

Parliamentary action on AI webinar series

Parliamentary oversight of AI: Early experiences and lessons learned

20 May 2026



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Key takeaways

On 20 May 2026, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) hosted a [webinar](#) on the theme *Parliamentary oversight of AI: Early experiences and lessons learned*. It was the first webinar in the *Parliamentary action on AI* series, which examines how parliaments are addressing the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) through their core functions, and aims to facilitate exchanges and peer learning between parliamentarians and staff working on similar issues. In their oversight role, parliaments worldwide are beginning to scrutinize government use of AI, oversee public procurement of AI systems, ensure regulatory bodies are working effectively, and press for accountability for the private-sector actors developing and deploying AI. However, this is a technical, complex and fast-evolving area of parliamentary engagement.

The webinar brought together two parliaments with active but very different oversight programmes on AI. The first was the Parliament of South Africa, where a long-standing portfolio committee is scrutinizing the development of a national AI policy, working with regulators, and building parliament's own capacity to legislate on and use AI. The second was the Parliament of Ireland, which has established a dedicated cross-cutting committee on AI to scrutinize the adoption of the technology across all government departments and to foster greater understanding of AI within parliament and among the public. The two case studies illustrated that models for how parliaments organize oversight of AI can differ, but also pointed to emerging good practice, lessons learned and certain shared challenges.

The webinar followed the IPU resolution [The impact of AI on democracy, human rights and the rule of law](#) (adopted by the 149th IPU Assembly, held in Geneva, Switzerland, in October 2024), the [Kuala Lumpur Declaration: Parliaments and responsible AI](#) (adopted at the parliamentary conference *The Role of Parliament in Shaping the Future of Responsible AI*, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in November 2025), and the motion [Advancing parliamentary action on artificial intelligence](#) (adopted by the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights at the 152nd IPU Assembly, held in Istanbul, Türkiye, in April 2026). The programme of work aims to support parliaments in giving effect to these instruments in taking action on AI in their lawmaking, oversight and public engagement roles, as well as through international exchange and capacity-building on AI within parliaments.

Resources:

- Video of the webinar on IPU's [YouTube channel on artificial intelligence](#)
- IPU resolution [The impact of AI on democracy, human rights and the rule of law](#) (October 2024)
- [Kuala Lumpur Declaration: Parliaments and responsible AI](#) (November 2025)

- Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights motion [Advancing parliamentary action on artificial intelligence](#) (April 2026)

The wider landscape: Why parliamentary oversight matters now

Opening the discussion, Mr. Alexander Kriebitz (IPU) set out the broader context. AI development and adoption are progressing at a pace without precedent in earlier technology transitions. Large language models are reshaping how citizens access information and knowledge. AI is being integrated into physical systems – robotics, drones, autonomous vehicles – and into neuroscience applications such as brain-machine interfaces, raising questions of safety, privacy, cognitive rights and human dignity. AI researchers warn that capabilities are outstripping research on AI’s societal effects.

This is the gap that parliamentary oversight is uniquely placed to address: bringing democratic scrutiny to bear on a technology whose development is moving faster than the evidence about its consequences, ensuring that the choices made about AI are debated openly, and ensuring that those making those choices – including governments, regulators and private actors – are held to account.

Parliament of South Africa: Oversight of a national AI policy under development

Ms. Khusela Sangoni (member of the National Assembly of South Africa and Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies) set out three opening propositions: AI governance is an emerging field, with around 95 of 195 United Nations Member States having adopted national AI strategies, and with clear North–South disparities; the priority issues themselves shift quickly, with data sovereignty, algorithmic bias and other concerns rising and falling on the agenda; and parliaments cannot effectively regulate what they do not yet fully understand. Together, these points call for a tempered approach – neither rushing to legislate nor delaying engagement – and further underscore the importance of parliamentary oversight.

In South Africa, the national conversation on AI gained momentum through the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution in 2022, which identified AI as a strategic priority and recommended a national policy, ethical governance frameworks, institutional coordination and investment in skills. The process was deliberately multi-stakeholder in nature, involving government, labour representatives, academia, business and civil society. This approach reflected a core lesson: that AI governance is a societal question, not purely one of technology.

