



Special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Artificial Intelligence

6 May 2025, 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Concept Note

The ECOSOC Special Meeting on Artificial Intelligence will take place on Tuesday, 6 May 2025 from 3:00 to 6:00 pm in the ECOSOC Chamber at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The meeting will explore the transformative role of Artificial intelligence (AI) in accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including bridging gaps and building foundations for AI innovation and development in the Global South, while addressing associated risks and challenges.

The meeting will include an opening, two interactive sessions – one in the format of a fireside chat and the other as a panel discussion, and a closing.

1. Fireside Chat: Emerging Trends of AI Innovations and the SDGs

AI has become a transformative force across multiple sectors, offering innovative solutions for healthcare, education, public services, energy efficiency, water resource management, and disaster response, among others. The *2024 ECOSOC Special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals*¹ demonstrated AI's potential to accelerate sustainable development when effectively governed and ethically applied.

However, AI also presents risks, including in the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, which threaten democratic institutions², social cohesion and public trust. The rapid proliferation of generative AI has made it harder to distinguish between human-created and AI-generated content, raising concerns about information integrity, especially in political discourse and electoral processes³.

¹ [Special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals](#), 7 May 2024.

² [UNESCO and UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development \(2022\) Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation: Competencies for Civil Servants](#). See also: [UNESCO \(2023\) Global Toolkit on AI and the Rule of Law for the Judiciary](#).

³ IGF 2024



The 2024 ECOSOC Special Meeting on AI emphasized the need to balance AI innovation with effective guardrails, ensuring that AI-driven progress does not exacerbate inequalities but rather serves as a tool for inclusive growth.

Emerging trends in AI governance focus on establishing international regulatory frameworks, improving AI transparency and accountability and addressing risks related to biases and digital divides. The *Global Digital Compact*, adopted in September 2024, underscores the need for multi-stakeholder cooperation and AI capacity-building efforts, particularly in developing countries, to ensure AI benefits all societies equitably.

Moving forward, strengthening global partnerships, investing in digital literacy and embedding ethical AI practices in development strategies will be essential for maximizing its positive impact on sustainable development.

Guiding questions:

- How can AI-driven innovations be effectively scaled to maximize their positive impact on the SDGs while ensuring equitable access, particularly in developing countries? What role do global partnerships and capacity-building efforts play in this process?
- How can policymakers, private sector leaders, academia and civil society work together to balance AI regulation and innovation, ensuring that ethical considerations and inclusivity remain at the core of AI development and deployment?

2. Panel Discussion: Building Foundations for AI in the Global South

AI has the potential to drive economic transformation and improve living standards in developing countries. However, disparities in infrastructure, funding and research capacity hinder these achievements. By addressing foundational challenges such as digital infrastructure, human capital development and local innovation ecosystems, countries in the Global South can better harness AI's potential to drive economic transformation. This will require not only faster and more universal technology adoption and absorption, but also a more equitable participation in the global digital economy.

Investing in AI infrastructure and digital literacy programs, establishing regionally relevant AI capacity-building and governance frameworks, community-driven AI solutions, and fostering AI research collaboration between Global South institutions and international partners are critical measures towards ensuring equitable access to AI advancements and bridging AI divides⁴.

⁴ IGF 2024.



Moreover, challenges related to interoperability and AI governance fragmentation need to be addressed. Without harmonized AI frameworks, countries in the Global South face obstacles in accessing global AI markets, talent and funding. Cross-regional partnerships, digital public goods and targeted investment in AI capacity-building programs will be key to overcome these challenges⁵.

There is the need to think beyond access and adoption to achieve meaningful progress, as well as address essential questions about how to build inclusive and sustainable AI ecosystems. Moreover, deeper analysis of AI's implications and possibilities for development is also required, so to better understand AI's potential to drive economic growth, reduce inequalities and tackle societal challenges in the Global South. This includes exploring AI's role in achieving the SDGs. It also requires a continued and productive rethinking of the role of strategic investments, public-private partnerships and international cooperation.

The *2024 ECOSOC special meeting on AI*⁶ highlighted the importance of building capacity and technical expertise, especially in developing countries, and attract investment in AI to enable more accessible and affordable digital solutions for all people, including those in rural areas, and thus contribute to closing the digital divide. It also emphasized meaningful inclusion of the perspective of women at all levels of the development of AI and other emerging and frontier technologies.

The *2025 STI Forum*, which is a part of the "STI week" in May 2025, will place a strong emphasis on ensuring that AI is accessible, inclusive and beneficial for all, highlighting its role in bridging digital divides and fostering equitable innovation.

The discussion will stress the importance of international cooperation and partnerships for supporting AI innovation and development in the Global South, ensuring that AI investments align with local priorities rather than external commercial interests.

Guiding questions:

- What are the key barriers preventing developing countries from fully leveraging AI for economic transformation?

⁵ PNAI Policy Brief 2024.

⁶ [Special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals](#), 7 May 2024.



- How can governments, international organizations, academia, and the private sector collaborate to create AI ecosystems in the Global South, ensuring access to AI advancements and participation in the global digital economy?
- What policy and governance mechanisms are needed to address AI interoperability and governance fragmentation in developing countries, and how can cross-regional partnerships and digital public goods support a more harmonized and accessible AI landscape?

3. Outcome

The special meeting will result in a summary from the President of ECOSOC, highlighting the key messages from the discussions.

4. Related Documents and Resources

- [Special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (May 2024)
- [Informal Note of the 2025 Coordination Segment](#) (especially chapters 4 and 5, February 2025)
- [STI Forum](#)
- [United Nations Activities on Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#) (2023)
- [United Nations Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies](#)
- [United Nations Global Principles on Information Integrity](#)
- [United Nations system white paper on artificial intelligence governance](#) (August 2024)
- [HLAB-AI Final Report: Governing AI for Humanity](#) (September 2024)
- [Proposed Normative Foundations for International Data Governance: Goals and Principles](#) from the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) (November 2024)
- [Framework for a Model Policy for Responsible use of AI](#) by the [Interagency Working Group on AI](#), High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) (December 2024)
- [Report on the Operational Use of AI](#), High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) of the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) (December 2024)
- [Messages from IGF 2024](#) in Riyadh including on AI-related aspects, [messages from Youth from IGF 2024 on AI and education](#) and from [other workshops focused on AI governance](#) hosted at the regional IGFs, output document from [members of parliaments at IGF 2024 on AI](#), network of [176 national, regional and youth IGFs \(NRIs\)](#), and IGF's [Policy Network on AI output report](#) and [PNAI multistakeholder approach](#)



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- UNESCO's [Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence](#), [decision to advance progress on the SDGs through AI initiatives](#), [Second Global Forum on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence](#), [Policy Dialogue on AI Governance](#), [Call to Action to Close the Gender Gap in Science](#), [Global Toolkit on AI and the Rule of Law](#), [Network of Experts on AI and the Rule of Law](#), [Framework on AI & Digital Competencies for Civil Servants](#), [Global Top 100 AI Projects for SDGs](#), and the [Call to Action of the Rabat Consensus on Artificial Intelligence for Africa](#)
- ITU's [International AI Standards Summit](#) and [AI Skills Coalition](#)
- OHCHR's practical recommendations to [advance responsible development and deployment of Generative AI](#)
- [AI for Good Summit](#)
- [AI Solutions for Early Warnings for All Initiative](#)