DIGITAL COOPERATION PORTAL

SEPTEMBER 2026



The Global Digital Compact:

Two years on

STORIES FROM THE PEOPLE BUILDING OUR DIGITAL FUTURE



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The Global Digital Compact: Two years on

Stories from the people building our digital future

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FOREWORD

In Portugal, six universities came together to develop the first open large language model in Portuguese, then released the dataset behind it. In Bursa, Türkiye, municipal staff used digital mapping to work out where childcare centres were missing. In Malawi, communities recorded their own languages so that an emergency call could be understood by the automated response service. All of these are examples of digital cooperation in action, from the ground up.

The Global Digital Compact (GDC) is a comprehensive global framework for cooperation on digital and emerging technologies. Its ambition: an open, safe and secure digital future that leaves no one behind; technology that serves the Sustainable Development Goals; and a more inclusive governance of artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity.

This collection is published on Digital Cooperation Day, 21 September 2026, two years after Member States adopted the GDC at the Summit of the Future in New York. The stories were sourced from the UN Digital Cooperation Portal, a data and AI-driven tool that helps stakeholders navigate the Compact's objectives and make their own GDC initiatives known to the world.

The promise of technology to enhance lives is undeniable—but we now know with certainty that it also takes governance, sustainable financing, skills and meaningful participation to unlock the true potential of digital for development.

We have come a long way in two years.

Hackers and diplomats gathered at Open Source Week to launch principles which guide the application of open source for development. The Giga partnership has mapped 2.3 million school locations and 781,100 schools have connectivity status mapped. The Independent International Scientific Panel on AI published its preliminary report in July 2026. The Global Dialogue on AI Governance took place in Geneva, bringing together more than 3,000 participants from 163 countries, seating Member States at the same table on AI governance for the first time. A multistakeholder Working Group on Data Governance has made significant progress on recommendations for benefit-sharing, interoperability and cross-border data flows.

These milestones demonstrate what can be achieved when ambition is matched by collective action. Yet they are only the beginning.

The stories, among many others, weave an important narrative about how governments, universities, foundations, companies and community organizations learn from one another, forge new partnerships, and collectively drive our progress towards an inclusive digital future.

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United Nations University (UNU)

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THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT AT A GLANCE

The Global Digital Compact (GDC) was the first comprehensive global framework for digital cooperation and the governance of artificial intelligence. Negotiated by all 193 United Nations Member States and shaped by global multi-stakeholder consultations, it was adopted by consensus on 22 September 2024 at the Summit of the Future in New York as Annex I to the Pact for the Future. Its goal is to build an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all.

Although non-binding, the GDC sets out a shared roadmap. It commits Governments, the private sector, civil society and technical communities to work together to ensure that digital technologies, data and artificial intelligence serve people everywhere, not just those already connected.

FIVE OBJECTIVES

1. Close all digital divides and accelerate progress across the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Expand inclusion in, and benefits from, the digital economy for all.
3. Foster an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promotes human rights.
4. Advance responsible, equitable and interoperable approaches to data governance.
5. Enhance international governance of artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity.

13 PRINCIPLES FOR DIGITAL COOPERATION

01 Inclusive

02 Development-oriented

03 Human rights-based

04 Gender empowerment

05 Sustainability

06 Equitable

07 Accessibility

08 Interoperability

09 Safety and trustworthiness

10 Innovation

11 Multistakeholder participation

12 Partnerships

13 Future orientation

OBJECTIVE 1

CLOSE ALL DIGITAL DIVIDES

CONNECTIVITY, DIGITAL SKILLS, DPI, DPG AND OPEN SOURCE

1

In the following articles, we explore this objective in practice.

OBJECTIVE 2

EXPAND INCLUSION IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

2

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO TURN DIGITAL ACCESS INTO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY?

The Global Digital Compact begins with a commitment to close digital divides, including gaps in connectivity, digital skills, access to diverse linguistic content online, and gender and age gaps.



Carpeted in tall grasses, bushes and trees, the Kgalagadi District of Botswana receives a mere 25 centimetres of rainfall annually. With access to knowledge and data, farmers have improved resource management and achieved higher productivity.

Photo credit: © Chris / Adobe Stock

The promise of digital technology for development appears straightforward: innovation and technology investments raise productivity in low-value sectors and help producers reach higher-value markets. This creates jobs, improves livelihoods, and promotes more efficient use of resources. Strategic investments in digital technologies could even allow countries to leap-frog development stages, promote economic diversification, and attract new investments. Yet, for many developing countries, digital technologies appear like a mirage on hot sand: always out of reach.

Technology alone does not close that distance. Artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, advanced data analytics and the Internet of Things (IoT) can all increase productivity, but only when skills and sustainable financing arrive alongside them. That combination is what one farm in Botswana set out to assemble.

