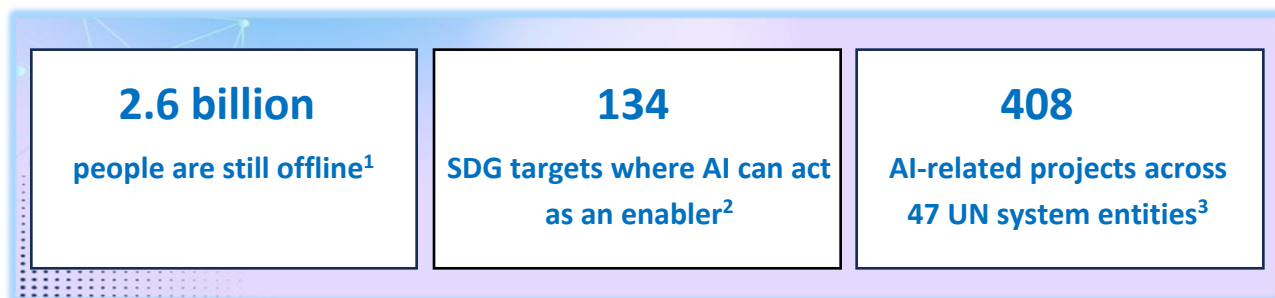




Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council
ECOSOC Special Meeting on Artificial Intelligence

6 May 2025, 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm
ECOSOC Chamber, UNHQ, New York



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Address digital and data divides with urgency** by investing in infrastructure, connectivity, and digital literacy, enabling the Global South to fully participate in and benefit from the AI revolution. This is especially urgent for least developed countries, women, people with disabilities, and those in vulnerable situations.
- **Ensure equitable access to computing and connectivity** by addressing disparities through differentiated pricing models, investing in local computing infrastructure, and designing context-specific AI applications which are responsive to local needs. Prioritize affordable access to both computing power and internet connectivity, especially in the Global South.
- **Create or strengthen inclusive AI governance and regulation frameworks** at the national level to create an enabling environment for innovation while upholding human rights and ensuring proper safeguards.
- **Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships** by promoting collaboration among governments, academia, civil society, and the private sector to co-develop responsible AI systems that are aligned with the SDGs. Leverage public-private partnerships and blended finance models to mobilize investment and scale innovation.

¹ ITU Facts and Figures Report 2024.

² Vinuesa, R., Azizpour, H., Leite, I. *et al.* The role of artificial intelligence in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. *Nat Commun* 11, 233 (2020).

³ United Nations Activities on Artificial Intelligence (AI) 2023.



SUMMARY

The [special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on Artificial Intelligence](#) was convened on 6 May 2025 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It took place back-to-back with the 2025 Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs ([STI Forum](#)) and as part of the [STI Action Day](#).

The special meeting brought together Member States, UN system experts, academia, private sector leaders, innovators, and civil society stakeholders to explore the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while addressing the associated challenges and risks. The meeting highlighted the pressing need to bridge the digital divide to enable developing countries to derive the full benefits from AI. The meeting also showcased AI initiatives from the UN system which are supporting SDG implementation and AI governance.

KEY MESSAGES: OPENING SESSION



“How can AI be a force for Good? How can it work for everybody? Can we have a system of governance and use of AI that empowers people?”

– H.E. Bob Rae, President of ECOSOC

The President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Bob Rae (Canada), underscored the urgent need to bridge the digital divide, establish robust systems of governance, and address related ethical considerations. He stressed that AI should not be controlled by only a few actors. Drawing a parallel to the transformative impact of the printing press invented in the 15th century, he noted that while history provides important lessons, the international community has an opportunity and responsibility to manage the ongoing technological shift more equitably in order to fully unlock AI’s potential for the benefit of all. He highlighted the role of the United Nations in helping to shape inclusive global governance for AI and leaving no one behind.



