AI IMPACT REPORT NO. 237 · REVISED 5 OCTOBER 2026 · 250 ROLES COVERED

Photographers

AI augmenting image capture, editing, and creative exploration, shifting focus to conceptualization and human connection.

EXPOSURE	WINDOW	ADOPTION TODAY	READING
48 Elevated exposure	5–10 yrs until change lands	Medium	The role is being reshaped. Exposure is the share of today's work AI can plausibly take on within the window.

§ 01 WHAT IS HAPPENING

What is happening to photographers

Impact

AI tools are automating routine photo editing, generating backgrounds, assisting with composition, and creating stylistic variations. This shifts Photographers' focus towards high-level conceptualization, client direction, ethical oversight of AI, and capturing profound human emotion and authentic moments.

Risk

Significant augmentation; emphasis on creative vision, human connection, and AI tool mastery.

The Photographer role will be heavily augmented by AI. AI will handle many repetitive tasks like photo editing, background generation, and basic compositional suggestions. Photographers will need to become adept at leveraging AI tools, critically evaluating AI-generated content for originality and intent, and focusing on the irreplaceable human elements of photography: profound emotional capture, unique artistic vision, and nuanced human connection. Ethical considerations around authenticity, deepfakes, and bias in image generation will be paramount.

Sector readiness

Emerging & Ethically Debated

The photography and visual arts industries are cautiously but rapidly exploring AI for efficiency and new creative possibilities. Many photographers and studios are experimenting with and integrating AI tools into their workflows, although heated debates around intellectual property, authenticity, and artistic value are significantly shaping the pace and nature of AI adoption.

§ 02 POSITION

Where you stand

i The Photographer role is undergoing a significant transformation, with AI becoming a powerful, though ethically debated, co-creator in the visual production process.

ii AI will automate routine editing, generate backgrounds, and assist with composition, freeing photographers to focus on high-level conceptualization, human connection, and capturing profound emotional authenticity.

iii Success will depend on Photographers' ability to master AI tools as collaborators, critically curate AI outputs for authenticity and intent, navigate complex ethical considerations, and ensure their unique human insight and emotional resonance shine through in an AI-assisted workflow.

§ 03 ACTIONS 15 POINTS

What this means for you

Concrete changes to how the work gets done, in the order you are likely to meet them.

01 **AI-Assisted Image Editing & Post-Production.** Photographers are increasingly leveraging AI tools for automated tasks like background removal, intelligent object selection, noise reduction, sharpening, and basic color correction. This significantly speeds up the post-production workflow, allowing for focus on creative retouching.

02 **Generative AI for Backgrounds & Scene Elements.** Photographers will utilize generative AI to create custom backgrounds, replace existing backdrops, or add realistic scene elements (e.g., foliage, clouds, props) to photographs. This expands creative control and reduces the need for physical sets or extensive location scouting.

03 **Intelligent Image Culling & Selection.** AI tools are assisting Photographers in rapidly culling large batches of photos, identifying duplicates, detecting closed eyes, and flagging the sharpest or most aesthetically pleasing images. This streamlines the selection process after a shoot, saving significant review time.

04 **AI-Powered Composition & Framing Suggestions.** AI can analyze a photograph and suggest compositional improvements (e.g., rule of thirds, leading lines, framing adjustments) or assist with cropping for optimal impact. This augments the Photographer's eye, providing objective feedback for stronger visuals.

05 **Automated Stylization & Look Development.** Photographers are employing AI to apply specific artistic styles, color grades, or film-like effects to their images, or to generate numerous stylistic variations of a single photo. This streamlines aesthetic exploration and consistent look development across a series.

06 **Focus on Human Connection & Authentic Moment Capture.** As AI automates technical and repetitive tasks, the core value of Photographers shifts even more strongly towards building rapport with subjects, eliciting genuine emotions, and capturing unique, unrepeatable moments that convey profound human experience.

07 **Prompt Engineering for Creative Outputs.** Photographers must master the art of "prompt engineering"—crafting precise and effective textual inputs to guide generative AI tools to produce desired visual elements, stylistic treatments, or conceptual ideas. The ability to articulate a clear artistic vision to AI will be a key differentiator.