One smart farm in Kgalagadi

The Lobu Small Stock Farm sits almost 400 kilometres away from Gaborone, in the Kgalagadi District of Botswana. Carpeted in tall grasses, bushes and trees, this region receives a mere 25 centimetres of rainfall annually.

For decades, Kgalagadi's small-stock sector has been an important source of livelihoods. However, predominantly subsistence-oriented production, limited technology and constraints in farm management have held back the sector's potential.

In 2021 the Government of Botswana set out to revitalize the Lobu Farm with support from the **United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)**, the **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)**, and other partners. The transformation of Lobu combined access to training on modern agricultural methods with farm digitalization, including a mobile crush pen, drones, and an IoT-based livestock health digitalization, including a mobile crush pen, drones, and an IoT-based livestock health monitoring system, amongst other features. Virtual fencing helped reduce losses from predators and stray animals, while precision-feeding systems improved animal welfare and herd performance.

With access to knowledge and data, Kgalagadi District farmers improved resource management and achieved higher productivity on the farms. Yet, human capital, financing gaps and scarce water resources still limit what Lobu and other farms like it can achieve and none of these constraints are resolved by technology itself.

Skills for a digital world

Low levels of digital literacy remains one of the main factors hobbling the success of technology transfers in Africa. Ideally, digital literacy training is aligned with skills systems for priority sectors and real labour demand.

Participating in digital life begins with access to the internet, but meaningful connectivity demands skills ranging from navigating basic online environments to interpreting data critically and understanding information security. As the technology evolves, so do the skills needed.

For the Lobu Smart Farm the skills needs were clear. A smart classroom, supported by ECA, was equipped with an AI-enabled learning management system to train and provide farmers with access to resources on modern agricultural methods. Its modules were digitised so that young people considering the sector could learn remotely.

Reliable data on the number of individuals with ICT skills for Botswana is missing. While enrolment in primary school is quite high in Botswana, at 98 per cent, the Giga schools map for Botswana indicates that approximately 613 schools out of 1,000 are connected to the Internet.



Giga's global connectivity map visualizes school and health-facility connectivity worldwide.

Photo credit: © Giga Maps, UNICEF & ITU

Engaged in 54 countries, Giga helps Governments transform connectivity ambitions into action through school mapping, infrastructure planning, innovative financing, capacity development and more transparent and efficient procurement. "Every child has the potential to shape the future. School connectivity helps ensure that talent and ambition are not limited by geography or circumstance," says Irene Kaggwa, ITU Giga Programme Manager. As of August 2026, Giga has mapped 2.3 million school locations and 781,100 schools have connectivity status mapped. Infrastructure mapping and modelling to foster effective school connectivity has been completed for 19 countries.

A critical factor in the project's success was the development of an online auction platform. Stakeholders at Lobu first learned how to access digital information on livestock buyers and market prices. The online auction platform then enabled Lobu farmers to sell their livestock at better prices in Botswana and abroad—saving them the 700-kilometre round trip to markets in Gaborone. Skills and market access arrived together.

How can we finance the leap into high-tech?

Leaders gathered at the Financing for Development Conference in Sevilla in June 2025 were confronted with a stark figure: an estimated US$4 trillion annual financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals.

At a time of shrinking resources, digital technologies can provide a critical lever for development. But financing investments in frontier technologies in developing countries often carries higher levels risk. The question is how to finance, and by whom?

At Lobu, no single financial instrument covered the project. According to Lobu stakeholders, partnerships were essential to de-risk investments and mobilize resources. Mobile broadband connectivity was funded by the Government of Botswana through the Universal Access and Service Fund, which subsidizes qualifying service providers building communications infrastructure at affordable prices. Technical assistance came through the **ECA**, with support from Member States. Capacity-building was supported by the **IFAD** and the University of Botswana. At the scale of a single farm, digital cooperation took the form of multiple partners pooling financial and technical resources to meet a common objective.

A key concern among Lobu stakeholders was the pressure that livestock production placed on scarce potable water supplies. To address this challenge, 100 atmospheric water-harvesting hydropanels, funded by the Chan Soon-Shiong Family Foundation, were installed at Lobu Farm to test the viability of generating drinking water directly from air.

Combined with IoT-based systems for monitoring livestock water consumption, the results were striking: savings of more than 40 per cent in the first year.

Finding financing partners can be time-consuming. Indeed, stakeholders at the origin of the Lobu Smart Farm project observed that the one of the greatest challenges was aligning the partners.

This is a role that the United Nations system is positioned to play and increasingly does. The **United Nations Industrial Development Organization's (UNIDO)** Global AI for Industry and Manufacturing Platform seeks to build a dynamic platform of the likeminded to facilitate partnerships and accelerate industrial transformation through the power of AI. Over 250 AI innovators, manufacturers, policymakers and development organizations have already joined the initiative.