Within parliament, the Committee has been actively scrutinizing the development of a national AI policy. The proposed policy framework would establish a regulatory authority for organizational compliance, an AI ethics board, an ombudsperson’s office, an AI safety hub, and an insurance fund to process cases and, where appropriate, compensate citizens harmed by algorithmic systems where legal liability is uncertain. A draft of the policy was released for public comment in early 2026 and subsequently withdrawn after public inputs, including feedback noting that sections were written using AI. As Ms. Sangoni noted, this experience underlined an important principle: the governance of AI must embody the values it seeks to protect – transparency, accountability, consultation and public trust.

In its oversight role, the Committee identified that existing legislation, including the Protection of Personal Information Act and the Cybercrimes Act, was not designed for AI-specific harms such as algorithmic bias, automated decision-making and synthetic content. The Committee is working closely with existing regulators, including the Film and Publication Board, and intends to amend foundational legislation, notably the Electronic Communications Act. In parallel, parliament is building its own institutional capacity to oversee AI, including how it is used within parliament. A foundational training programme is being rolled out for MPs under the leadership of the Deputy Speaker. In addition, AI applications are being explored in various areas – bill tracking, multilingual interpretation, automated transcription, document management, research support and citizen engagement – supported by a bespoke tool, GovTrack.

Key takeaway: Parliamentary oversight of AI cannot wait for perfect regulation. Parliaments must engage while policy frameworks are still evolving, using existing laws where they apply, building internal expertise, and keeping AI governance firmly people-centred and grounded in constitutional values.

Parliament of Ireland: A dedicated cross-cutting committee on AI

Mr. James Geoghegan (member of the House of Representatives of Ireland and Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence) described a different institutional approach. In November 2024, the Parliament of Ireland established a special stand-alone committee dedicated exclusively to AI, with an initial mandate of two-and-a-half years. Unlike most parliamentary committees, which mirror individual government departments, the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence is cross-cutting: it has oversight over the use and adoption of AI across all departments, and a remit to foster greater understanding of the technology both within parliament and among the public. To inform that work, the Committee has consulted widely with stakeholders including youth, disability and justice organizations, and has organized its work thematically around AI in democracy, education, justice and public services, as well as the issue of images, deepfakes and consent.

The Irish context is important, as some of the world's leading AI companies have a significant presence in the country. Ireland will also hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2026 – a position from which it intends to shape EU-level developments, particularly the implementation of the EU AI Act. The national approach to implementing the EU AI Act in Ireland is also notable: rather than designating a single regulatory authority, the government has opted for a devolved model under which 15 sectoral regulators exercise competence in their respective domains, with a new, stand-alone body – the AI Office of Ireland – providing coordination, expertise and support. The Committee's work has mirrored that approach, drawing in evidence from across government and from external stakeholders.

The Committee published its first interim report in December 2025, with recommendations including: strengthening the institutional capacity of the regulatory bodies that will hold competence over AI; establishing an AI Skills Observatory to complement the AI Office of Ireland; identifying skill gaps and labour market disruption risks; and introducing provisions on privacy, data protection and copyright. Externally, the Committee draws heavily on the AI Advisory Council, a non-statutory body of academics established in 2024, and will work closely with the permanent advisory council to be established alongside the new AI Office of Ireland.

Internally, MPs use Microsoft Copilot under controlled conditions for the safe institutional application of AI.

Key takeaway: A dedicated, cross-sectoral committee provides a “helicopter view” of AI across government, generates expertise among legislators and supports public understanding. The early conclusions from the Parliament of Ireland are that AI scrutiny is ongoing work and that a permanent committee model may be the most appropriate long-term institutional arrangement for oversight of AI.

Emerging principles for parliamentary oversight of AI

The case studies, taken together with interventions from MPs and staff in Africa, the Arab region, Asia and Europe, pointed to a set of shared principles for how parliaments can approach the oversight of AI. The list below reflects the themes that ran through the session.