08 **AI for Lighting & Shadow Correction.** AI tools are intelligently analyzing lighting conditions in photographs and suggesting or automatically applying corrections for exposure, contrast, and shadow detail, or even realistically simulating changes in light direction. This enhances image quality and mood.

09 **Ethical AI, Authenticity & Deepfakes.** Photographers are at the forefront of navigating the complex ethical landscape of AI, particularly concerning authenticity, the creation of synthetic images (deepfakes), and potential biases in AI-generated visuals. Ensuring responsible and transparent use is paramount.

10 **AI-Driven Talent/Model Selection.** AI can analyze images of individuals to suggest models or talent that fit a specific brief (e.g., facial expressions, body types) or to ensure diversity and representation in casting decisions.

11 **Automated Metadata Tagging & Image Organization.** AI tools are streamlining the organization of large photo libraries by automatically tagging images with relevant keywords, objects, and concepts based on their visual content. This improves searchability and asset management.

12 **Continuous Learning & Artistic Adaptation.** The rapid pace of AI development means Photographers must commit to continuous learning, exploring new AI tools, understanding their capabilities and limitations, and adapting their photographic practice to leverage these technologies effectively while preserving their unique artistic voice.

13 **AI for Commercial Photography Optimization.** For commercial photographers, AI can analyze market trends, client preferences, and past campaign performance to suggest optimal visual styles, compositions, or product placements for marketing imagery, maximizing impact and ROI.

14 **Cross-Platform Delivery & Optimization.** AI can optimize images for various distribution platforms (e.g., social media, print, web) by suggesting optimal compression settings, aspect ratios, and color profiles. Photographers will use AI to ensure consistent quality across diverse channels.

15 **Strategic Client Communication & Vision Translation.** As AI handles more technical production, the Photographer's role will intensify in communicating their creative vision to clients, understanding unspoken needs, and translating abstract concepts into tangible visual narratives.

§ 04 CAUSES 10 DRIVERS

What is pushing this change

01 **Explosive Growth of Digital Imagery.** The sheer volume of digital photos created daily (smartphones, cameras) provides massive datasets for AI training and creates demand for efficient processing.

02 **Advancements in Generative AI (Images, Deepfakes).** Breakthroughs in AI fields enable sophisticated image generation, manipulation, and realistic deepfakes, fundamentally changing visual content.

03 **Demand for Faster Editing & Post-Production.** Photographers and clients require rapid turnaround for image delivery in fast-paced media and commercial environments.

04 **Proliferation of Online Platforms (Social Media, E-commerce).** Online platforms demand vast amounts of visually appealing content, pushing for faster and more efficient image creation.

05 **Need for Personalized & Dynamic Visual Content.** AI enables customization of visual content to individual viewer preferences or specific audience segments at scale.

06 **Pressure for Cost Reduction in Photo Production.** Automating routine editing tasks like background removal, culling, and basic retouching can reduce labor costs.

07 **Complexity of Image Editing & Management.** Complex editing workflows and managing large image libraries benefit significantly from AI assistance.

08 **Increased Accessibility of Powerful AI Tools.** User-friendly AI tools are making advanced image manipulation accessible to a broader audience, influencing professional workflows.

09 **Shifting Perceptions of Authenticity & Authorship.** The rise of AI-generated imagery challenges traditional notions of authorship, originality, and what constitutes a "photograph."

10 **Global Competition in Visual Content Creation.** Artists globally compete for attention and sales; AI offers tools to enhance productivity and explore new styles.

§ 05 VARIATION 5 SECTORS

Impact by sector

The headline figure is an average. Where you work changes the picture.

Portrait Photographers	AI for skin retouching, background generation, and light optimization. Focus on capturing personality, directing subjects, and client connection.
Commercial Photographers	AI for product image backgrounds, consistent lighting across shots, and A/B testing creative variations. Focus on brand messaging and conversion.
Photojournalists / Documentary Photographers	AI for culling large event batches, image enhancement in challenging conditions, and fact-checking visual elements. Focus on capturing authentic moments and ethical storytelling.
Fashion Photographers	AI for virtual set creation, background generation, and model posing suggestions. Focus on creative direction, styling, and capturing unique editorial vision.
Art Photographers	AI for conceptual image generation, style transfer, and exploring abstract visual themes. Focus on unique artistic expression and philosophical depth.