Regional ambitions

But can one smart farm alone signal a technology-driven productivity revolution?

With productivity improving at Lobu Farm and Government ownership of the project, its long-term sustainability appears increasingly attainable. A research centre at Lobu Farm conducts advanced genetic procedures to improve livestock resilience and quality, and a SmartBots Lab (Botswana's 4IR Digital Transformation Strategy) launched at the Digital Innovation Hub in Gaborone with support from **ECA** in 2023. Botswana ranked fourth among African countries in the Global Innovation Index 2025.

Lobu stakeholders are sanguine but optimistic: the barriers to scaling and the financing challenges persist, but the Lobu model may be a potential blueprint for developing similar centres of excellence in other African countries. Combining Government leadership, support from development-partners and specialized agri-tech expertise, such hubs could create reliable records of agricultural products moving through a value chain, opening opportunities for producers take part in regional trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area.



A beneficiary receives an Omid ID, a digital identity solution supported through Aseel's digital inclusion initiatives, helping expand access to services, opportunities, and community support.

Photo credit: © Aseel Correspondent

HOW CAN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION REACH THE WORLD'S MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE, SAFELY?

When a country is hit by a crisis, information on the population—names, ages, addresses—inform decisions on the distribution of water, shelter and other essential services. All too often, this data is not available nor digitized, making it more difficult for emergency actors to distribute aid effectively.

The challenge is particularly acute for vulnerable populations such as refugees and crisis-affected communities, where a failure in an identity system can cost someone access to food, shelter or legal status. Poorly designed systems can create new risks of exclusion, discrimination and unlawful surveillance. As Governments and development organizations increasingly deploy digital public infrastructure (DPI) and AI-enabled systems to improve the delivery of social protection and public services, a critical question emerges: how can we ensure these technologies do no harm and protect the people they are designed to serve?

> The GDC recognizes that transparent, safe and secure digital public infrastructure and user-centred safeguards can promote public trust and use of digital services.

Aid that recognizes a person, not a caseload

One response has emerged through the start-up AidOS (Aid Operating System). Its founders, Aseel Technology Corporation, originally set out to build an e-commerce platform for artisans in Afghanistan. As local conditions deteriorated in 2021 and it became nearly impossible to transact online with the population, Aseel adapted some of the logic and technology of the digital economy to meet the humanitarian needs of local communities.

How does it work? A donor anywhere in the world purchases an essential item on the platform, such as food or a wheelchair. The item is then bought locally and delivered by a nearby delivery person, from the Atalan network (meaning "heroes"). The Atal gives real-time proof-of-delivery to the donor, while the beneficiary uses the Omid ID (a digital ID, meaning "hope") to list their needs online. To date, AidOS has facilitated the delivery of aid to more than 850,000 people across Afghanistan, Gaza, and Türkiye, with active research for expansion into Africa.

"Omid and the Atalan network are not only about improving access to services or accountability, they are also about dignity. The ability for people participating in humanitarian aid to be recognized as an individual with a unique identity, rather than be reduced to a statistic or caseload number," explains Layma Murtaza, co-founder and Chief Partnerships Officer at Aseel.