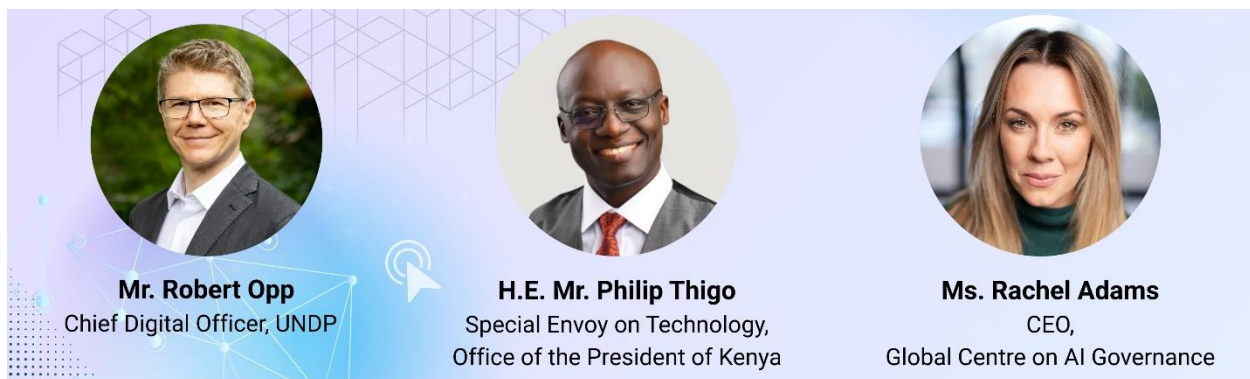
“For AI to truly serve humanity, its development and governance must reflect all of humanity. We can allow AI to widen divides, or we can harness it to widen opportunity.”

– Mr. Amandeep Singh Gill, Under-Secretary General, Special Envoy for Digital and Emerging Technologies



Under-Secretary-General and Special Envoy for Digital and Emerging Technologies Mr. Amandeep Singh Gill reflected on the rapid advancement of AI and its potential to drive economic growth and support the SDGs, while warning of stark disparities in access to AI infrastructure, governance, financing, capacity, and data quality. He also noted that 118 countries – many in the Global South – remain largely excluded from global governance discussions, which presents a challenge to inclusive multilateralism beyond just a technological divide. He called for translating the principles of the *Global Digital Compact* adopted in September 2024 into coordinated action, while recognizing emerging leadership from the Global South through regional AI governance initiatives in Africa, ASEAN, and Latin America.

KEY MESSAGES: FIRESIDE CHAT ON EMERGING TRENDS OF AI INNOVATIONS AND THE SDGS



Participants in the Fireside Chat underscored the transformative potential of AI for our societies and for the achievement of the SDGs. To equitably harness its potential, it is essential to ensure inclusive and rights-based AI governance frameworks.

The need for inclusive partnerships and the involvement of affected communities in AI development was emphasized. [The Global Index on Responsible AI](#) was cited as promoting a human-centric, value-based regulatory approach that balances innovation with the protection of rights.

Building trust, inclusion, and local relevance were identified as important factors, and governments were urged to co-create technologies with local communities, support culturally and linguistically diverse datasets, and ensure AI reflects the values of diverse societies.

It was stressed that there is a stark divide in AI development and deployment, with Africa and other parts of the world dangerously behind in terms of resources and infrastructure. Addressing the divide will require unprecedented international cooperation to ensure more equitable access to internet connectivity and compute resources. Access to these resources often cost more and are unreliable in many parts of the Global South.



Taking the floor, Member States and other stakeholders highlighted a number of issues:

- Concerns were raised about the spread of misinformation and disinformation, environmental impacts, and the risk that AI could amplify existing harms. There was a collective call for proactive measures to mitigate these negative effects and ensure that AI serves humanity in a responsible way.
- Participants emphasized the critical role of government policy in shaping the development and use of AI. Many highlighted the role of their existing or planned AI strategies in this regard. Some pointed out that implementation of national AI strategies is often underfunded or stalled, and that budget allocation, public sector adoption, and national ownership are crucial for success. Public-private partnerships were emphasized in this context.
- Many argued that AI is not inherently neutral and must be guided by inclusive governance frameworks. Responsible AI requires ethical frameworks, and it should be locally relevant, transparent and avoid reinforcing bias or exclusion. In this regard, it was noted that AI development must include marginalized as well as Indigenous communities.
- The importance of international collaboration in regulating AI was also highlighted, along with the need for having standardized policies to prevent fragmented governance. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence was commended. The implementation of the Global Digital Compact was recognized as a key step toward ensuring consistent and equitable AI governance. Several interventions underscored the need for harmonized international standards to manage AI risks.
- Participants stressed that international cooperation and multilateralism must be scaled up. The scale of collaboration required to bridge the AI divide exceeds current efforts. Cooperation must go beyond funding and include knowledge sharing, joint innovation, and mutual capacity building across all regions, particularly in the Global South.
- Many participants advocated for a strong role for the United Nations in multilateral AI governance. Support was expressed for the implementation of the Global Digital Compact and the establishment of the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue. Participants welcomed the multidisciplinary nature of the Panel and stressed the need to provide evidence-based insights on the risks, opportunities, and best practices related to AI, ensuring that global expertise informs policy and innovation.



