

Global Future Council on Data Equity

DATA EQUITY DEFINITION
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Defining Data Equity

The World Economic Forum's [Global Future Council on Data Equity](#) addresses the societal impact of data and how emerging data ecosystems and technologies are perpetuating existing power dynamics, and creating new ones. Building on [Data Equity: Foundational Concepts for Generative AI](#), the Council has advanced a definition for data equity, and in Fall 2024 will publish a framework for inquiry that stakeholders can use to reflect and advance data equity in their industry or organization.

Context and definition of data equity

Living in an era where automated decision-making systems based on algorithms and data are increasingly common brings significant impacts on individuals, society and human rights. Therefore, those designing and using such systems must carefully consider the potential social consequences. This is why advancing data equity is essential.

Data equity can be defined as the **shared responsibility for fair data practices that respect and promote human rights, opportunity and dignity**. Data equity is a fundamental responsibility that requires **strategic, participative, inclusive, and proactive collective and coordinated action** to create a world where **data-based systems** promote **fair, just and beneficial outcomes for all** individuals, groups and communities. It recognizes that **data practices** – including collection, curation, processing, retention, analysis, stewardship and responsible application of resulting insights – significantly impact **human rights** and the resulting **access to** social, economic, natural and cultural **resources and opportunities**.

Data equity seeks to address historical and current imbalances in the use and access of datasets in various domains and for decision-making in algorithmic and AI systems and their societal impact.

Data equity can be achieved by the design of data uses, practices and governance to promote just and fair outcomes for people whose human rights are directly or indirectly impacted by these systems. It is important that the focus of data studies shifts from just what “data is” to what “data does”. The proposed definition, while covering the whole data cycle, centres especially on the impact side of data governance and practices.

Data equity permeates the data lifecycle: How data are collected and constructed (input data equity); made available (data access equity); representative and relevant for the context and purpose being used (data representation equity); processed and interpreted (process or algorithmic data equity); used to generate and inform outcomes (outcome data equity); and being distributed and shared with individuals and communities that have contributed with it (data value equity).

Data equity can be advanced through corrective and proactive actions:

- **Corrective actions** include addressing historical (and current) biases in datasets, such as biased depictions or underrepresentation of marginalized groups, and the ability to control (through opt-in or opt-out) one's data being used to ensure human agency, autonomy and right to privacy.
- **Proactive actions** include involving those represented in the data in defining the data itself, ensuring representative datasets by collecting data in a way that allows for different groups to be identified and represented, sharing data openly and transparently, ensuring the systems that leverage data are transparent, legible and participative with respect to those impacted by the systems, and drive verifiably fair and just outcomes, and ensuring the ability of everyone to benefit from the value created by the use of the data they have contributed to.

It is crucial to include data equity from the beginning and in all stages of the data pipeline, as quality and equity issues that have been neglected at earlier stages cannot simply be remedied at a later stage. Data collectors must also consider the possible subsequent (re)use of their data by other actors in potentially harmful ways.

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The World Economic Forum's Network of Global Future Councils is the world's foremost multistakeholder and interdisciplinary knowledge network dedicated to promoting innovative thinking to shape a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future.

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