§ 06 PREPARATION 8 SKILLS

Skills to build

The skills that keep the human part of this work valuable as the routine part is automated.

01 **Creative Vision & Artistic Direction.** The ability to define a distinct photographic style, conceptualize a series, and create images that are aesthetically compelling and meaningful.

02 **Human Connection & Directing Subjects.** Skill in building rapport, eliciting genuine emotion, and directing subjects to capture powerful, authentic moments.

03 **AI Tool Proficiency & Prompt Engineering.** Skillfully crafting inputs for AI tools and effectively using various generative AI and image editing platforms for ideation and enhancement.

04 **Aesthetic Judgment & Curation.** The inherent ability to discern beauty, composition, and visual harmony, and to rigorously select and refine AI-generated outputs to align with artistic intent.

05 **Technical Mastery (Camera & Lighting).** Deep knowledge of camera systems, lenses, lighting techniques, and composition principles to capture high-quality raw images.

06 **Ethical AI & Authenticity Awareness.** Understanding the legal and ethical implications of using AI in photography (e.g., deepfakes, copyright) and ensuring responsible content creation.

07 **Post-Production & Retouching (AI-augmented).** Proficiency in image editing software, leveraging AI features for efficiency while maintaining creative control over the final output.

08 **Communication & Client Management.** Effectively articulating creative ideas, presenting photo selections, and managing client feedback to ensure project alignment and satisfaction.

§ 07 INSTRUMENTS 12 ENTRIES

Tools in use

KINDS OF TOOL WORTH KNOWING

01 **Generative AI Image Creation Platforms.** Platforms that can generate novel images, illustrations, and photographic styles from text prompts or existing images.

02 **AI-Enhanced Image Editing Software.** Industry-standard photo editing software that has integrated AI features for tasks like selection, background removal, upscaling, and content-aware fill.

03 **AI for Image Culling & Selection.** Software that uses AI to analyze batches of photos, identify duplicates, detect closed eyes, and flag best shots based on quality and aesthetics.

04 **AI for Background Removal & Scene Generation.** AI tools that can intelligently remove existing backgrounds or generate realistic new backgrounds/scene elements for a photograph.

05 **AI for Image Upscaling & Enhancement.** Software that uses AI to increase the resolution and detail of low-resolution images, or enhance clarity and reduce noise.

06 **AI for Composition & Cropping Suggestions.** AI tools that analyze a photo's content and suggest optimal cropping or compositional adjustments based on aesthetic principles.

NAMED TOOLS ALREADY IN USE

Midjourney / DALL-E / Stable Diffusion VISIT
Leading generative AI platforms that create high-quality images and art from text prompts, used for conceptualization and background generation.

Adobe Photoshop (Generative Fill) / Topaz Labs (Upscaling) VISIT
Industry-standard image manipulation software now integrated with AI features like "Generative Fill" and AI-powered enhancement tools.

PhotoMechanic (with AI features for culling) / Narrative Select VISIT
Photo management software increasingly integrating AI for faster culling, rating, and initial selection of images from large shoots.

Remove.bg / Adobe Photoshop (Generative Fill) VISIT
Online services and integrated software features that use AI to automatically remove backgrounds from images or generate new ones.

Topaz Labs (Gigapixel AI) / Adobe Photoshop (Super Resolution) VISIT

AI-powered software specializing in intelligent image upscaling and enhancement, improving resolution and detail.

Skylum Luminar AI (Composition AI) / Adobe Lightroom (Auto-Crop) VISIT

Photo editing software that leverages AI to provide smart compositional suggestions and automated cropping based on image content.

§ 08 EXAMPLES 5 EXAMPLES

In practice

Ways people in this role are already using AI, and what they get from it.

Automate Image Retouching for Portraits

EXAMPLE 1

HOW Photographers can use an AI-powered retouching tool to automatically smooth skin, remove blemishes, and optimize facial features in portrait photographs, saving significant manual post-production time.

GAIN Significantly reduces manual retouching time, ensures consistency in portrait quality, and frees up photographers for creative direction.

