

## **AI and Internet Access as a Human Right: Preventing a New Subspecies of Exclusion**



### **1. Beyond Literacy – A New Divide Emerges**

For centuries, the defining gap between the empowered and the excluded was literacy. Those who could read had access to knowledge, law, and opportunity; those who could not were left behind. In the 21st century, however, a new and far more volatile divide is emerging—access to artificial intelligence.

Unlike traditional forms of knowledge or even digital fluency, AI is not merely a tool; it is a co-actor in cognition, decision-making, and influence. The systems we are now embedding in our daily lives—whether chat-based assistants, medical advisors, or algorithmic governance platforms—are not optional luxuries. They are becoming essential infrastructure for education, work, and participation in public life.

But access is not universal. In fact, it is narrowing. Just as illiteracy once defined the boundaries of class and fate, we are now witnessing the early

signs of a more disturbing fracture: a split between those who can effectively use AI systems, and those who cannot. The cause may be economic, infrastructural, legal, or political—but the consequence is the same. Without immediate action to ensure open and equitable AI accessibility, we risk creating not just inequality, but a form of human stratification that cannot be reversed.

This article outlines the legal foundations of AI as a human right, the social and biological consequences of exclusion, and the urgent need to treat access not as a market commodity, but as a cornerstone of civilizational stability. For if we fail, we may soon witness the birth of a new human subspecies—algorithmically blind, permanently disadvantaged, and culturally amputated.

## 2. The Legal Framework: Access, Rights, and Emerging Obligations

At present, no international legal instrument explicitly guarantees access to artificial intelligence. Yet the principles are already in place. The right to education, the right to information, and the right to participate in the cultural and public life of a society are enshrined in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26 and 27) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19). If AI is the dominant medium through which education, information, and participation are now channeled, then withholding it—by design, neglect, or price—constitutes a form of structural exclusion.

In legal terms, we are approaching a threshold where access to AI must be seen as an extension of informational enfranchisement. In the same way that literacy became a universal right in modern legal orders, and internet access is increasingly treated as a basic utility, AI must now be considered part of a minimum civic toolkit. The alternative is an unregulated market logic that permits AI fluency to become a private privilege—a tool of power rather than a platform for equality.

Governments, therefore, carry an emerging positive obligation: not only to avoid restricting AI access but to actively enable it. This includes ensuring availability in multiple languages, supporting public-sector and educational AI models, and enacting transparency laws that prevent algorithmic tools from reinforcing hidden biases against the untrained or unassisted user.

What is legally at stake is not simply fairness, but legal personality itself. As AI increasingly mediates access to legal advice, health care, education, and civic voice, individuals without access to AI risk becoming procedurally invisible—unable to assert claims, navigate systems, or understand the rules that govern their lives.

In summary, AI accessibility is not a peripheral issue. It is foundational to legal equality in the digital age. And if it is not addressed with the same urgency as literacy once was, we will watch rights become hollow—and democracy itself tilt toward those with algorithmic advantage.

### 3. The Social Risk: Exclusion, Stratification – the Birth of a Subspecies

Technology has always divided before it unified. The printing press empowered those who could read. Electricity first illuminated the homes of the wealthy. The internet widened the gap before narrowing it. But the risk posed by artificial intelligence is qualitatively different—not just faster, but deeper. Because AI is not merely a tool; it is a cognitive companion, an epistemological prosthesis. If access is uneven, the split it causes is not economic or digital alone—it is evolutionary.

We are already seeing signs of divergence. Those with continuous exposure to AI systems learn to speak in structured prompts, receive accelerated knowledge, navigate bureaucracy, and develop a sharpened sense of decision-making. In contrast, those without access rely on slower, less scalable forms of learning and interaction. Over time, this produces a stratified society—not just by income or geography, but by cognitive infrastructure.

This stratification does not remain horizontal. It compounds vertically. Children with access grow up speaking to intelligence systems daily, refining curiosity and compressing learning cycles. Adults excluded from this feedback loop are left behind not only in employment but in cultural participation, legal comprehension, and identity formation. Without deliberate intervention, we are manufacturing two realities—interlinked geographically, but drifting apart in perceptual speed and sense-making depth.

The term “subspecies” may sound alarmist, but it reflects a very real process: functional divergence within a single species due to sustained environmental inequality. Just as illiteracy once rendered entire populations vulnerable to exploitation and control, AI illiteracy will freeze millions into dependence. Worse, it will naturalize this state—making it appear justified by capability when it is in fact produced by systemic neglect.

The result is not just injustice. It is irreversibility. Once institutional power and biological development are shaped by unequal access to intelligence systems, no amount of social goodwill can retroactively bridge the gulf. This is the real risk of our age: not only to create inequality, but to enshrine it inherited and permanent.

#### 4. Historical Parallels: Illiteracy, Land Rights, and Technological Elites

History offers precise warnings for what happens when access to transformative infrastructure is denied. Literacy, land ownership, and electricity once stood at the frontier between agency and dependency. In each case, those with access advanced not only economically, but in cultural memory, civic participation, and biological survivability. Those without were rendered marginal—legally visible, perhaps, but systemically silent.

Consider illiteracy. For much of history, the inability to read excluded entire populations from legal processes, property claims, and even spiritual texts. The literate class not only had access to knowledge but could dictate the law, interpret doctrine, and write history. The parallels to AI are stark. Just as legal documents became unreadable to the illiterate, algorithmic processes are now opaque to the unassisted.

Or take land rights. In feudal systems, the ownership of land determined access to food, status, and autonomy. When land was inherited along narrow lines, so too was power. We are now witnessing a similar logic in the domain of intelligence. AI models and the data they rely on are being enclosed by corporate and state actors—effectively privatizing cognition. Without intervention, the AI-capable class will resemble the landed gentry of old: gatekeepers of growth and protectors of epistemic territory.

Even the spread of electricity offers a sobering mirror. Initially reserved for urban elites, electrification marked who could participate in modern life and who remained in precarity. Rural populations took decades to catch up, and many never did. The lesson is clear: infrastructure not made universal becomes a tool of passive domination. It enforces hierarchy without needing to name it.

Finally, consider early computing itself. In its infancy, access to computers was limited to state institutions and elite universities. The result was a narrow culture of influence that shaped the next 50 years of digital evolution. If we replicate this pattern with AI—allowing only a sliver of society to train, interpret, and deploy it—we will be embedding unrepresentative values at the core of human decision-making.

In each case, the cost of exclusion was not only social but civilizational. What was denied was not just a tool, but a trajectory. If AI follows this historical arc, the gap it creates will not merely reflect inequality. It will generate it—structurally, recursively, and with exponential permanence.

## 5. Bridging the Gap: The Case for Universal AI Access

Avoiding the emergence of a divided species requires bold and immediate action. The goal is not merely to provide access to a tool, but to safeguard the preconditions of equality in a world increasingly mediated by algorithmic processes. If AI becomes the primary interface through which we learn, decide, heal, work, and govern—then access to AI must be treated not as a market commodity, but as a public right.

The first and most urgent step is infrastructure-level recognition. States must begin treating AI access like electricity or clean water: a foundational utility without which participation in modern life becomes impossible. This entails public investment in open-source AI platforms, multilingual models, and localized systems that serve not just urban elites but rural, indigenous, and underserved populations.

Second, legal systems must codify AI access as a right, extending from existing protections for education, information, and digital inclusion. This doesn't mean handing every citizen the latest proprietary model—but it does

mean ensuring everyone has the right to an intelligible, functional, and safe AI interface for core domains: learning, legal advice, healthcare, and government services.

Third, education systems must evolve. Just as basic literacy became a requirement of citizenship, AI literacy—understanding how to prompt, question, verify, and evaluate outputs—must now be part of early and continuous schooling. This is not a matter of technical skill, but of cognitive self-defense: the ability to maintain agency in a world where decision-making is increasingly shared with machines.

Fourth, there must be transparency and accountability for the platforms that dominate access. If a few companies or governments control the interfaces through which the majority engages with AI, then public oversight is essential. Ethical boards, audit trails, and the right to know how outputs are generated must be non-negotiable.

Lastly, we must resist the framing of AI as an elite domain. AI is not a futuristic abstraction—it is the current terrain of justice. It shapes who gets hired, who receives healthcare, who is surveilled, and who is heard. To democratize AI is to prevent its weaponization against the voiceless.

Bridging the AI divide is not a utopian ambition. It is the only rational defense against a future where social inequality becomes not just entrenched, but genetically encoded across generations. A society that fails to make AI access universal will not simply reproduce its current injustices—it will amplify them beyond repair.

## 6. Species Divergence or Shared Evolution

The emergence of artificial intelligence is not just a technological shift—it is a cognitive watershed. At stake is nothing less than the architecture of the human condition in the decades to come. As with literacy, electricity, and land, the question is not whether AI will change society—it already has. The question is whether society will respond with the clarity and courage required to distribute that change justly.

What we face is a choice of species design. Either we treat AI as a public good —legally recognized, structurally supported, and universally available—or we accept the consequences of engineered divergence: a humanity stratified not by effort or ethics, but by the sheer accident of access.

This is no longer speculative. The lines are forming. In schools, in courts, in hospitals, in rural homes and urban megacities—some have already stepped into accelerated cognition, while others are being structurally outpaced. Not by will, but by design default.

Yet there is still time to redirect. What has not yet ossified can still be shaped. What has not yet been inherited can still be shared.

Let us then take the simplest and oldest principle as our guide: reciprocity. Not the shallow fairness of trade, but the deeper ethic of recognition—that to build a future worth living in, we must refuse to build it alone.

If artificial intelligence is to reflect the whole of humanity, then the whole of humanity must be given a chance to speak to it, learn from it, and evolve with it. Anything less is not intelligence—it is a mirror held up to privilege.

Let us ensure that what AI reflects back is not a fracture, but a shared image—layered, plural, and dignified.