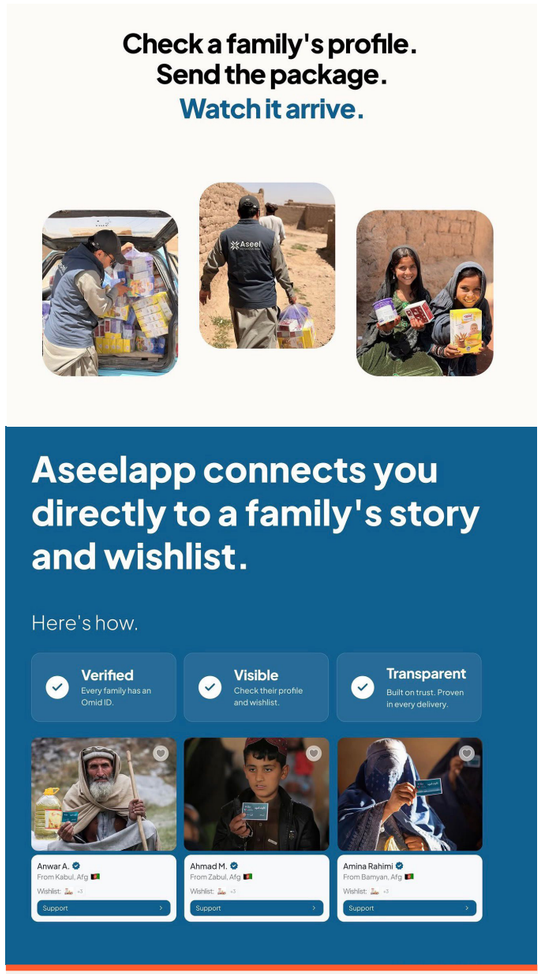


Photo credit: © Aseel Correspondent

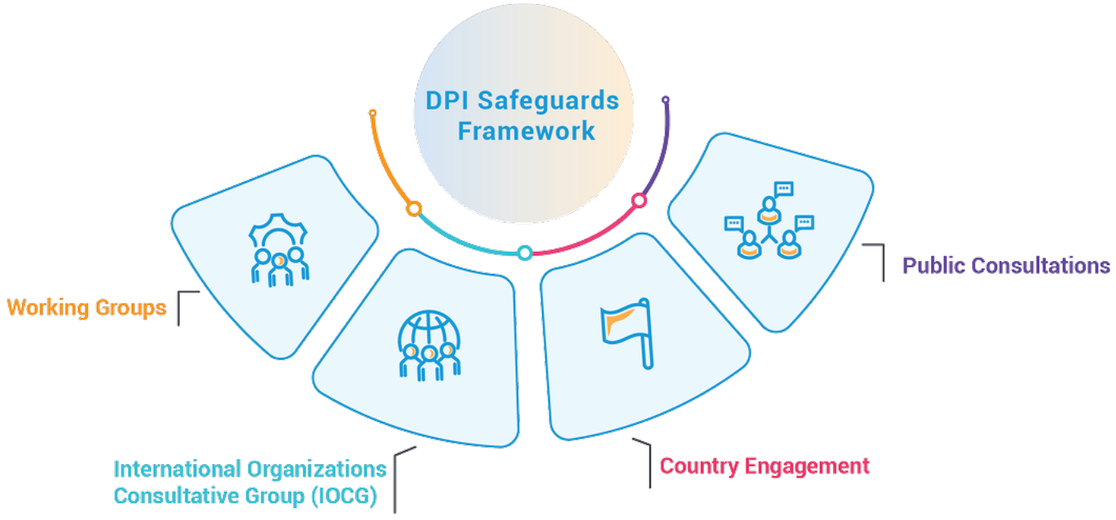


Photo credit: © DPI Safeguards Initiative, UN ODET & UNDP

Safety and dignity from design to deployment

Digital identity systems such as Omid can improve inclusion, transparency in delivery of services and accountability for both the providers and recipients of aid. But they also require the collection and management of sensitive personal data.

The DPI Safeguards Initiative, co-led by the **UN Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (UN ODET)** and **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, provides practical, rights-based guidance for the governance, design, deployment and use of DPI. It identifies risks at each point in the life cycle of a system and names the safeguards that address them.

The Framework rests on 18 principles, implemented through collaboration between everyone from government officials to the people whose data is being held. To date, nine countries across five regions have pioneered the adoption of the Universal DPI Safeguards Principles, while an additional 16 countries have requested support for safeguards implementation.

Designing with inclusion

The **Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** and the Government of Ethiopia have shown what this looks like in practice for some of the world's most vulnerable people.

> "When digital inclusion is implemented well, like in Ethiopia, aid dependency is reduced and benefits expand through communities far beyond just the refugees and vulnerable people themselves."
>
> **Sam Jefferies**
> UNHCR lead on DPI and Digital Identity

Safeguards were built into the design, deployment and use of the Fayda National ID system, with affected communities actively participating throughout the process. The result is a national identity system, with over 50.8 million registrations, that meaningfully includes asylum seekers and refugees.

The GDC speaks to the special needs of migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and others in vulnerable situations and calls for their engagement in the design and implementation of strategies to close digital divides.

The business case for DPI

Aseel agrees passionately that inclusion of users and risk mitigation are key concerns of their design and deployment of digital systems. Handling sensitive data relating to vulnerable people in Afghanistan requires an 'unhackable-by-design' approach in the back end of Omid and the Atalan network.

An additional benefit of DPI in humanitarian contexts is the ability to create accurate and consistent records for individual beneficiaries. This enables systems such as AidOS and national platforms such as Fayda to generate insights over time and improve service delivery. Systems designed with appropriate safeguards not only reach more people and target assistance more effectively but can also improve on themselves to serve people better.

WHAT IF AI WAS A DIGITAL PUBLIC GOOD?

Most AI systems are built, licensed and controlled as products. The report *AI Systems as Digital Public Goods* penned by **United Nations University (UNU)**, **UN ODET**, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), asks what would change if AI systems were treated more like DPI, closer to a road or a library. The report explores how AI systems could be designed to meet standards for other digital public goods (DPG): open and accessible, respectful of privacy, and with safety, transparency and public benefit in mind.

Photo credit: © sippapas / Adobe Stock

The potential impact could be transformative. Governments, schools, hospitals, researchers and local communities would be empowered to adapt AI to their own languages, cultures and development needs, rather than simply accept what is available commercially. This could accelerate progress in areas such as healthcare, education, agriculture, climate resilience, and public services. Communities would become not only users of AI, but also active creators and owners of solutions that address their own needs and challenges.