Generate Custom Backgrounds for Product Shots

EXAMPLE 2

HOW For product photography, Photographers can instruct a generative AI image tool to create a custom background (e.g., a specific outdoor scene, an abstract pattern) for a product shot, seamlessly blending it with the foreground object.

GAIN Expands creative possibilities, reduces the need for expensive physical sets or location shoots, and enhances visual storytelling for products.

Intelligently Cull Wedding Photos

EXAMPLE 3

HOW After a large event like a wedding, Photographers can use an AI photo culling tool to automatically go through thousands of images, identifying duplicates, detecting closed eyes, and flagging the sharpest, most in-focus shots for initial selection.

GAIN Dramatically reduces the time spent on initial photo selection, improves efficiency, and helps identify the best shots from large volumes of raw footage.

Enhance Low-Light or Noisy Images

EXAMPLE 4

HOW Photographers can input low-light or noisy images (e.g., from a concert, night scene) into an AI enhancement tool. The AI will autonomously reduce digital noise, sharpen details, and improve overall clarity, making previously unusable photos usable.

GAIN Salvages otherwise unusable images, improves overall photographic quality, and expands the range of conditions in which high-quality photos can be captured.

Apply a Consistent Style Across a Photo Series EXAMPLE 5	HOW	For a large photo series (e.g., a commercial campaign, a portrait session), Photographers can use an AI style transfer tool to apply a consistent color grade, tone, or artistic filter across all images, ensuring a cohesive visual look with minimal manual adjustment.
	GAIN	Ensures strong brand consistency, streamlines post-production for large batches, and allows for rapid exploration of different aesthetic themes.

§ 09 CONTEXT

How this role compares

Three neighbouring roles chosen to show the direction of travel.

Photo Retouchers (Routine image manipulation) / Photo Editors (Basic culling and cropping) MORE EXPOSED	AI IMPACT	Very High (AI excels at automated skin retouching, background removal, upscaling, and culling large image sets.)
	WORK MOVES TO	Role contraction or redefinition towards overseeing AI outputs, handling complex exceptions, or specializing in manual, highly artistic retouching.
AI Imaging Scientists / Generative AI Artists (Visuals) DIFFERENT SKILLS, GROWING	AI IMPACT	Foundational (They design and build the AI algorithms and systems that create or manipulate images.)
	WORK MOVES TO	Deep expertise in AI/ML algorithms, computer vision, digital art techniques, and software engineering for visual applications.
Art Directors (Creative oversight for visual campaigns) / Cinematographers (Film/Video capture) COMPLEMENTARY, LESS EXPOSED	AI IMPACT	Low-Moderate Augmentation (AI assists in concept generation for art directors; AI aids in pre-visualization for cinematographers), but core creative vision, on-set leadership, and human performance capture remain paramount.
	WORK MOVES TO	Defining creative strategy for visual campaigns (Art Directors); Guiding visual storytelling, camera operation, and lighting for moving images (Cinematographers).

§ 10 VERDICT

Closing judgement

> For Photographers, AI is not merely a tool but a radical force of transformation that will fundamentally redefine the creative process. It will autonomously handle the mundane, amplify creative exploration exponentially, and streamline production, compelling photographers to pivot to indispensable human connection, profound artistic vision, and ethical oversight. The future of photography is an intensified human-AI partnership, where authentic moments and compelling narratives are paramount.

§ 11 BASIS REVISED 5 OCTOBER 2026

Evidence and revisions

What the exposure figure rests on, what changed when it was last revised, and the published work cited for this role.

SCORE

50 to 48

WINDOW

5-10 years (unchanged)

The 5 October 2026 review moved the score down by 2 points.

Exposure Index v2. Inputs: task applicability 49/100 (Microsoft AI applicability score 0.25 for Photographers); observed usage 26/100 (Anthropic observed exposure 0.20); official exposure tier 70/100 (BLS: high); labour-market trajectory 52/100 (BLS projects employment to fall 0.7% over 2025–35); published adoption rating 40/100 (medium adoption). Weighted base 47.6. Final score 48. The previous figure of 50 was lowered by 2 points, a small change that comes from moving off scores rounded to the nearest five. The change window is unchanged.