- **Treat AI oversight as a continuous exercise.** AI is moving faster than most regulatory systems. Oversight should therefore be proactive and ongoing across the term of a parliament, with scope to revisit issues as the technology and its impact evolve. Even without a comprehensive AI law in place, parliaments can scrutinize how government and private-sector actors are developing and using AI, hold inquiries on emerging issues and use that evidence base to shape future legislation.
- **Use existing laws as a starting point.** Parliaments generally already have legal frameworks that apply, in part, to AI: data protection, cybercrime, electronic communications, equality and competition law. Parliaments can begin by mapping where these apply, where they fall short and where new legislation is needed.
- **Build parliament’s own expertise on AI.** Effective oversight requires institutional capacity inside parliament itself, among both MPs and staff. Foundational training, specialist advisers and access to external expertise (academic councils, research services, civil society) are all part of the picture.
- **Ensure oversight is informed by public engagement.** AI governance is a societal question. Parliaments are uniquely placed to bring civil society, academia, industry and affected communities into a public conversation and to ensure that AI policy is shaped by, and accountable to, the people it affects.
- **Pay attention to cybersecurity as part of AI oversight.** AI is changing the cybersecurity landscape, both as a defensive tool and as a vector for attack. Parliaments should engage with national cybersecurity authorities and integrate cyber considerations into their AI work.
- **Anchor work in international exchange.** Parliaments are not navigating this alone. Peer exchange through the IPU, as well as through bilateral and regional channels, accelerates learning and helps identify shared concerns. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration provides a common platform for parliamentary action.

From the open discussion

The open discussion drew interventions from parliaments in Bahrain, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Tunisia and elsewhere. A more detailed Q&A record is available as a companion document. The themes below give a sense of where the conversation went.

Balancing regulation and innovation, and avoiding the regulatory dilemma

Mr. Shaik I. Subrathie (member of the National Assembly of South Africa and member of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies) asked how parliaments

avoid stifling innovation when regulating AI, drawing on perspectives shared at a 2025 global technology summit in India. Mr. Geoghegan noted that EU Member States had, on balance, concluded that more should be done to support innovation, with simplification of major laws under way, but that protections against harms – notably online child sexual abuse material and adult non-consensual intimate imagery – were being strengthened, not weakened. Protecting fundamental values does not require innovation to be sacrificed, but it does require clarity about which lines are non-negotiable. Mr. Ali A. Ahmed (Parliament of Kenya), citing his country’s Artificial Intelligence Bill 2026, framed a related dilemma: how parliaments avoid both legislating too early on a moving target, and waiting too long. The discussion pointed to elements of an answer: starting with the existing legal base; using inquiries and hearings to keep the policy conversation going; building flexibility into new legislation; and learning from peers.

Capacity, context and the use of AI in parliaments

Ms. Annelie Lotriet (Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa) described work to apply the IPU’s [Maturity Framework for AI in Parliaments](#) and to break down silos between the staff and parliamentarian sides of the institution, including using AI to handle large volumes of public input in oversight processes. Ms. Maryam Aldhain (member of the Council of Representatives of Bahrain and member of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee) drew on doctoral research to underline the importance of cultural and legal context in AI implementation and the role of public education and awareness as a foundation for AI policy. Several participants also raised the broader question of how parliaments use AI in their own work, which is the focus of the IPU Centre for Innovation in Parliament’s complementary programme of work, including the [Guidelines for AI in parliaments](#) and the AI Maturity Framework.

Next steps

This webinar was the first in the *Parliamentary action on AI* series, which supports the implementation of the 13 recommendations of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, providing a platform for parliaments to exchange experience and access expertise on AI policy issues.

- **Second webinar:** [Tackling AI-generated sexualized deepfakes](#), scheduled for 25 June 2026 (16:00–17:00, Geneva, CEST). An IPU issue brief on non-consensual intimate imagery will be published in advance of the webinar.
- **Geneva AI Governance Week (6–10 July 2026):** Three events in Geneva – the Global Dialogue on AI Governance, the WSIS Forum 2026 and the AI for Good Global Summit – at which the IPU is supporting parliamentary engagement. MPs and staff planning to attend are encouraged to be in contact in advance.

Learn more

To learn more about the IPU’s Parliamentary Action on AI Policy programme, visit ipu.org/AI or contact the IPU Secretariat at ai-policy@ipu.org.

This document was prepared on the basis of the IPU webinar Parliamentary oversight of AI: Early experiences and lessons learned, held on 20 May 2026 as the first webinar in the Parliamentary action on AI series. The webinar was moderated by Mr. Alex Read (AI Policy Consultant, IPU) and featured presentations by Ms. Khusela Sangoni (member of the National Assembly of South Africa and Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Communications and Digital Technologies) and Mr. James Geoghegan (member of the House of Representatives of Ireland and Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence).