



# Technical Report

**ISO/IEC TR 20226**

## **Information technology — Artificial intelligence — Environmental sustainability aspects of AI systems**

*Technologies de l'information — Intelligence artificielle —  
Aspects de durabilité environnementale des systèmes d'IA*

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# Contents

Page

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1 Scope</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Normative references</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3 Terms and definitions</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>4 Symbols and abbreviated terms</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5 Purpose</b>	<b>5</b>
5.1 General	5
5.2 The London Declaration	6
5.3 Existing International Standards	6
5.4 Environmental sustainability in the European Artificial Intelligence Act	6
5.5 Enacted climate change legislation and market response	6
5.6 Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy	7
<b>6 Environmental sustainability</b>	<b>7</b>
6.1 General	7
6.2 Energy consumption	7
6.2.1 General	7
6.2.2 Types and sources of energy	8
6.2.3 Physical renewable energy supply, Power Purchasing Agreements and offsets	8
6.3 Geographic considerations	9
6.3.1 General	9
6.3.2 Location	9
6.3.3 Distribution of energy sources	9
6.3.4 Freight transportation of energy sources	9
6.3.5 Handling and storage of energy sources	10
6.4 Water use	10
6.5 Cooling	11
6.5.1 General	11
6.5.2 Types of cooling	11
6.5.3 Post cooling use	11
6.6 Carbon footprint	11
6.6.1 General	11
6.6.2 Applicable use of measurements and carbon accounting methods	12
6.6.3 Estimation versus measurement	13
6.6.4 Carbon leakage	13
6.7 Consumption patterns and rebound effects	13
6.8 Waste	13
6.8.1 General	13
6.8.2 Types of waste	13
6.8.3 E-waste	14
<b>7 Perspectives of environmental sustainability of AI systems</b>	<b>14</b>
7.1 General	14
7.2 AI system ecosystem	15
7.3 AI system life cycle	16
7.4 AI system supply chain	16
7.5 Other perspectives	16
<b>8 AI system ecosystem perspective</b>	<b>17</b>
8.1 General	17
8.2 AI system	17
8.3 AI application	18
8.4 Machine learning	18
8.5 AI engineering	18

8.6	Big data and data sources.....	19
8.7	Cloud and edge computing.....	19
8.8	Resource pools.....	19
<b>9</b>	<b>AI system life cycle perspective.....</b>	<b>20</b>
9.1	General.....	20
9.1.1	AI system life cycle in ISO/IEC 5338.....	20
9.1.2	Life cycle assessment in ISO 14040 and ISO 14044 .....	21
9.2	Inception.....	22
9.3	Design and development.....	22
9.4	Verification and validation .....	23
9.5	Deployment.....	24
9.6	Operation and monitoring.....	24
9.7	Continuous validation .....	25
9.8	Re-evaluation.....	25
9.9	Retirement.....	25
<b>10</b>	<b>AI system supply chain approach to determine environmental sustainability aspects .....</b>	<b>26</b>
10.1	General.....	26
10.2	Elements.....	26
10.3	Mines.....	26
10.4	Smelters and refiners.....	27
10.5	Component manufacturers.....	27
10.6	Assemblers.....	27
10.7	Distributors.....	27
10.8	Domestic infrastructure.....	28
10.9	Internet infrastructure.....	28
10.10	AI Training.....	28
10.11	Data preparation, labelling and dataset size .....	28
10.12	Device abandonment.....	29
10.13	Collection of abandoned devices .....	31
10.14	Shipping of abandoned devices.....	31
10.15	Recovering of abandoned devices .....	32
10.16	Disposing of abandoned devices.....	32
<b>11</b>	<b>Measuring the environmental sustainability aspects of AI systems.....</b>	<b>33</b>
11.1	General.....	33
11.2	AI system ecosystem measurements.....	33
11.2.1	General.....	33
11.2.2	Energy consumption.....	33
11.2.3	CPU energy.....	33
11.2.4	GPU energy.....	33
11.2.5	Accelerated processing unit energy.....	33
11.2.6	Energy efficiency.....	34
11.2.7	Power usage effectiveness.....	34
11.2.8	Renewable energy factor .....	34
11.2.9	Water usage effectiveness.....	34
11.2.10	Carbon usage effectiveness.....	34
11.2.11	Energy efficiency improvement.....	34
11.2.12	Carbon efficiency .....	35
11.3	AI system life cycle measurements.....	35
11.3.1	General.....	35
11.3.2	Energy-Precision Ratio (M).....	35
11.4	AI system supply chain measurements.....	35
11.4.1	General.....	35
11.4.2	Raw material extraction method.....	36
11.4.3	Transportation of materials.....	36
11.4.4	Material hazard and environmental leaching risk.....	36
11.4.5	Material sustainability.....	36
11.4.6	Material processing.....	36

11.4.7	Transportation emissions	37
11.4.8	Manufacturing and product emissions	37
11.4.9	Water use	37
11.4.10	Natural gas	37
11.4.11	Power	38
11.4.12	Light pollution	38
11.4.13	Electrical, signal or radio wave pollution	38
11.4.14	Physical ecosystem disruption	38
11.4.15	Community	38
11.5	Other measurements	38
11.5.1	General	38
11.5.2	Carbon intensity of a machine learning model	39
11.5.3	Software Carbon Intensity	39
11.5.4	Operational carbon emissions	40
11.5.5	Embodied carbon emissions	40
<b>12</b>	<b>Approaches to reducing AI systems' negative environmental impacts</b>	<b>41</b>
12.1	General	41
12.2	Ecosystem approaches	41
12.2.1	General	41
12.2.2	Geographic location	41
12.2.3	Carbon aware scheduling	41
12.2.4	Carbon aware pausing	41
12.2.5	Generative AI	42
12.2.6	Synthetic data	42
12.2.7	Adapting a foundation	42
12.2.8	Transfer learning	42
12.2.9	Use of structured data versus brute force	42
12.2.10	Utilising local hardware and specialised circuits	42
12.2.11	Augmenting cloud usage data	42
12.3	Life cycle approaches	43
12.3.1	General	43
12.3.2	Carbon-Aware Core SDK	43
12.3.3	Computationally efficient algorithms	43
12.3.4	Using pretrained models	43
12.3.5	Automated ML	43
12.3.6	Federated learning methods	44
12.3.7	Customized processors	44
12.3.8	Energy efficient reinforcement learning practises	44
12.3.9	Using public APIs	44
12.4	Supply chain approaches	44
12.4.1	General	44
12.4.2	Certification of hardware and data centres	44
12.4.3	Using recycled rare earth elements in AI specific hardware	44
12.4.4	Applying circular economy concepts and principles	45
12.4.5	Business-improvement methodologies	45
<b>Annex A</b>	<b>This document's clauses mapped to the UN Sustainability Development Goals</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>49</b>

## Foreword

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This document was prepared by Joint Technical Committee ISO/IEC JTC 1, *Information technology*, Subcommittee SC 42, *Artificial intelligence*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at [www.iso.org/members.html](http://www.iso.org/members.html) and [www.iec.ch/national-committees](http://www.iec.ch/national-committees).

## Introduction

Unprecedentedly large and ever-growing deep learning models, large language models, natural language understanding networks and generative AI applications require vast data storage capacities, take weeks to train, are running continuously and require a lot of compute power as well as memory to load the models. And once completed they consume substantial amounts of network connectivity bandwidth in operation. Sixty per cent of IT industry carbon emissions come from the downstream use of products by customers.

The use of power intensive GPUs to run machine learning training (and non-AI uses such as crypto currency mining) has already been cited as contributing to increased carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>[1]</sup> Many machine learning packages have been modified to take advantage of the extensive parallelism available inside the average graphics processing unit. Often this resource intensity is used to exemplify environmental concerns with AI systems.

According to the World Economic Forum and experts in the field, AI has “the potential to accelerate environmental degradation, and is already doing so” <sup>[1,2]</sup>. In 2022, the OECD’s Policy Observatory <sup>[3]</sup> that provided input into basic framework for understanding, measuring and benchmarking domestic AI computing capacity by country and region, did not consider environmental sustainability in its charter <sup>[4]</sup>.

The AI system life cycle does provide opportunities to consider and positively influence the environmental sustainability aspects of the system: for example, using and applying teacher–student models <sup>[5]</sup> in deep neural networks represents a trade-off between more learning and better inference performance when in production.

Improving in-operation product performance can, conversely, aid sustainability. Publications from the European Union,<sup>[6,7]</sup> the United States,<sup>[8-10]</sup> the United Nations <sup>[11,12]</sup> and other regional <sup>[13]</sup> and global think tanks <sup>[14]</sup> have called for better understanding and disclosure with regards to ICT’s environmental footprint and that of AI systems in particular.





# Information technology — Artificial intelligence — Environmental sustainability aspects of AI systems

## 1 Scope

This document provides an overview of the environmental sustainability aspects (e.g. workload, resource and asset utilization, carbon impact, pollution, waste, transportation, location) of AI systems during their life cycle, and related potential metrics.

NOTE 1 This document does not identify opportunities on how AI, AI applications and AI systems can improve environmental, social or economic sustainability outcomes.

NOTE 2 This document can help other projects related to AI system environmental sustainability.

## 2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC 22989:2022, *Information technology — Artificial intelligence — Artificial intelligence concepts and terminology*