

# Al & PPPs

Unlocking sustainable, resilient infrastructure for the SDGs

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

POLICY BRIEF NO. 1

NOVEMBER 2025



The purpose¹ of the Policy Brief Series is to highlight the opportunities and the challenges that Al poses to PPPs and infrastructure throughout the lifecycle of projects. Lower transaction costs for governments and an expedited PPP process would represent a transformational leap in the efficiency and effectiveness of PPPs in support of the SDGs. But such efficiencies need to be measured against the risks associated with the implementation of AI in PPPs and infrastructure projects.

The Policy Briefs are drafted by leading experts under the auspices of the UNECE secretariat and are supplemented by regular webinars or podcasts organised by the UNECE secretariat, engaging various experts from governments, private sector, academia, civil society, and international organisations.

The Policy Brief Series will address both the pros and the cons in implementing AI in PPPs and infrastructure projects, including how AI is already utilised in projects and its potential to predict infrastructure needs, generate reports and analyses data.

The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is redefining our world. It has the potential to bring about great benefits by addressing some of the most pressing challenges humanity faces today. From combating climate change to enhancing infrastructure resilience, Al technologies can play a pivotal role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By leveraging the transformative power of AI, we can accelerate progress toward a more equitable, sustainable and prosperous future for all.

As we explore the vast potential of AI to address global challenges, it is clear that AI is also an essential enabler for successful Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in advancing the SDGs. By integrating AI into PPP frameworks, we can enhance efficiency, transparency and decisionmaking processes, thereby optimising project outcomes. By harnessing Al's capabilities, PPPs can become more adaptive and impactful, driving progress toward the SDGs with greater effectiveness and inclusivity.

As we do so, we must proceed responsibly, safely and with ethical integrity. To deploy AI systems within PPP projects which align with our values and societal goals, it is imperative to understand Al's complexities and potential impacts.

To achieve this, sharing and disseminating information and insights about AI is crucial. Cultivating a culture of learning and collaboration is vital to empowering stakeholders with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions.

This is the goal of the UNECE's AI & PPPs Policy Brief Series: to provide resources that bridge knowledge gaps in the use of AI in PPP and infrastructure projects, equipping stakeholders with further guidance in navigating the opportunities and complexities of Al.

The key objectives of the series, drafted by leading experts under the auspices of the UNECE secretariat, include:

- showcasing how to leverage AI to expedite PPP processes, lower transaction costs and enhance efficiency and effectiveness across the project lifecycle, in support of the SDGs;
- highlighting how to balance the benefits of Al against the possible risks and challenges, ensuring Al applications in PPPs are reliable and contribute positively to achieving sustainable, resilient infrastructure; and
- exploring how AI is currently used in PPP and infrastructure projects, as well as its potential for the future.

We stand at a pivotal moment. Artificial Intelligence is developing at warp speed, transforming our world in ways we are only beginning to comprehend...<sup>2</sup>

> **António Guterres UN Secretary-General**

The series is comprised of concise briefs, along with associated webinar discussions, on relevant topics to provide guidance on effectively integrating AI into PPPs, enhancing their capacity to meet stakeholder needs and drive sustainable development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Embracing AI and digitalization in PPPs is crucial for driving sustainable, resilient infrastructure, in order to achieve the SDGs and the goals of the UN's Pact for the Future, through enhanced productivity, efficiency, inclusivity, transparency and accountability.

#### PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

To align with the SDGs, PPPs must meet five desirable outcomes, which prioritize "people" and "planet" along with "prosperity" in meeting public infrastructure and service needs. These outcomes are:

- (i) Access and Equity;
- (ii) Economic Effectiveness and Fiscal Sustainability;
- (iii) Environmental Sustainability and Resilience;
- (iv) Replicability; and
- (v) Stakeholder Engagement.

When implementing this approach spearheaded by UNECE,3 particular attention needs to be paid to the rights of vulnerable people by adopting a human rights-based approach to PPPs and infrastructure, particularly by considering the specific needs and rights of marginalized communities. This ensures that the benefits of PPP projects are inclusive and accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, location, or ability. Prioritizing a human rightsbased approach and key SDG outcomes in a standardized assessment not only enhances the attractiveness of PPPs to lenders but also facilitates a swift evaluation of their capacity to meet stakeholder needs.