AI developed as a DPG could also help countries strengthen their digital sovereignty and reduce dependence on a small number of technology providers. By leveraging open standards and shared resources, Governments can retain greater control over their digital infrastructure and data, build local capacities and avoid costly duplication of efforts.

Equally important, DPG standards aim to make AI more trustworthy and accountable. Transparency, privacy protections, accountability mechanisms and safeguards against harm would incorporated from the outset. As a result, public confidence in the use of AI to support decision-making and service delivery could increase.

> *"ADB has a strong interest in ensuring that AI is developed and used responsibly. We commissioned this research because we see enormous potential in AI, but we also recognize that AI is fundamentally different from traditional categories of DPGs, such as open software, content and datasets."*

Yoon Choi Barker
Deputy Director General of ADB's Information Technology Departments

Ultimately, the vision is not simply to create "free AI." It is to create AI that is widely accessible, locally relevant, responsibly governed and aligned with the public interest.

FOUR KEY FINDINGS

Openness is not all-or-nothing.
AI systems can be assessed along a scale of openness, across different components, including code, data, model weights and documentation.

Public benefit is not guaranteed by openness.
An AI system may be open yet still fail to protect privacy, address bias or deliver meaningful benefits.

Governance matters throughout the AI lifecycle.
AI systems continue to evolve after deployment. Responsible governance therefore requires continuous monitoring, testing, transparency, redress mechanisms and stakeholder participation.

Equity requires more than access.
Many developing countries lack the computing infrastructure, local-language datasets, technical expertise and evaluation capacity needed to use AI effectively.

These issues and more are debated annually by over 1,000 hackers, coders, diplomats and policymakers at the United Nations Open Source Week, co-hosted by the **UN Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT)** and **UN ODET**. During the June 2026 edition, a conversation between Government representatives and leaders of the open-source community initiated an emerging global definition of open-source AI. The discussion reinforced the importance of ensuring that this definition reflects not only technical considerations but also the needs and priorities of Governments around the world.

The fifth edition of UN Open Source Week is planned for mid-2027.

OBJECTIVE 3

FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE, OPEN, SAFE AND SECURE DIGITAL SPACE THAT RESPECTS, PROTECTS AND PROMOTES HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS, INTERNET GOVERNANCE, DIGITAL TRUST AND SAFETY, INFORMATION INTEGRITY

In the following articles, we explore this objective in practice.

IN CONVERSATIONS: WHO TOLD YOU THAT?

In 2024–2025, the United Nations published its first Global Risk Report, which identified misinformation and disinformation as among the major risks facing the world. A deluge of fake news and poor-quality information online has eroded trust in institutions and strained social cohesion around the world.

Photo credit: © Chaosamran_Studio / Adobe Stock

“There is no miracle solution. We need to combine funding, awareness-raising, and technological tools.”

Florian Gauthier
Co-founder of LaRéponse.tech

The United Nations Global Principles for Information Integrity, launched in June 2024, calls on all actors—including Governments, tech companies, media, and civil society—to strengthen access to reliable and trustworthy information. The five principles put forward a framework for coordinated international action to make information spaces safer and more humane: societal trust and resilience, independent and pluralistic media, transparency and research, public empowerment and

The GDC echoes the call in Objective 3 with commitments to expand digital media literacy, bolster independent and public media, and joint action with technology companies and developers to address misinformation and disinformation and hate speech collaboratively.

We sat down with two partners at the forefront of the global movement for information integrity, the European Broadcasting Union and LaReponse.tech, to explore how AI impacts mis-and dis-information.



Artificial Intelligence that tracks Disinformation

Florian Gauthier is co-founder of LaRéponse.tech, a French NGO built around a collective of more than 20 experts from various fields. An entrepreneur committed to the public good for more than a decade, Gauthier was inspired during the 2024 French legislative elections, which saw widespread disinformation in the days leading up to the vote. Together with a group of volunteers, he decided to harness the power of artificial intelligence to fight disinformation.

That is how Vera was born: an AI tool designed to make fact-checking simple, fast, and integrated into everyday habits, directly accessible through WhatsApp, Instagram and Telegram.

An AI That Does Not Hallucinate

Unlike most general-purpose AI systems which are trained to answer most questions, Vera relies exclusively on more than 500 verified sources across 80 countries, selected according to the standards of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) and the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) created by Reporters Without Borders.

If no reliable source can answer a user’s question, Vera says so. “The ability to say ‘I don’t know’ is precisely what prevents Vera from hallucinating or making things up,” argues Gauthier.

Highlighting the Work of Journalists

Vera is not there to replace anyone: instead, it increases the visibility of journalists, fact-checkers and experts who conduct investigations, says Gauthier. The tool helps showcase their work and make it accessible to the public by providing answers in simple language while systematically citing its sources.

