# Governments navigate challenges and opportunities of AI in public services



At Global Government Forum’s Innovation 2025 conference, extensive discussions centred on the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in government operations and service delivery worldwide. Drawing on an AI-generated analysis of all conference sessions, key themes emerged highlighting how governments are integrating AI, the challenges faced, and leadership strategies required to accelerate adoption.

One of the foremost topics addressed was the readiness of the public sector to embrace AI. While enthusiasm exists around AI’s transformative potential, concerns remain about the pace of required change and the sector’s capacity to adapt. A significant issue is the shortage of AI-related skills within the civil service, including a deficit of machine learning engineers alongside a need to upskill current staff. Participants described AI-related skills data as “really messy,” complicating workforce development efforts.

Ethical considerations were prominent, particularly regarding automated decision-making and the imperative to build public trust. Participants underscored that ensuring AI systems operate transparently, fairly, and without bias is critical to public acceptance. Data quality and governance emerged as vital factors for successful AI deployment. Poor-quality or inaccessible data hampers AI effectiveness, and attention to clear data labelling at the source was emphasised as a prerequisite for reliable AI outcomes.

There was some divergence on AI’s overall impact; while some viewed AI as revolutionary, others felt its influence would concentrate in specific domains such as task automation and speeding up processes. Concerns were also voiced about the risk of over-reliance on AI potentially diminishing critical thinking skills. Environmental considerations featured as well, with the energy demands of AI computing, particularly in large data centres, prompting discussions about balancing technology deployment with net-zero climate targets. Furthermore, a lack of a consistent, clear definition of AI across government organisations was identified as a foundational challenge, complicating coordination and strategy.

Governments showcased a variety of current AI applications. These include enhancing efficiency and automation by streamlining routine tasks, improving data analysis to support evidence-based decision-making, and optimising internal operations such as human resource management through AI-enabled software for skills assessment and recommending training or promotion opportunities. AI’s potential to improve service delivery was demonstrated in areas like providing summaries of complex information for judges and diagnostic support in healthcare. Citizen engagement emerged as a key focus, with AI-powered chatbots assisting with enquiries and experimental use of digital twins for synthetic research to better understand audience needs.

The conference outlined both opportunities and obstacles in deploying AI in public services. Advantages highlighted included increased operational efficiency, enhanced decision-making driven by large dataset analysis, more personalised citizen services, improved resource allocation forecasting, and the ability to unlock novel insights from government data. Conversely, challenges were associated with data fragmentation and quality issues, the shortage of AI expertise and necessary skills development, integration difficulties with legacy IT infrastructure, ethical and bias concerns, the imperative to secure public trust, cybersecurity risks, complexities in procuring AI technologies, potential employment impacts, and the need to maintain human connection in public services, especially for vulnerable populations.

Leadership was identified as a pivotal factor in accelerating AI adoption within government. The conference stressed the importance of strong leadership buy-in, with senior leaders and ministers providing clear commitment and a “call to arms” to foster innovation. For instance, contributors noted that the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s prioritisation of digital and data transformation presents a significant opportunity to drive progress. Leaders are encouraged to articulate a clear AI vision and communicate it effectively across their organisations. Investing in training and talent development was deemed essential, alongside the creation of governance frameworks empowering Chief Digital and Information Officers (CDIOs).

A culture of innovation and experimentation, including “test and learn” approaches and dedicated units for prototyping, was advocated to accelerate learning and lower barriers to adoption. Collaboration across departments, private sector partners, and academia was emphasised as critical to sharing best practices. Addressing ethical concerns proactively and focusing AI deployment on user needs and mission delivery were also key leadership roles. Furthermore, senior leaders demonstrating engagement with AI tools themselves can foster workforce confidence, as exemplified by Slovenia where ministers actively participate in AI skills conversations. Empowering civil servants to identify and implement AI solutions within clear guidelines was advised to encourage bottom-up innovation. Recognising and sharing successful AI use cases was seen as a means to build organisational momentum.

Overall, the Innovation 2025 conference highlighted a strong conviction in AI’s ability to transform government operations and public service delivery. However, the complexity of challenges spanning skills shortages, data management, ethical considerations, infrastructure, and leadership dynamics underscores that realising this potential requires deliberate strategy and concerted efforts across multiple dimensions. The conference proceedings provide a comprehensive overview of how governments are navigating the evolving AI landscape and outline pathways for fostering effective adoption in the public sector.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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