In this context, PPPs for the SDGs can play a pivotal role by leveraging AI and digital transformation to drive sustainable development and advance progress toward the SDGs.

#### THE UN PACT FOR THE FUTURE & THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT

The UN Pact for the Future<sup>4</sup> (the Pact), adopted on 22 September 2024, outlines an ambitious agenda to tackle the world's most urgent challenges, including environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic development, with a focus on achieving the SDGs by 2030. The Pact recognizes the potential impact of PPPs to this effort, leveraging private sector expertise, efficiency, and capital.

The Pact highlights that digital and emerging technologies, including AI, play a significant role as enablers of sustainable development and offer huge potential for progress for the benefit of people and planet today and in the future.

To realize this potential and manage the risks through enhanced international cooperation by promoting an inclusive, responsible and sustainable digital future, the Pact contains a "Global Digital Compact".5

The goal of the Global Digital Compact is to create an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all, achieving it through the following objectives:

- (i) Close all digital divides and accelerate progress across the SDGs:
- (ii) Expand inclusion in and benefits from the digital economy for all;
- (iii) Foster an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promote human rights;
- (iv) Advance responsible, equitable and interoperable data governance approaches; and
- (v) Enhance international governance of AI for the benefit of humanity.

Digital technologies are dramatically transforming our world. They offer immense potential benefits for the wellbeing and advancement of people and societies, and for our planet. They hold out the promise of accelerating the achievement of the SDGs.6

**UN Global Digital Compact** 

#### THE SEVILLA COMMITMENT

The Sevilla Commitment, adopted at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (30 June - 3 July 2025), builds on the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact by recognizing the transformative potential of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in advancing the SDGs. It highlights the role of AI in strengthening financial systems, improving data governance, and expanding digital public infrastructure.

The Commitment notes that innovation in Al can modernize fiscal systems and public administration, enable financial inclusion through digital finance and fintech, and support innovation ecosystems and research capacity. It also underlines the importance of building institutional and human capacity to harness AI responsibly and inclusively, ensuring that its benefits are shared equitably across all countries.

When deployed responsibly and inclusively, AI, together with well-designed PPPs, can help mobilize sustainable investment, modernize fiscal governance, widen financial inclusion, and enable all countries to harness technology in pursuit of the SDGs.

#### **OVERVIEW OF THE AI & PPPs POLICY BRIEF SERIES**

The UNECE Policy Brief Series responds to the calls to action in the Pact, with its Global Digital Compact, and the Sevilla Commitment, by offering insights and guidance for governments, policymakers and industry leaders to enhance the implementation of PPP and infrastructure projects with the use of AI, ultimately supporting the achievement of the SDGs and contribute to closing the digital divide.

The series also supports the Global Digital Compact's call for strengthened digital cooperation and advancement of digital transformation by providing an overview of the benefits and the necessity of integrating AI into PPP and infrastructure projects, highlighting key considerations for implementation, and exploring the opportunities and challenges that may arise throughout the project lifecycle. The guidance and insights provided are designed to empower governments to proactively maximize the opportunities these technologies offer for sustainable progress.

Where possible, case studies and real-world examples are incorporated to illustrate successful applications of AI in PPP projects, offering practical lessons and strategies that can be adapted to various contexts. By showcasing these examples, the aim is to inspire innovative approaches and foster collaboration among stakeholders, driving forward the digital transformation agenda.

In addition to the publication of the policy briefs, the UNECE will host a series of webinars featuring the authors and experts in the field, to disseminate the insights further, foster a deeper understanding of the topics covered and encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Ultimately, this series aims to serve as a resource for those seeking to navigate the complexities of AI integration in infrastructure development, ensuring that projects are not only technologically advanced but also aligned with the SDGs.

# 3

## THE AI & PPPs LANDSCAPE

Al is one of the key issues facing the infrastructure industry today. It has the immense potential to accelerate progress across all SDGs and assist the industry to overcome some of our toughest challenges, including climate change, safety concerns, labour shortages and cost and schedule overruns. Al also carries risks which must be carefully considered, both before and during any utilization of Al systems. Without the appropriate safeguards in place, in addition to ethical and security considerations, Al risks widening the digital divide, further exacerbating poverty and productivity gaps.

