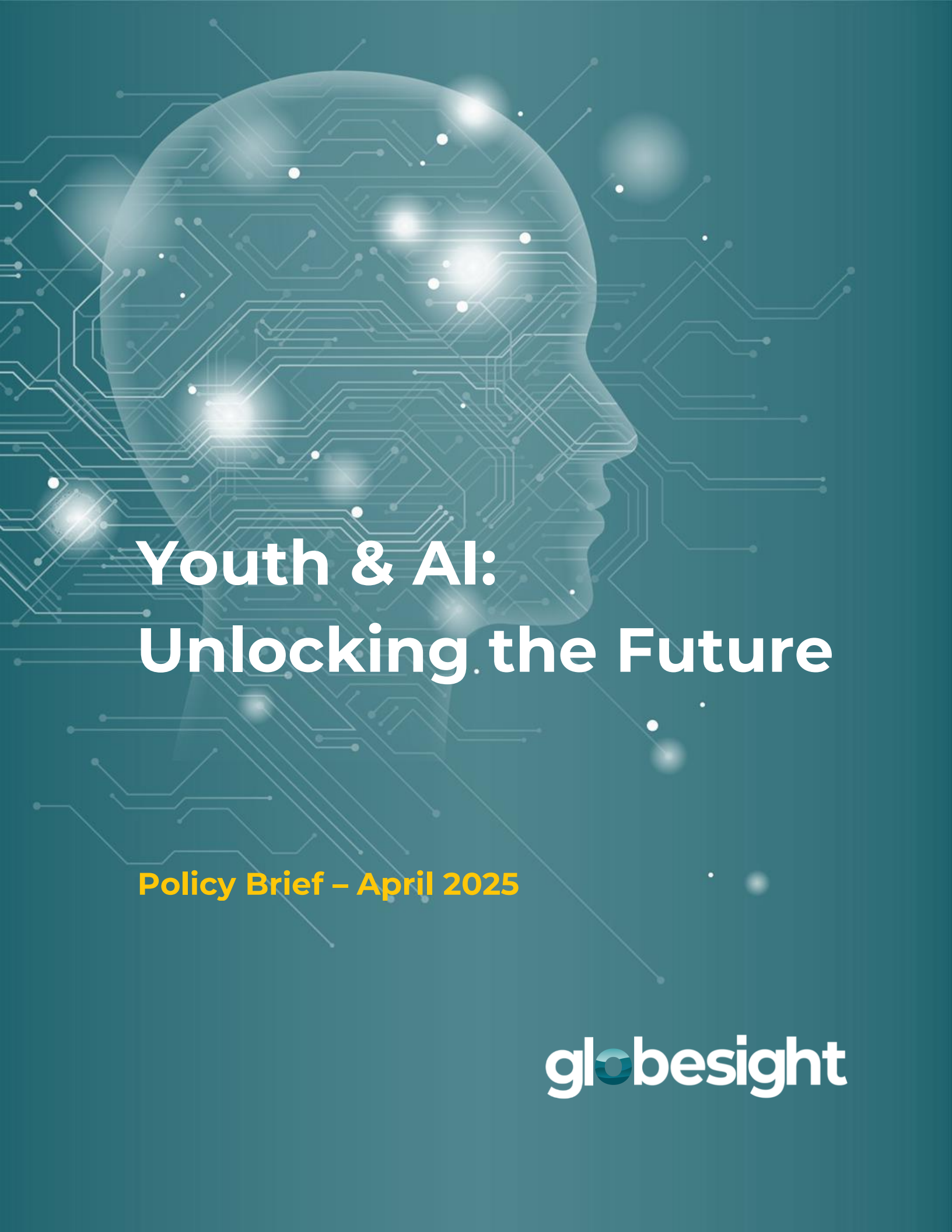

Youth & AI: Unlocking the Future

Policy Brief – April 2025

globesight

Background

AI is reshaping international development - it has the potential to accelerate progress on 134 of the 169 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To fully harness this potential, we must address the challenges posed by the existing digital divide, which is both geographical and economic.

At the heart of AI adoption are literacy, preparedness and effective diffusion. While open-source AI tools are readily accessible, today's youth (ages 15–24) need better preparation to embrace this revolution. At Globesight, we researched gaps in youth AI readiness across the regions of the Global South where we operate.

Southeast Asia: The time for a digital leap is here

Home to 660 million people and 213 million youth aged 15–34, the time is ripe for AI adoption in Southeast Asia. Over 52% of young people in Southeast Asia are already upskilling to keep pace with technological changes. AI adoption will drive the digital economy in the region and help deliver $835 billion by 2030. All ten countries in Southeast Asia have launched national AI strategies or AI initiatives, with Singapore topping Salesforce's 2023 AI Readiness Index. Regional initiatives like the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance are also promoting responsible AI development.

Key AI initiatives that are targeting and serving the youth's ability to adopt and adapt innovative technologies include: The Bangkit program, Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), Asia-Pacific Artificial Intelligence Association (AAIA), Asia AI Association, and Analytics & Artificial Intelligence Association of the Philippines (AAP).

South Asia: AI upskilling is key

Every day, 100,000 youth enter South Asia's job market. However, the lack of AI infrastructure and skills gaps remain significant barriers to AI adoption. While India is leading the charge with a national strategy and a growing ecosystem, it still lags behind regional AI powerhouses like China. To compete both within Asia and globally, the region urgently needs bolder education policies, stronger collaboration, and better startup support.

On top of national AI roadmaps, multilateral and private sector initiatives are promising to bridge the skills gaps. These include the Commonwealth Artificial Intelligence Consortium (CAIC), Huawei-BUET ICT Academy, 1M1B India AI Youth Awards, Fusemachines AI Fellowship, Oracle AI Training, and Samsung Innovation Campus.

Middle East: Stepping into the global AI stage

AI is transforming the Middle East. The region is projected to capture 2% of the total global AI benefits by 2030, amounting to approximately US$320 billion. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are leading the regional race, with a significant lead. The former is poised to achieve the largest economic gains from AI, while the UAE is projected to see the most significant relative impact.

Important youth-focused efforts to highlight include: the Responsible AI Foundation, the Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI), the UAE's AI in Educational Platforms, ADEK AI Bootcamp, Massar AI Ghurair initiative, and the AI Opportunity Initiative for the Middle East & North Africa.

What's next for the Global South?

INNOVATE

- Build infrastructure and scale open AI access.
- Invest in youth-led startups.

UPSKILL

- Make AI part of every national education curriculum.
- Align AI training with the job market

SAFEGUARD

- Develop ethical AI policies.
- Establish AI governance frameworks.

COLLABORATE

- Scale what works. Share what succeeds.
- Build regional AI hubs and public-private alliances.

At Globesight, we are committed to equipping young people with the skills needed for an AI-driven future. We're leveraging local innovations for the Global South by the Global South and investing in partnerships that equip youth for what's next. The time to act is now. Join us!

Globesight is a leading strategy advisory firm and partner for institutions seeking to scale development impact in the Global South, with a primary focus on the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Through engagement and collaboration, integrity, and innovation, we provide insights and strategic advice and create initiatives for development partners and organizations to advance meaningful, scalable solutions and partnerships in global development. Headquartered in Dubai, Globesight operates with a distributed structure and a network of experts from across the Global South.

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