A Disinformation Radar

In just eighteen months, Vera has answered 500,000 questions from users in more than 30 countries.

That scale allowed the Vera team to develop a disinformation observatory. When a topic or question repeatedly appears, the observatory is alerted to the emergence of potential disinformation, often much before the media covers it.

For instance, the observatory sounded the alert during the 2025 presidential campaign in Côte d’Ivoire when people frequently asked whether pro-government or anti-government demonstrations had been cancelled. False cancellation notices are a common tactic for suppressing turnout at a rally.

The Key Challenge

When asked about the future challenges facing factchecking, Gauthier first pointed to the difficulty of raising funds. He also highlighted the need for media literacy education and the development of critical thinking skills among young people so that everyone can maintain a critical outlook amid the massive flow of information on social media and increasingly through general-purpose LLMs.

“We understand that human-driven journalism comes with mistakes. But this (AI induced distortion) is not an error rate that the public can rely on when it comes to news.”

Liz Corbin
Director of News at European Brodcasting Union



What happens to the news when it goes through an AI assistant?

Based in Geneva, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) brings together more than 100 public service broadcasters across Europe and beyond. As AI chat assistants become a favourite gateway to the news, we met with Liz Corbin, Director of News, to talk about the “Facts In, Facts Out” campaign.

A large-scale study of AI assistants

The EBU already knew, anecdotally, that chat assistants cut corners on accuracy, attribution of facts, and impartiality, sometimes offering opinions as plain facts.

Together with the BBC and 21 other member organizations, EBU analysed four chat assistants quoting content from various broadcasters and languages. The result: 45 per cent of AI responses distorted news content significantly, regardless of language or assistant.

Citing sources: an obligation, not a best practice

Trust in a piece of information depends on where it came from and who made it. “The public needs to know where their news is coming from, so that they can make their own decisions about its trustworthiness. A voluntary system, or a kind of ‘sometimes you cite the sources and sometimes you don’t’, isn’t acceptable,” she adds.

The stakes go beyond transparency alone. Public broadcasters exist thanks to public support. If their content circulates inside AI assistants without attribution, audiences may devalue public media—which weakens the case for funding these trusted outlets.

Making information integrity economically viable

Another major challenge: disinformation is currently more profitable than accurate reporting in terms of engagement and virality. For Corbin, pressure from the news industry alone is not enough. Governments, regulators and institutions need to create a level playing field where quality information is compensated fairly. If quality news organizations lose their business model altogether, that is a serious problem for democracy.

Five principles for a responsible AI ecosystem

The “Facts in, Facts Out” campaign is a joint endeavour of EBU, the World Association of News Publishers, the World Broadcasting Unions, with support from partners such as **UNESCO** and the Council of Europe. Together, they are calling on big tech platforms to commit to five principles.

On this last principle, Liz Corbin points to a recent example. Google Earth launched a new feature that lets users generate AI imagery on top of real satellite views. Journalists and verification experts tested it within hours and showed how easily convincing scenes could be fabricated at real coordinates. Scrutiny and rapid engagement from all stakeholders helped surface the risk. Google responded by promptly withdrawing the feature.

A future worth building together

Corbin remains optimistic: “AI assistants offer a real opportunity to make news more relevant and more personal to each individual, not by trapping people in their own bubble, but by better serving their actual needs and interests. But that opportunity will only be realized if big tech companies seriously engage with the problem of disinformation and misrepresentation. News organizations, she says, “cannot do this alone.”

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR A RESPONSIBLE AI ECOSYSTEM

No consent, no content
Generative AI models and tools must seek authorization to use news content.

Fair recognition
of the value of up-to-date, multilingual news must be fairly recognized when it is used to benefit third parties.

Accuracy, attribution, provenance
The original news source must be apparent to the reader.

Plurality and diversity
AI tools trained on a narrow range of sources will reproduce a narrow view of the world.

Transparency and dialogue
More dialogue between tech platforms and the news industry will help develop standards of safety, accuracy and transparency.

WHO BENEFITS FROM WOMEN'S DATA?

EMPOWERMENT AND SURVEILLANCE IN THE DATA-DRIVEN CITY

In suburban neighbourhoods of the USA, the sight of vandalized high-tech cameras reveal strong sentiments over the benefits—or harms—of data. Many cities were built for able-bodied men and planned without much thought for how women move through them, what services they need or whether they are safe. Data offers a way to correct that. City officials now hold more information about how their residents live than any previous generation.

Photo credit: © Lustre Art Group / Adobe Stock

Information on women and girls has immense potential for gender-responsive planning—but it can also be leveraged for abuse in the physical world. The Janus nature of data—its duality—requires clear safeguards and terms of engagement between residents and city authorities.