As AI is a technology here to stay, and is developing at pace, it cannot be ignored. When considering how to operationalize responsible AI throughout project lifecycles, it is important for any PPP programme to recognise the wide-ranging and complex issues AI encompasses. The challenges are multifaceted and matters to consider include regulation and governance (which are outside the scope of this policy series), access to talent and training, environmental, data, availability and/or access to the infrastructure, as well as accounting for and accommodating technologies of the future.

The landscape is now rich with various papers, guides and toolkits available for Al implementation, usage, governance and security. **Annex A** sets out a number of these leading Al publications for reference.

This Policy Brief Series sits at the interface between those specific AI resources and the PPP lifecycle, offering insights and guidance to bridge between the technology and the practical application in infrastructure delivery.

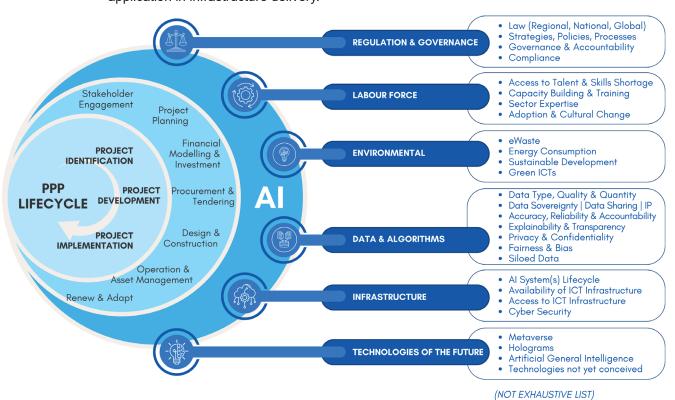


FIGURE 1: THE AI & PPPs LANDSCAPE

## FORTHCOMING POLICY BRIEFS

Al is emerging as a pivotal force in transforming the way infrastructure projects are conceived, planned and executed. This series explores the role of AI across various stages of infrastructure development, highlighting its potential to drive innovation, efficiency, resilience and sustainability, as well as the risks and challenges which must be considered. Each policy brief aims to equip policymakers, industry leaders and stakeholders with the knowledge and insights necessary to leverage AI responsibly and effectively. Upcoming policy briefs include:



### **POLICY BRIEF NO. 2** PROJECT PLANNING & PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

This policy brief looks at the transformative role of Al in enhancing decision-making processes during the identification and planning phases of infrastructure projects. For example, through AI and data-driven needs and risk assessments, benchmarking, forecasting, and environmental and scenario assessments, stakeholders can enhance the precision and efficiency of infrastructure development, ultimately leading to projects that are not only economically viable but also environmentally and socially responsible.



### **POLICY BRIEF NO. 3** FINANCIAL MODELLING & INVESTMENT

This policy brief explores the impact of AI on the development of sophisticated financial modelling for PPP and infrastructure projects. Al technologies offer unprecedented capabilities to enhance demand and revenue forecasting, refine pricing strategies, simulate and optimize portfolios and strengthen investment decision-making processes. By enabling data-driven, adaptive, and transparent modelling, Al has the potential to significantly improve financial resilience and investor confidence across the project lifecycle.



### **POLICY BRIEF NO. 4** STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & PUBLIC CONSULTATION

This policy brief examines the potential of AI to revolutionize communication and engagement strategies within PPP infrastructure projects. Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for the success of any project, and AI offers innovative solutions to facilitate better communication, collaboration, and transparency. By proactively addressing any challenges of data privacy, security and ethical concerns, and standardization of AI in specific sectors, AI can be harnessed to create more inclusive and transparent stakeholder engagement processes.



## **POLICY BRIEF NO. 5 PROCUREMENT & TENDERING**

This policy brief explores the use of AI in procurement strategies and tender evaluation. Al technologies offer powerful tools to streamline processes, enhance transparency, and improve decision-making, ultimately leading to more efficient and effective project outcomes. For example, by leveraging Al-driven insights, procurement teams can analyze vast amounts of data to identify optimal suppliers, assess market conditions, and predict future trends, as well as automate the analysis of bid submissions and proposals.