HOW THE FIGURE IS BUILT (EXPOSURE INDEX V2)

Task applicability — Microsoft Research, AI applicability score	49 × 35%	17.3
Observed usage — Anthropic Economic Index, observed exposure	26 × 20%	5.2
Official exposure tier — US BLS AI-exposure category	70 × 20%	14.0
Labour-market trajectory — US BLS projected employment change 2025–35	52 × 10%	5.2
Published adoption rating — This report's adoption level	40 × 15%	6.0
Weighted base		47.6
Exposure score		48

MEASURES BEHIND THE SCORE

US Bureau of Labor Statistics · *Employment Projections 2025–35 and AI Exposure Categories* (27 August 2026)

AI-exposure tier: High. Projected employment change 2025–35: -0.7%. Matched to Photographers.

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Microsoft Research · *Working with AI: Measuring the Applicability of Generative AI to Occupations* (10 July 2025)

AI applicability score 0.25 (percentile 79 of 785 occupations) for SOC 27-4021.

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Anthropic · *Anthropic Economic Index report: Cadences* (26 June 2026)

Observed exposure 0.20 for SOC 27-4021 (percentile 84 of 756 occupations).

PUBLISHER PDF

World Economic Forum · *The Future of Jobs Report 2025* (7 January 2025)

Graphic designers appear on the WEF fastest-declining list for the first time in the 2025 edition, which the report attributes directly to generative AI.

PUBLISHER PDF

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology · *Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market* (28 January 2026)

UK context: around 70% of UK workers are in occupations with tasks AI could perform or enhance, above the US average; a one-standard-deviation rise in exposure was associated with a 3.9% fall in UK job postings.

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ALSO CITED FOR THIS ROLE

PwC · *2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer* (May 2026)

A two-track market is emerging: creative roles "professionalised" by AI (direction, strategy, brand) grow faster, while roles "democratised" by it see wage pressure.

PUBLISHER PDF

Archived copies are served only where the licence permits; otherwise the link goes to the publisher. Full research library: https://www.careerguard.ai/sources

§ 12 APPENDIX

Method and sources

Each report was written from a large body of published research. The exposure score itself is computed, not written: it is the CareerGuard Exposure Index, a weighted average of occupation-level measures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (AI-exposure classification and 2025–35 projections), Microsoft Research (AI applicability scores) and Anthropic (observed exposure), together with the adoption rating published on the report. The organisations and publications below are the standing literature behind the narrative sections. Every source, with dates, licences and archived copies where we are permitted to hold them, is catalogued in the research library.

Exposure Index v2 (October 2026). Each input is scaled to 0–100 and weighted: task applicability 35% (Microsoft AI applicability score ÷ 0.5), observed usage 20% (Anthropic observed exposure ÷ 0.75), official exposure tier 20% (BLS very high = 100, high = 70, moderate = 40, low = 10), labour-market trajectory 10% (50 2.5 × projected % employment change), published adoption rating 15% (very high = 85, high = 70, medium-high = 55, medium = 40, low-medium = 25, low = 10). Inputs not measured for an occupation are dropped and the remaining weights renormalised. An editorial adjustment of at most ±12 points is allowed only for automation channels the measures cannot see (robotics, self-service, machine vision, medical imaging, RPA/OCR, generative video) and is always

logged with its reason. Scores are whole numbers, not rounded to five. The change window shifts one notch (a year at each end) per ten points of movement.

I GLOBAL AND MACROECONOMIC IMPACT OF AI ON WORK

World Economic Forum

The Future of Jobs Report series — Employer survey of expected job growth and decline, skill shifts and technology adoption (2020, 2023 and 2025 editions); Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Entry-Level Work (2026).
AI governance and transformation reports — Frameworks on ethical AI, talent strategy and industry transformation.

McKinsey Global Institute

AI, Automation and the Future of Work series — Research quantifying automation potential by task, sector and demographic, from "Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained" to "Agents, robots, and us" (2025).
Industry-specific reports — Financial services, healthcare, manufacturing and others.

PwC

Global AI Jobs Barometer — Annual analysis of job postings and productivity by AI exposure (2024–2026 editions).
Upskilling Hopes and Fears survey — Employee perceptions and readiness.

