnerships with Member States, companies, NGOs, universities and government bodies around the world for the implementation of these projects.

Call for collaboration available at <https://ircai.org/launch-2021/call-for-collaboration/>

### ***Technical platforms***

IRCAI has developed a portfolio of technologies within its Programme Committees and its partners network to showcase the use of AI and sustainability.

Coronavirus watch <https://coronaviruswatch.ircai.org/>

AI and Assistive Technology in the media <https://at.ircai.org/>

X5GON Platform <https://platform.x5gon.org/>

Hands on AI <https://orangedatamining.com/>

## ***Public statement (Ready-to-publish)***

On March 29 and 30, a launch event of the International Research Center on Artificial Intelligence under the auspices of UNESCO - IRCAI, which was founded by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and has its headquarters at the Jožef Stefan Institute was held. Over 1000 registered individuals from 123 countries attended and were addressed by esteemed speakers on the first day of the event.

The President of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr Borut Pahor emphasized in his speech that the establishment of IRCAI in Ljubljana is a great recognition for Slovenian researchers and the Jožef Stefan Institute who have been working on artificial intelligence in Slovenia for several decades. According to President Pahor, artificial intelligence is a tool for a better life and offers great opportunities “for progress, for more accessible and efficient public services, quality education and better access to information, and helps us tackle climate change, introduce new forms of mobility and use energy more efficiently.”

The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Ms Audrey Azoulay, who attended the event live from Paris, regretted that she could not be there live as originally planned and welcomed IRCAI to the UNESCO family. “IRCAI has become a space that directs academic and human resources to research topics within the mandate of UNESCO, which, as you know, includes education, culture, science and information,” adding that despite the large number of UNESCO centers, none yet deals with artificial intelligence. “Thanks to IRCAI, we now have the support of an entire team that is directing its diverse skills to ensure that artificial intelligence is used in a way that serves the common good. We are fortunate to have an ally like this to help make our ambitions reality,” she added, explaining the important role IRCAI played in drafting the UNESCO Recommendation on Ethical Artificial Intelligence and personally thanking the team for its efforts in leading the regional consultation on the draft recommendation. “We already had a glimpse of the potential of this partnership. This launch is therefore very promising,” she concluded. The Minister of Education, Science and Sport of Slovenia, prof Simona Kustec stressed the importance of cooperation

in creating opportunities to address current challenges, including with the help of artificial intelligence, and called on all participants to work together. The Minister of Public Administration of Slovenia, Mr Boštjan Koritnik stressed that “Slovenia aims for high quality and ethical use of artificial intelligence that citizens can trust” and emphasized that artificial intelligence will be one of the main priorities during Slovenia’s EU Presidency.

The development of artificial intelligence in Slovenia was also highlighted by prof Boštjan Zalar, Director of the Jožef Stefan Institute, who stressed that the Institute has a 40-year history in the development of artificial intelligence, over 70 major projects in various departments of the Institute and that in his opinion IRCAI can further strengthen these achievements.

Support for IRCAI was further expressed by the representative of European Commission with which IRCAI has many strategic synergies. Anthony Whelan, Digital Policy Adviser from the cabinet of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen noted that “it is indeed a nice coincidence that the Slovenian Presidency is preparing to work with such an excellent asset on its doorstep, and we hope that this will also serve as a flagship for international efforts.”

The course of events leading up to the establishment of IRCAI and the results of the Center’s work to date were presented by its Director, prof. John Shawe-Taylor. “IRCAI has already established active cooperation with a wide range of international organizations, which it intends to further strengthen and expand,” he said in his speech. Among other things, he called for active participation through projects listed on the Center’s website.

The second part of the opening event focused on building a global artificial intelligence community in a panel discussion that included several speakers from African countries. The second day of the event was focused on IRCAI’s presentations of its outputs from activities, opportunities for collaboration, and the use of artificial intelligence tools that support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, developed with the support of IRCAI program committees.