KEY MESSAGES: PANEL DISCUSSION ON BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR AI IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH



The panel discussion contrasted the optimism around AI adoption in emerging markets with the stark North-South divide that currently exists in AI development and access. Participants called for urgent improvements to infrastructure, capacity and access to compute resources, especially in Africa, where affordability and availability remain major barriers.

Reliable internet and power infrastructure were highlighted as crucial for connectivity and deploying AI solutions, particularly in rural and low-income areas. Skilled talent – developed through capacity-building for developers and digital literacy initiatives for end users and high-quality, ethically-sourced, representative data were also mentioned as critical for developing relevant AI solutions.

Inclusive AI design must be intentional. Participants emphasized the need for AI to be responsive to the needs of diverse groups – particularly youth, women, marginalized populations, persons with disabilities and underserved regions – and advocated for actively involving these groups in its design, policymaking, and implementation. Participants urged treating youth-led innovation as an investment in the future, not merely charity, and called for the empowerment of young innovators through mentorship, funding, and education reform.

Participants stressed the importance of public-private partnerships and of creating a conducive business environment for private investment in AI ecosystems. By aggregating demand and ensuring widespread adoption, regional cooperation can amplify investment and facilitate advocacy for equitable pricing models.



Taking the floor, Member States and other stakeholders highlighted a number of issues:

- Participants noted that ethical standards in AI were crucial to ensure responsible development and deployment. Innovation must be accompanied by strong governance to maintain integrity and trust.
- Least developed countries face significant challenges in policy, infrastructure, and accessibility, necessitating inclusive governance and multistakeholder partnerships. Participants stressed that closing the gender digital divide and addressing regional obstacles through international cooperation were essential for equitable AI development.
- Participants acknowledged that some countries have begun to recognize the benefits of AI and were developing inclusive strategies tailored to local contexts. Capacity-building and international cooperation are vital to support these efforts.
- Partnerships are key to advancing digital infrastructure and computing resources.
- Global collaboration, including the United Nation's role, was widely recognized as essential for bridging the digital divide, building capacity, and ensuring that AI benefits everyone.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE UN SYSTEM



AI for Good Global Summit

AI for Good, organized in partnership with over 40 UN agencies, is identifying innovative AI applications, building skills and standards, strengthening global dialogue on governance, and advancing partnerships to solve global challenges. The 2025 Summit, held in Geneva, will focus on the rise of autonomous AI, low-cost AI models, and the next wave of accelerated AI development.



Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

This global standard on AI ethics, adopted in 2021, is applicable to all 194 member states of UNESCO. The Recommendation emphasizes the protection of human rights and dignity, transparency, fairness, and human oversight of AI systems. It includes policy areas such as data governance, environmental sustainability, gender equality, education and research, health, and social wellbeing.



Artificial Intelligence Landscape Assessment

A framework created to assist countries in responsibly harnessing the potential of AI. AILA focuses on three pillars: government as an enabler of AI, government as a user of AI, and ethical AI. It assesses a country's AI readiness by examining infrastructure, skills, data, innovation support, strategic vision, technological capabilities, and mechanisms for accountability, inclusivity, safety, and transparency in AI deployment.



Observatory on AI and Work in the Digital Economy

The leading international knowledge hub on the world-of-work dimensions of AI and the digital economy. The portal brings together ILO's research and policy/regulatory insights across four key areas: AI, algorithmic management, digital labor platforms and workers' personal data. It aims to support governments and social partners in understanding and managing the digital transformation of work.