## **CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES**

As the integration of AI in PPP and infrastructure projects continues to evolve, there are a number of overarching themes that relate to the implementation of all AI systems throughout all stages of the project lifecycle.

This section highlights some of those cross-cutting challenges or topics that are integral to each policy brief. Due to the concise nature of these briefs, only those topics below which are uniquely pertinent to each specific area will be elaborated upon in forthcoming policy briefs. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that these challenges are universally relevant and should be considered throughout the implementation of AI in PPP projects.

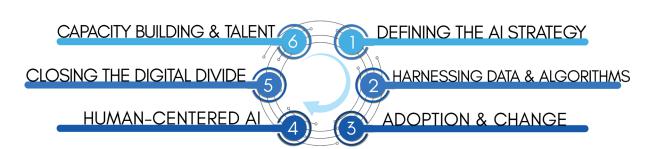


FIGURE 2: CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES SOURCE: UNECE



#### **DEFINING THE AI STRATEGY**

Any PPP project or programme should have a clear, written Al strategy, covering each stage of its development. The AI strategy should be accompanied by a comprehensive roadmap for implementation, adoption and review,8 as well as align with national and regional AI strategies in order to facilitate faster adoption and support sustainable development.

The aim of AI strategy is to optimize and monitor project performance and outcomes, enhance efficiency, reduce costs, facilitate better risk management and improve transparency and accountability through the strategic use of Al. The strategy should define clear output goals, needs and measurements for success. The Al strategy may sit alongside and complement the digital strategy, ICT strategy, data strategy and other policies around Al usage and governance.

Adopting an AI strategy for PPPs9 also requires a nuanced understanding of sector-specific needs and challenges. For example, in the healthcare sector, Al may be revolutionizing patient care through predictive analytics and personalized medicine, while in the transportation sector Al may be leveraged for optimizing traffic management and improving safety. Each project or programme is likely to have unique demands, and the AI strategy should be tailored accordingly. This sector-based approach ensures that AI applications are not only technologically advanced but also contextually relevant, maximizing their impact across diverse industries, driving substantial improvements in service delivery.



#### HARNESSING DATA & ALGORITHMS

Harnessing data for Al-driven decision making throughout the PPP lifecycle presents a multitude of challenges. To fully realize the potential of data-led strategies, stakeholders must address issues such as data quantity and quality, interoperability, ownership and governance to ensure that insights are accurate, ethical, and actionable. For example:

Data have become a cornerstone of development and the lifeblood of digital economies...<sup>10</sup>

UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) WSIS+20

- DATA TYPE, QUALITY AND QUANTITY: A primary concern is ensuring the type, quality, and quantity of data are sufficient to support accurate and reliable AI models. The principle of "rubbish in = rubbish out" underscores the critical importance of data integrity: poor data quality or insufficient data can lead to flawed insights and misguided decisions. This highlights the need for robust data collection and management practices, so that AI models are built on a foundation of high-quality, comprehensive data.
- ACCURACY, RELIABILTY & ACCOUNTABILITY: The integration of AI systems in PPP and infrastructure projects requires a strong emphasis on accuracy, reliability, and accountability to ensure successful outcomes. Accuracy in AI systems is paramount as it directly impacts decision-making processes and project efficiency. Reliability too is crucial as AI systems must consistently perform as expected, providing stakeholders with confidence in the technology's ability to support project goals. Equally, accountability is essential to maintain transparency and trust among all parties involved. This involves establishing clear guidelines and protocols for AI usage, ensuring that any errors or biases are promptly addressed, and that there is a mechanism for auditing AI decisions. Together, these elements can foster innovation, while safeguarding the interests of both public and private entities.
- EXPLAINABILITY & TRANSPARENCY: Explainability refers to the ability of AI systems to provide understandable and interpretable insights into their decision-making processes. This is crucial for stakeholders who need to comprehend how AI-derived conclusions are reached, ensuring that decisions are based on sound logic and data. Transparent AI systems can facilitate trust and collaboration between public and private entities by openly sharing methodologies, data sources, and algorithms used in the project. By prioritizing explainability and transparency in AI systems, projects can harness the full potential of AI technology while maintaining accountability and fostering stakeholder confidence.
- DATA SOVEREIGNTY & DATA REGULATION: Data sovereignty issues arise as governments
  and organizations navigate the complexities of data ownership and jurisdiction, particularly
  when data crosses international borders. In addition, adhering to data regulation frameworks
  is essential to comply with legal standards and protect privacy.
- INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: Issues surrounding data sovereignty and data regulation
  are closely tied to intellectual property concerns, where the rights to data and the insights
  derived from it must be clearly defined and protected. Governments should consider
  enabling robust intellectual property frameworks that safeguard innovation while balancing
  the interests of various stakeholders, ensuring that AI advancements are both legally sound
  and conducive to collaborative progress.
- PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY: Privacy and confidentiality are paramount in any infrastructure project. In addition to any commercial and political sensitivities, use of personal data in AI systems necessitates stringent measures to protect individuals' rights and comply with regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Governments and organizations involved in PPPs should consider prioritizing the establishment of comprehensive privacy protocols and data protection strategies to foster trust and transparency throughout the project lifecycle.