## Media



Photo of esteemed speakers at IRCAI launch event, March 29, 2021.

All talks of the IRCAI launch event were recorded and are now published under the Creative Commons licence in an open access repository Videolectures.NET.

Event recordings are available on Videolectures.NET at [http://videolectures.net/IRCAILaunch2021\\_Ljubljana/](http://videolectures.net/IRCAILaunch2021_Ljubljana/).

### Ways to get in touch

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## Agenda: DAY 1 - Monday, March 29, 2021

### 14:30 - 14:35 Launch opening

Master of Ceremonies **Igor Bergant**

### 14:35 - 15:00 Opening statements

**prof Boštjan Zalar**, Director of the Jožef Stefan Institute

**H.E. Mr Borut Pahor**, President of the Republic of Slovenia

**H.E. Ms Audrey Azoulay**, Director General of UNESCO

**prof Simona Kustec**, Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia

**Boštjan Koritnik**, Minister of Public Administration of the Republic of Slovenia

**Anthony Whelan**, Digital Policy Adviser, Cabinet of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission

### 15:00 – 15:05 IRCAI promotional video

### 15:05 - 15:25 History, Status, Ecosystem, Vision, Network and work with UNESCO (presentation)

**prof John Shawe-Taylor**, Executive Director, IRCAI

IRCAI is the result of a long tradition of Slovenian research in AI and a number of large-scale partnerships across several decades over a number of European networks of excellence and almost a decade of activities with UNESCO. It exists within an ecosystem of AI players, across different research departments at the Jozef Stefan Institute, non-profits such as the Knowledge 4 All Foundation and a number of start-ups between London and Ljubljana. Its mission is to cover the vertical from research, to implementation and policy input showcasing unbiased, rigorous, and comprehensive dialogue for policymakers, researchers, journalists, executives, and the general public to develop a deeper understanding of the complex field of AI.

### 15:25 - 15:35 Launch of Report on Artificial Intelligence in Sub-Saharan Africa capacity building agenda

**Neil Butcher**, IRCAI affiliate

This is a new IDRC supported report which involved IRCAI personnel in the framework of the AI4D programme designed via a survey of universities; HEIs,

and communities of practice. In order to guide future investments in capacity building that will build responsible AI development and deployment, it is important to know answers to questions such as: what does the AI landscape in SSA look like? What measures are stakeholders in the region taking to ensure that they are AI-ready? Where does capacity already exist or not?

### 15:40 - 16:35 Building a Global AI Community for Sustainable Development (panel session)

Round table with multi-stakeholders moderated by **Melissa Heikkilä**, AI Correspondent, Politico.

**Jade Abbott**, Retro Rabbit and Masakhane

**Billy Okal**, 6 River Systems (Shopify) and Data Science Africa

**Olalekan Akinsande**, Chief Technical Lead at Data Science Nigeria

**Benjamin Rosman**, University of the Witwatersrand and Deep Learning Indaba

There are a number of AI communities across Africa from Deep Learning Indaba with their IndabaX chapters across 35 countries, to Data Science Africa and Data Science Nigeria which are both pushing forward capacity building aiming to train millions of AI practitioners across Africa, and Masakhane which is a research community specialized in African languages. This is a thriving landscape that supports research addressing local challenges in Africa.

### 16:40 - 16:45 Announcing the IRCAI Global Top 100 list for AI Projects on SDGs and how to engage with IRCAI (presentation)

**Davor Orlic**, COO IRCAI

IRCAI wants to give a voice to researchers across the world to present their best work, that's why we want to start a scoping study with the TOP 100 projects to unearth the amazing work being done by AI colleagues everywhere. We have built mechanisms for researchers, policymakers, industry and venture capital to join our new Global Network of AI Excellence Centres. For this purpose, we have also set up a governance structure with Terms of Reference, Governing Board, Steering Committee and Programme Committees.

