Executive summary of the External Auditor's Report

Use of Artificial Intelligence at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

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Objective

The objective of the performance audit was to assess the extent to which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has implemented effective and efficient internal governance and operational practices for the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

Why this matters

In today's swiftly advancing technological landscape, AI serves as a transformative force with the potential to substantially enhance decision-making, efficiency, and innovation. However, these opportunities are accompanied by challenges, including ethical considerations, data privacy and other legal and digital security concerns, and the necessity for transparency and accountability. Through the assessment of the OECD's governance and operational practices regarding the use of AI, the audit provides insights into whether AI is being utilised responsibly in alignment with the Organisation's core values and whether opportunities to harness AI's potential are being explored.

General assessment

The External Auditor’s assessment is that the OECD has taken important steps to harness the benefits of AI use while managing its associated risks, as evidenced by the development and dissemination of the ‘Secretary General’s Guidelines for Staff on the Use of Generative AI’ on 5 June 2023, followed by an update on 29 April 2024, and the establishment of a Secretariat task force to develop a comprehensive strategy for the use of AI at the Organisation.

Building on the work undertaken, the audit identified areas of opportunity for further enhancement, such as clarifying roles and responsibilities across the AI lifecycle; issuing guidance on the disclosure of AI-assisted outputs; strengthening capabilities through targeted, role-specific training; fostering a supportive culture with clearer signposting for concerns; and improving access to approved, high-performing tools while consolidating guidance into a single, user-friendly hub. In view of these identified areas for improvement, the External Auditor has made specific recommendations.

Key findings and recommendations

The OECD has taken important steps to establish AI governance by approving and disseminating the ‘Secretary General’s Guidelines for Staff on the Use of Generative AI’ on 5 June 2023 and subsequently providing an updated version on 29 April 2024. These updated guidelines signify a shift towards a more structured and strategic adoption of AI, supported by senior management engagement, an external benchmarking, and the creation of a task force to define an organisation-wide AI and digital governance framework. However, challenges remain. While clear performance evaluation frameworks and measurable objectives for systems with AI components were applied in some cases, such as the AI-powered translation application, in others, like the recruitment screening application, the initial testing of the AI features did not warrant a more in-depth setting of measurable objectives and indicators at that stage. Furthermore, although progress has been made with the creation of a task force, formal roles and responsibilities across the AI lifecycle have not yet been defined. Overall, while the OECD has laid the groundwork for responsible AI governance, it now needs to formalise roles, responsibilities, and performance measurement mechanisms to ensure accountability, risk mitigation, and continuous improvement.

In view of the above findings, the External Auditor recommended that, as the OECD develops its AI governance framework, it ensures that specific roles and responsibilities across all stages of the AI system's lifecycle are clearly assigned, along with clear procedures for assessing the achievement of AI-related goals and objectives.

Although the 'Secretary-General's Guidelines for Staff on the Use of Generative AI' emphasise transparency by advising staff to appropriately disclose the use of generative AI, the expected guidance on disclosing AI tool usage in published work has not yet been issued. As a result, staff are left without the necessary guidance to ensure compliance with these requirements.

In view of the above findings, the External Auditor recommended that the OECD develop and implement guidelines for the disclosure of outputs that are generated or assisted by AI.

The audit revealed that AI adoption at the OECD is varied, influenced by generational and role-specific factors, with early-career staff and certain functions reporting higher usage. While most staff recognise the benefits of AI, particularly in terms of time savings and improved drafting quality, its potential in areas such as data analysis and visualisation is not yet fully leveraged. AI adoption remains at early maturity stages, with only a small share of cases perceived as fully deployed. Cluster analysis further highlights three user profiles – engaged adopters, sceptics, and disengaged staff – indicating varying levels of trust, familiarity, and perceived relevance. Training presents an opportunity for enhancement, as nearly half of staff reported not having taken AI training in the past year. There is strong interest in learning about OECD-approved tools, large language models, responsible AI use, and practical applications for data analysis and drafting. Preferences lean toward structured, interactive training formats such as internal workshops, complemented by flexible self-paced learning and mentoring.

In connection with this, the External Auditor recommended that the OECD strengthen staff capability to use AI responsibly through role and task-specific training, supported by practical guidance and inclusive capacity-building measures that address differences in access and confidence.

The perception of awareness of AI risks is high, with data security and output quality being primary concerns. A significant majority of personnel validate AI outputs before use; however, 27.3% do not engage in collaborative practices, suggesting possible silos. Although some staff are unclear about whom to contact for AI-related issues, confidence in reporting AI-related concerns stands at 73.6%. The thematic analysis indicates that while OECD personnel are eager to adopt AI to improve productivity, information processing, and written communication, challenges such as access to high-performing tools, uneven availability across directorates, and unclear guidance exist, although efforts are underway to address these issues.

The OECD personnel currently utilise a wide variety of task-specific AI tools, such as coding assistants and translation and transcription applications. However, some staff members have stated that they rely on personal subscriptions. Feedback highlights a strong appetite for practical use cases, but also concerns related to hesitancy, risk-averse attitudes, and the lack of a coherent, Organisation-wide strategy. While the commitment of OECD personnel to responsible AI use is evident, realising AI's full potential requires clearer internal communication, enhanced governance and wider access to secure and effective AI tools and fostering communities of practice to share expertise and use cases.

Considering the aforementioned findings, the External Auditor recommended that the OECD continues to promote a culture of responsible AI use by: (1) strengthening communication around AI use, recognising responsible AI initiatives; (2) appointing AI focal points within directorates to support peer learning, promote adoption, and share lessons; (3) monitoring and documenting emerging use cases for the main types of staff's work activities; (4) supporting safe experimentation in line with OECD corporate policies and guidelines, in particular those related to digital security and the mitigation of legal risks; and (5) scaling up the most successful AI applications across the Organisation.

The audit revealed that OECD personnel encounter challenges in the effective and responsible adoption of AI. While most personnel use AI tools, approximately 13% report not using them, primarily due to lack of familiarity, privacy and security risks or limited perceived benefits. Among this group, long-tenured staff

often cite knowledge gaps, while early-career staff see fewer relevant use cases. Active AI users encounter issues such as limited access to high-performing tools, unclear governance and guidance, lack of tailored training, and risks related to data security and confidentiality.

In light of the above findings, the External Auditor recommended that the OECD strengthen AI access and provide clear guidance for responsible AI use within available resources, while taking into account relevant corporate risks, by: (1) assessing and addressing disparities in access to approved AI tools across directorates; (2) considering to expand access to secure, high-performing AI tools that meet staff needs and mission-critical tasks and that would be compatible with OECD corporate policies and guidelines, in particular those related to legal and digital security; (3) consolidating existing AI-related resources – including an approved AI tools list, usage guidelines, FAQs, and practical examples – into a central, user-friendly digital hub; and (4) disseminating further that the use of non-approved tools is not allowed under the guidelines.