- FAIRNESS & BIAS: Designing AI systems that make fair, equitable decisions, free from bias, discrimination or favouritism, is essential in PPP and infrastructure projects as they have the potential to impact diverse communities and stakeholders. Bias in AI can arise from skewed data or flawed algorithms, leading to outcomes that disproportionately affect certain groups. Addressing issues of fairness and bias requires a proactive approach, including rigorous testing and validation of AI models, as well as continuous monitoring to detect and mitigate any unintended consequences. Prioritizing fairness in AI systems not only enhances the ethical standards of PPP projects but also fosters trust and collaboration among all parties involved.
- CYBERSECURITY: Cybersecurity is another critical challenge, as the increasing reliance on data makes systems vulnerable to breaches and attacks. Robust security protocols to safeguard data are essential to protect sensitive information and maintain the trust of all stakeholders involved in PPPs. By implementing advanced cybersecurity measures, including regular audits, encryption, and real-time monitoring, governments and organizations can mitigate risks and enhance the resilience and reliability of infrastructure projects.
- **DATA MONETIZATION:** Where governments manage revenues generated from Al-driven assets, robust policies and strategies are required to navigate data-related challenges highlighted in this section. For example, in smart cities, where AI technologies are used to optimize urban infrastructure and services, such as traffic management, energy distribution, waste management, and public safety, data privacy and security are paramount, as the systems collect and analyze vast amounts of personal and operational data. Comprehensive policies and strategies are essential to address such challenges and manage Al-driven assets ethically and efficiently.
- DATA SHARING: Data sharing and control of data involves addressing issues related to data silos, access and ownership. Governments should consider developing policies that facilitate data sharing while protecting proprietary information and understanding issues of liability, whilst ensuring equitable access, including cross-border data transfer. This includes establishing frameworks for data ownership and creating incentives for collaboration across sectors. This is reflected in the Sevilla Commitment's section on data, which emphasizes the need to strengthen collaboration between public and private sectors to improve data governance and development outcomes. Additionally, many organizations are unaware of the full extent of their data assets, underscoring the need for comprehensive data audits and management strategies to unlock the potential of existing data and drive informed decision-making.



We encourage leveraging innovation in non-traditional data sources... supported by public-private partnerships and specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) indicators. We will strengthen capacity for effective data-sharing and exchange, as appropriate, within government and between government and the private sector...<sup>11</sup>

The Sevilla Commitment



### **ADOPTION & CHANGE**

Al involves a shift in culture and change from traditional ways of working. This can prove challenging for some organizations. Public authorities need to create an enabling environment, promoting change and innovation, with leadership driving strategy. Al initiatives should be monitored in order that new AI systems, new processes and new ways of working are adopted and implemented responsibly. To do so, adoption plans should be formulated which satisfy the objectives of consistency, interoperability, efficiency and value for money.

Encouraging pilot projects and phased implementations can also help demonstrate the value of AI, gradually building confidence and paving the way for broader integration within PPPs. In addition, authorities should review the effectiveness and efficiency of any AI initiative, such that lessons learnt can be applied to subsequent projects.



