



# ALGORITHMIC TRANSPARENCY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: WHY IT IS IMPORTANT AND WHY IT IS A KEY ASPECT OF RESPONSIBLE AI AND DATA GOVERNANCE

## WHAT IS ALGORITHMIC TRANSPARENCY

Algorithmic transparency lacks a universally accepted definition, but **as a principle** it involves allowing internal or external actors access to algorithm information for evaluation and accountability.

**As a standard**, algorithmic transparency refers to expected levels of accessibility of information and explainability of such information. Explainability, refers to whether the outcomes of an algorithm (decisions that were reached) can be explained to and understood by a human.

**As a governance instrument**, it arises within the broader context of **public interest regulation**. The principle derives from the democratic right to know and access information. In this case, information about the algorithms that affect people directly and indirectly. It seeks **compliance with specific transparency principles, standards, or rules**. Understanding algorithmic transparency in the context of a set of sometimes competing rights, such as privacy or intellectual property, is important in recognising tensions between competing regulatory instruments.

With democratic governments required to provide access to information and with many of them at regional, national and local levels having committed to **Open Government**, they are more susceptible to calls for transparency and greater access to information.

*Given the expansion of government adoption of automated decision-making systems, states have an obligation to apply algorithmic transparency principles, standards, and rules in their use of algorithms and opportunity to provide role models to algorithm-driven industries where they are demanding greater public accountability.*

## WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

- **Enables other fundamental rights:** education, health, due process;
- **Enables principles of responsible, ethical, and trustworthy IA:** accountability, explainability;
- **Enables social and political accountability and citizen oversight;**
- **Contributes to all the pillars of Open Government initiatives;**
- **Informs public decision-making: can inspire other public bodies:** inspires public bodies create algorithmic solutions;
- **Enables more efficient use of public resources:** states have the opportunity to better understand how they are investing in algorithmic systems and to avoid duplicating costs

## SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT DELIVERABLES FOR 2024

- **State-of-the-art report:** A review of the algorithmic transparency instruments (reactive and proactive) used and proposed worldwide. Given that repositories of public algorithms have gained prominence among governments, emphasis is needed on this instrument.
- **Case studies of repositories**
- **Recommendations for governments**

## HOW IT RELATES TO RESPONSIBLE AI

The work of the Responsible AI (RAI) Working Group is grounded in a vision of AI that is **human-centred, fair, equitable, inclusive and respectful of human rights and democracy**, and that aims at contributing positively to the public good. If those conditions are respected, then it is possible to qualify an AI system as trustworthy. Since **trust is created through transparency**, it is essential that governments be transparent in their use of algorithms.

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## HOW IT RELATES TO DATA GOVERNANCE

**Data is the backbone of AI systems.** A large part of algorithmic governance is about making transparent and explainable the treatment of data by algorithms that have until recently been black boxes to data regulators and citizens. **Data sovereignty** requires that citizens know if and how their data is being used in AI systems. Transparency of algorithms is an aspect of **ethical and just data practices** that can only be proven with sufficient transparency. The GPAI Data Governance Working Group has been working on tools to achieve better transparency for a responsible and just deployment of AI technologies in the public sector.

## ABOUT GPAI

The Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) is a multi-stakeholder initiative which aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice on AI by supporting **cutting-edge research and applied activities on AI-related priorities**. Built around shared commitment to the OECD Recommendation on Artificial Intelligence, it brings together expertise from science, industry, civil society, governments, international organizations and academia to foster international cooperation.

*The project is co-led by Juan David Gutiérrez (Universidad de los Andes) and Alison Gillwald (Research ICT Africa).*