## *Agenda: DAY 2 - Tuesday, March 30, 2021*

### **14:00 - 14:05 Re-launch opening**

**prof John Shawe-Taylor**, Executive Director, IRCAI

### **14:05 - 14:40 IRCAI Activities in AI and Sustainable Development (presentations)**

IRCAI has set up International Scientific Program Committees consisting of groups of experts around Grand Challenges solvable by AI to validate and create projects with partners from all the world's regions.

#### **AI and Climate: Water Quality Measurement System**

**Aidan O'Sullivan**, PC Chair in AI and Climate

#### **AI and Education: AI algorithms for Education**

**Colin de La Higuera**, PC Chair in AI and Education

#### **AI and Assistive Technologies: White paper in AI and Assistive Technologies**

**Catherine Holloway**, PC Chair in AI and Assistive Technologies

#### **AI and Healthcare: Use of AI for COVID-19 vaccination**

**Delmiro Fernandez-Reyes**, PC Chair in AI and Healthcare

### **14:45 - 14:50 Findings of AI Need Assessment in Africa (presentation)**

**Prateek Sibal and Bhanu Neupane**, Communication and Information Sector, UNESCO

UNESCO has published with the support of IDRC and Knowledge 4 All Foundation the results of a survey intended to establish the priorities and capacity building needs of African countries concerning AI. The countries responding the survey requested support for standard-setting, policy advice, capacity building, network development and for addressing gender equality related concerns in the development and use of AI.

### **14:50 - 15:30 UNESCO Member States and IRCAI – From Needs Assessment to Action (panel session)**

Discussion to be led by **Lenart Kucic**, independent journalist

**Evelyne Rodrigues**, Innovation 4 policy Foundation

**Renée Cummings**, Criminologist, AI Ethicist, Data Activist

in Residence, School of Data Science, University of Virginia  
**Adriana Bora**, The Future Society

The panel will discuss how policy needs to come into action and what are the tangible results of such a scenario. We understand via the UNESCO assessment report that there is a need to levelized the potential benefits and risks of the AI technologies and research which is not equally distributed across regions of the world. As a category 2 center under the auspices of UNESCO, IRCAI wishes to benefit from the survey findings and partner with UNESCO to expand similar effort in other geographical constituencies of UNESCO, namely across Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) and use the experience of the panel in thinking about how to push commitment into action.

### **15:35 - 15:55 IRCAI Ethics – from Commitments to Action (presentations)**

#### **Analysis of 6 Regional Consultations on the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI**

**Neil Butcher**, IRCAI affiliate

UNESCO is working to harness opportunities in its fields of competence and has been leading reflections around pressing concerns related to AI's rapid development, from a Human Rights and Ethics perspective. IRCAI has produced an analysis of the feedback of all UNESCO Member States on the draft Recommendation, including leading the East European.

#### **IRCAI Ethics and Regulation**

**Katherine Evans**, IRCAI affiliate

**Gregor Strojic**, President CAHAI, Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence, Council of Europe

During 2020, IRCAI Programme Committees authored an Opinion Series. One report explores the question of the ethical uniqueness of emerging artificial intelligence which has not only received global interest, but also requires an urgent and global response. Through our experts we give an insight into the work in ethics, trustworthiness, bias, in a number of international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD, Council of Europe.

## Agenda: DAY 2 - Tuesday, March 30, 2021

### 16:00 - 16:25 IRCAI Datasets – from Citizen Science to African languages (presentations)

#### Cracking the Language Barrier for a Multilingual Africa-Low Resource African Languages

**Kathleen Siminyu**, Regional Coordinator, AI4D Africa  
IRCAI together with Knowledge 4 All Foundation is working in the framework of UNESCO's MLA 2 Building knowledge societies through ICTs by enabling universal access to, and preservation of, information and knowledge, where UNESCO, IDRC, and GIZ support a Fellowship for Low Resource African Languages in order to develop datasets and strengthen capacities and innovation potential by creating data challenges.