A digital map strengthening gender-responsive services

Across the world in Türkiye, local governments often struggled to implement gender-responsive policies because data on social assistance programmes, child populations, education levels and local services were stored separately. As a result, city planning processes frequently relied on fragmented information, limiting municipalities' ability to identify where inequalities were concentrated and where resources could have the greatest impact.

UN Women Türkiye and Bursa Metropolitan Municipality came together to create Mor Haritam ("Purple Map"), a digital decision-support platform designed to strengthen gender-responsive local governance.

Developed in 2024 with technical support from the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) and Sida, the platform was launched in Bursa as part of a broader initiative that has since reached seven cities across Türkiye.

The platform overlays data about women's lives on one interactive map making decisions about services such as where to locate women's counselling centres or municipal assistance programmes more effectively in the city. Municipal departments, district municipalities and civil society organizations now work from the same base. In one example of Purple Map's impact, better data allowed resources for childcare centres to be targeted towards neighbourhoods in greater need.

The GDC principle on gender empowerment promotes cooperation to close the gender digital divide, mainstream a gender perspective, and counter sexual and gender-based violence amplified by the use of technology.

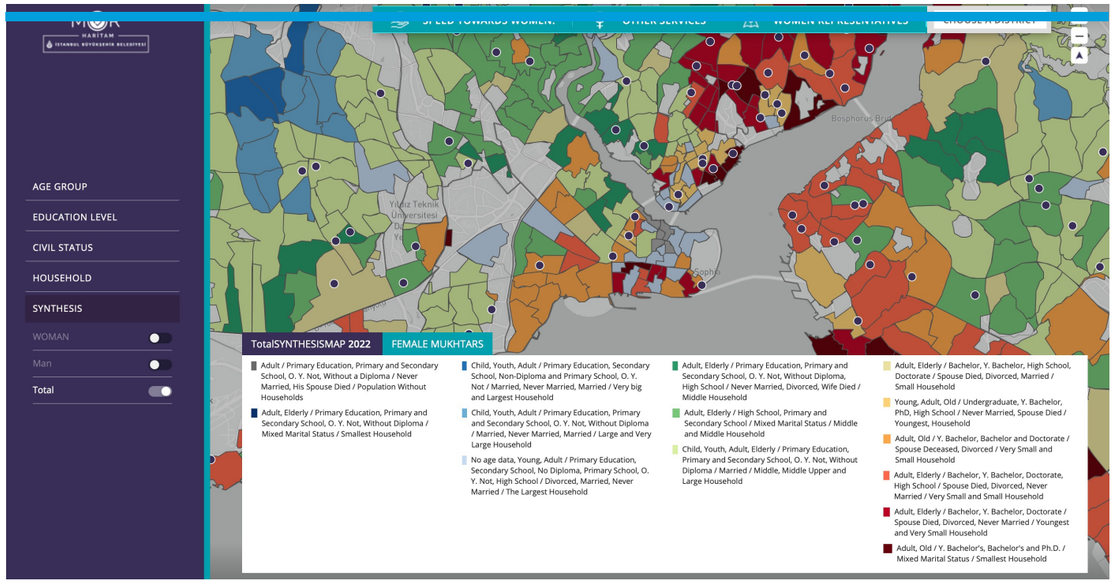


Photo credit: © UN Resident Coordinator Office, Türkiye

Data turned against women

The granularity that lets Bursa find the neighbourhoods without childcare is what makes data about women dangerous elsewhere. What separates the two is not the data but the terms it is held on.

Fed by CCTV, private cameras, sensors, satellite imagery or data scraped off the Internet, cities' datasets about their citizens have exploded. Today, much of this information is privately owned and can be sold to customers.

Data brokers, data-sharing partnerships and AI analytics companies have been implicated in the illegal surveillance and tracking of women by former partners and stalkers. Dozens of cities in the USA recently ended contracts with an automated licence plate reader network after evidence that the data had been used to spy on women. The issue is not limited to one country, according to **UN Women**, but occurs regularly in cities around the world.

GDC objective 3 calls for urgent action to enhance digital trust and safety, including through measures to counter all forms of violence, hate speech, cyberbullying and other forms of abuse which occur through technology use.

Data governance to combat Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)

Digital harms to women and girls continue to escalate in prevalence and form, from image-based abuse, online harassment and doxxing to AI-enabled tracking. UN sources record a 550 per cent increase in deepfake video content online between 2019 and 2023. Some 98 per cent of that content was sexually explicit, and 99 per cent of those depicted were women and girls. Poorly governed data increases our vulnerability to digital monitoring and the risk of invasion of privacy—particularly for women and marginalized groups. In April 2026, five UN Special Rapporteurs addressing the problem of digital monitoring called for stringent safeguards on data quality, testing and validation, and personal data protection and security to be effectively implemented.

