

The Alan Turing Institute

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Impact story

A right to explanation

Advice from Turing researchers, urging the need for individuals to have a legally-binding right to have automated decisions made about them explained, is helping shape how the new EU general data protection regulations (GDPR) will be implemented.

- Algorithms are making life-altering decisions; from loan and health insurance applications to recruitment and criminal justice systems.
- GDPR and UK's Data Protection Bill aim to give individuals more control over the usage of personal data.
- However, Turing researchers identified gaps in the legislations concerning the explanations of algorithmic decision-making processes.
- Published paper to international attention in Jan 2017 and provided written and oral evidence to multiple government committees, summarising problems in the legal frameworks.
- In a second paper published in Nov 2017, the researchers showed how meaningful, legally binding explanations could be implemented.
- Such explanations would enable someone to understand a decision, and possibly contest it, without the need for technical, trade-secret information to be disclosed.
- The work has been cited by both the House of Lords and the official EU body that is providing expert guidance on how the GDPR should be implemented.
- The work also has the potential to have wider impact on accountability and trust in AI systems in general.

Impact

- Helped trigger House of Commons inquiry
- Invited to provide evidence to parliament
- Cited in official EU guidance on automated individual decision-making and profiling in GDPR
- Influenced amendments to UK's Data Protection Bill

“Engaging and explaining what is going on with algorithmic decisions may help avoid repercussions for the UK economy.”

Sofia Olhede, Director of the UCL Centre for Data Science



Turing Fellow Sandra Wachter speaking to MPs about decision-making algorithms