#### Ethics in action

**Blaz Zupan**, IRCAI industrial partner

IRCAI is working with the University of Ljubljana on the citizen science aspect of AI training with Orange, a machine learning and data mining suite for data analysis through Python scripting and visual programming. Here we report on introducing and designing new features in the system enabling ethical components that are based and suggested in the UNESCO Recommendation in Ethics of AI. Orange is being used by experienced users and programmers, as well as for students of data mining.

### 16:30 - 16:55 IRCAI Funding and Innovation Programme (presentations)

#### Social Impact Bonds

**Daniel Miodovnik**, Social Finance

IRCAI AI Social Impact Bonds: the Center will introduce the idea of the social impact bond as a mechanism for quick and effective governmental investment in AI companies coming from research.

#### AI policies around the world

**Mark Minevich**, IRCAI Chief Digital Strategist

Whilst IRCAI is involved in research backing UNESCO and other IGO publications, and its own data driven analytics platform, it also has via its Business Council an insight into industrial perspectives on which governments are leading in their rollout and infrastructure development in AI to enable different stakeholders in creating an effective AI sector.

#### AI Global Observatory

**Marko Grobelnik**, CTO at IRCAI

IRCAI plan is to build "SDG Observatory", an online system to observe UN SDG indicators along diverse dimensions: through media, academia, economy and other data sources to complement the official SDG classification. The goal is to provide an accurate up-to-date picture of what is the status of SDGs, how they interrelate and where they evolve.

### 16:55 - 17:00 Launch of AI in Africa: State of Play

**Patti Kachidza**, IRCAI affiliate

The paper is one of the reports in the AI4D Africa programme. Its focus has been to review the state of play of AI technologies in Africa in the areas of innovation, capacity building, policy, and infrastructure. After describing the state of play, it invites all African stakeholders and calls them to action to focus on the key activities required for Africa to position itself to better harness responsible AI technologies to tackle some of its critical challenges, and even become a leading voice on steering the African AI agenda.

### 17:00 - 17:05 Concluding remarks

**prof John Shawe-Taylor**, Executive Director, IRCAI

With your participation and the feedback we received after our launch event, we remain open to various organizations, the African Union, the European Commission and other partners, most especially of course UNESCO, but also to individuals and research groups who wish to join our global partnership to work together towards these ambitious goals. We are committed to exploring further funding mechanisms that will enable such collaborations and create the synergies that will give our network an unstoppable momentum.

## **IRCAI TEAM**

### **John Shawe-Taylor**

Director & Unesco Chair In AI

### **Davor Orlič**

Chief Operation Officer

### **Mihajela Črnko**

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### **Matej Posinković**

AI Researcher

### **Matej Kovačič**

AI Researcher

### **Joao Pita Costa**

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### **Domen Hrovat**

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Founder Quintaum & Challenge: Future

### **Melina Sánchez Montañés**

Managing Director, Innovation Fund

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Chair in AI and Assistive Technologies

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UNESCO Chair in teacher training  
technologies with OER, PC Chair in AI  
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OER and Open Learning, PC Chair in AI  
and Circular Economy

### **Delmiro Fernandez-Reyes**

Professor of Biomedical Computing at  
UCL, PC Chair in AI and Healthcare

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IRCAI has National Contact points in the following 62 countries:

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Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Tanzania

### Arab States

Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Maldives, Oman, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates

### Asia and the Pacific

China, India, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, South Korea, Mongolia, PR Lao, Taiwan

### Europe and North America

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium (Flemish part), Bosnia and Hercegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America

### Latin America and the Caribbean

Brazil, Colombia, Mexico



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



International Research Centre  
on Artificial Intelligence  
under the auspices of UNESCO

*The IRCAI team and partners thank you for your participation in the launch event and for your interest in the development of IRCAI.*

<http://ircai.org>