#### **HUMAN-CENTRED AI**

Human-centred Al integrates human values, judgment, and oversight into the design and use of Al systems, ensuring technology augments rather than replaces expertise. Human responsibility in all stages of the Al lifecycle should be recognized and indicated in compliance procedures. In PPP and infrastructure projects, which are characterized by complex structures and long lifecycles, this approach is key to maintaining trust, accountability, and alignment with the public interest. Embedding human-in-the-loop mechanisms enhances decision-making, efficiency, and risk management while ensuring Al outputs reflect ethical, social, and environmental priorities throughout the project lifecycle.

Ethical principles of fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect for privacy, are essential for responsible use of AI in PPPs. Governance frameworks, audits, and contractual safeguards can uphold oversight and prevent misuse, while open communication and stakeholder engagement builds trust and confidence. Embedding these principles across the lifecycle supports sustainable, inclusive, and socially responsible infrastructure delivery.



#### **CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

Closing the digital divide requires equitable access to technology, connectivity, and digital skills for all, regardless of geography or socio-economic status. In PPP and infrastructure projects, this means investing in service networks, digital utilities, and data-sharing frameworks to reach underserved regions. Collaboration between the public and private sectors, supported by community initiatives, can deliver affordable internet, accessible devices, and digital literacy, empowering broader participation in the digital economy and ensuring the benefits of AI and digital transformation are shared equitably.

Robust digital infrastructure is the foundation for inclusive access to technology. Digital infrastructure must reach underserved and remote areas to bridge connectivity gaps. PPPs can drive this expansion by combining public priorities with private sector innovation and investment, building sustainable and resilient networks. By prioritizing infrastructure development, PPPs can create a more connected and inclusive world where all communities benefit from digital progress.



#### **CAPACITY BUILDING & TALENT**

Capacity building and talent development are essential components of successful AI-enabled PPP and infrastructure projects. The challenge of finding skilled talent in AI necessitates focused efforts on internal upskilling and reskilling, making these efforts integral to digital transformation strategies.

In addition, gaining a thorough understanding of private sector requirements for infrastructure investments can effectively attract private sector participation. This involves evaluating the capacity of both their organizations and the market economy to design, deliver, operate, and finance projects. Where gaps are identified, establishing programs to build relevant capacity and train both authorities and market participants becomes crucial. By integrating talent development and capacity building into their strategic approach, governments can better navigate the complexities of AI and PPP projects, fostering innovation and ensuring sustainable outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

As we stand at the threshold of a new era marked by rapid technological advancements, the integration of AI into PPPs presents a transformative opportunity to address some of the most pressing global challenges. This Policy Brief Series aims to illuminate the path forward by providing comprehensive insights and guidance on leveraging AI to enhance infrastructure projects, ultimately supporting the achievement of the SDGs. By embracing AI, stakeholders can drive innovation, efficiency, and resilience, ensuring that infrastructure development is not only technologically advanced but also aligned with ethical, social, and environmental priorities.

The UNECE's AI & PPPs Policy Brief Series serves as a vital resource for governments, policymakers, and industry leaders, equipping them with the knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of AI integration. Through a series of concise briefs and associated webinars, the series fosters a culture of learning and collaboration, empowering stakeholders to make informed decisions that optimize project outcomes. By showcasing successful applications of Al in PPP projects, the series aims to inspire innovative approaches and encourage collaboration among stakeholders, driving forward the digital transformation agenda.

As we explore the vast potential of AI, it is crucial to proceed responsibly, ensuring that AI applications in PPPs are reliable and contribute positively to achieving sustainable, resilient infrastructure. The series highlights key considerations for implementation, addressing challenges such as data governance, cybersecurity, and ethical integrity. By adopting a humancentred approach and prioritizing a human rights-based framework, stakeholders can ensure that the benefits of AI and digital transformation are inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status or location.

Ultimately, this Policy Brief Series aims to bridge knowledge gaps and foster collaboration, paving the way for a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future. By harnessing the transformative power of AI, PPPs can become more adaptive and impactful, driving progress toward the SDGs with greater effectiveness and inclusivity. As we move forward, the insights and guidance provided by this series will be instrumental in shaping the future of infrastructure development, ensuring that projects are not only technologically advanced but also aligned with the values and goals of our global community.



- The purpose and scope of the Policy Brief Series have been approved by UNECE member Sates in ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2024/INF.2.
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