Microsoft Research and Anthropic

Working with AI (2025); Anthropic Economic Index (2025–2026) — Occupation-level usage data from Copilot and Claude conversations, the two observed-usage measures behind the 2026 revision.

Stanford Digital Economy Lab and Stanford HAI

Canaries in the Coal Mine? (2025–2026); AI Index Report (annual) — Payroll evidence on early-career employment in exposed occupations; annual measurement of AI capability, investment and adoption.

Deloitte

Human Capital Trends series — Workforce, talent and HR technology trends.
Tech Trends series — Emerging technologies and their business implications.

Accenture

Technology Vision series — Forward-looking analysis of emerging technology, with emphasis on AI.
Fjord Trends — Design, innovation and human experience in a digital world.

Boston Consulting Group

AI/ML insights and industry solutions — "The AI Revolution in the Workplace" and related research.

EY

AI and workforce reports — Adoption, talent strategy and ethics.

IBM Institute for Business Value

AI and automation studies — Business models, workforce evolution and leadership.

OECD

AI Policy Observatory — International data and policy on AI, labour markets and skills.
Employment Outlook — Labour-market trends including technological impact (2023–2026 editions).

International Labour Organization

Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupational Exposure (2025) — Task-level exposure gradients for every ISCO occupation; successor to the 2023 global index.

International Monetary Fund

Staff Discussion Notes on AI and work (2024, 2026) — Complementarity framing: where AI augments and where it substitutes.

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market (2026) — UK occupational exposure and job-posting evidence.

Brookings Institution

AI and automation research — Economic and social implications, displacement and skills.

Yale Budget Lab and Goldman Sachs Research
Tracking the Impact of AI on the Labor Market; AI and the US labour market (2026) — Aggregate labour-market monitoring; macro displacement estimates.

Oxford University (Oxford Martin School)
The Future of Employment — Frey & Osborne and subsequent research on susceptibility to automation.

MIT Technology Review
AI & Work — Reporting on AI research and its implications for industries and jobs.

Gartner
Hype Cycle for Artificial Intelligence — Maturity and adoption of AI technologies.
Future of Work reports — Workplace models and talent strategy.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Employment Projections 2025–35; AI Exposure Categories; Occupational Outlook Handbook — Ten-year employment projections and, from the 2025 cycle, an AI-exposure tier for every detailed occupation.

Indeed Hiring Lab
AI at Work Report (2025) and posting-market updates — Skill-level transformation estimates and job-posting trends by occupation.

II CORE AI AND MACHINE-LEARNING RESEARCH

OpenAI
Research papers, blog and API documentation — Large language models, generative AI, safety and societal impact.

Google DeepMind
Research papers and blog — Reinforcement learning, AI for science, AGI and ethics.

Meta AI
Research papers and blog — Large language models, computer vision, AI for social good.

Hugging Face
Transformers library and model hub — Open-source state-of-the-art NLP models.

TensorFlow and PyTorch
Documentation and community forums — Core frameworks illustrating practical capability.

arXiv
cs.AI, cs.LG, cs.CV, cs.CL — Pre-print research.

NeurIPS and ICML
Conference proceedings — Top-tier academic research.

ACM and IEEE
Journals and proceedings — ACM Computing Surveys; IEEE Transactions on AI.

Kaggle
Datasets and competition solutions — Applied machine learning on real-world problems.

The Alan Turing Institute
Research and reports — Responsible and applied AI.

III ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE AI DEPLOYMENT

NIST
AI Risk Management Framework — Voluntary framework for managing AI risk.

European Commission
AI Act — Risk-tiered legal framework for AI.
Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI — Principles for responsible development.

Partnership on AI
Research and best practice — Responsible AI development.

AI Now Institute
Annual reports — Social implications: power, inequality, rights.

ACM FAccT
Proceedings — Fairness, accountability and transparency.

Data & Society
Publications — Social implications of data-centric technology.

WIPO
Conversation on IP and AI — Intellectual-property implications of AI.

IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of A/IS
Ethically Aligned Design — Recommendations for ethical AI design.

Center for AI and Digital Policy
Policy briefs — Accountable AI policy.