"States must urgently recommit to safeguarding rights and freedoms by enacting effective limits on digital surveillance," they wrote. These could include "rigorous human rights due diligence and impact assessments of AI and other technologies throughout their lifecycle, including regarding their development, transfer and use."Safeguards are critical, but they are not sufficient on their own, because most of the harm is designed in before any safeguard is applied According to Alexandra Robinson, GBV Programme Adviser at **UN Population Fund (UNFPA)** headquarters, "technology-facilitated gender-based violence is not inevitable. It is the product of poor tech design choices, but design choices can be made differently."

Making All Spaces Safe (MASS) is a **UNFPA** global programme supported by Global Affairs Canada, with the aim of tackling the growing prevalence and threat of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. The programme advocates for safely designed technology—which can mean many things. Mapping of the potential risks and harms from a product while embedding privacy and security principles into the initial concept. End-to-end encryption. Minimal metadata collection. Clear informed consent.

MASS also addresses the needs of survivors of TFGBV. In its pilot phase, the programme strengthened the capacity of over 1,200 frontline GBV service providers and stakeholders in local communities through the contextualization and translation of the global TFGBV Training Package across 12 countries and four languages.

Setting the terms

Back in Bursa, the Metropolitan Municipality is now at the helm of the Purple Map and committed to expanding its benefits. When queried about the potential for breaches of privacy, the developers behind the data map pointed to Türkiye's stringent data protection laws. Bursa's map is publicly owned, aggregated to the level of neighbourhoods, and collected for a declared purpose. As one municipal leader put it: "Mor Haritam Bursa serves as a dynamic and evolving digital system that both supports women's access to information and services and contributes to their more equal participation in urban life."

4.8 billion people—or 58 per cent of the world's population—live in cities and towns. That means local and regional governments often find themselves confronting many of the practical challenges and risks associated with the digital transformation.



Roundtable conversation at Digital Cooperation Day 2026 bringing together mayors, local governments and partners to explore how the Mayors for Digital Cooperation and Cities Digital Inclusion Toolkit can help bridge local digital divides and advance inclusive digital transformation.

Photo credit: © UN ODET

The Mayors for Digital Cooperation (MDC) initiative aims to localize and advance the GDC in cities through a global network of mayors. Developed by the **United Nations Human Settlements Programme** in partnership with **UN ODET**, the Cities Digital Inclusion Toolkit (CDIT), responds by helping cities assess their local digital divide, identify priority areas for action, and connect these gaps with relevant digital solutions and proven practices.

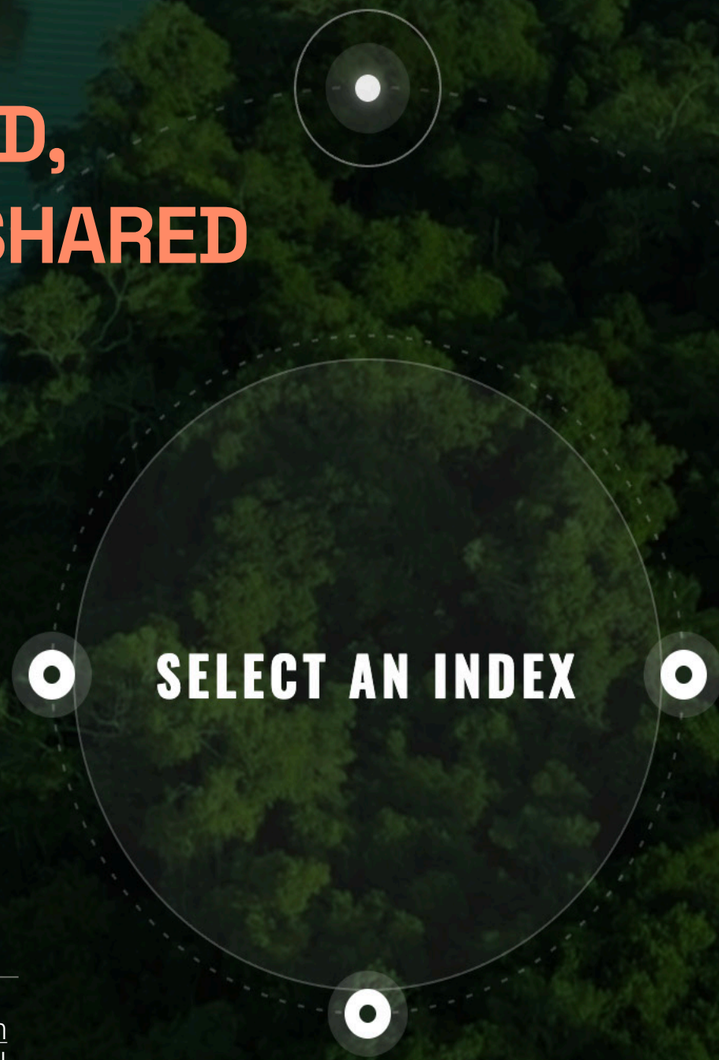
OBJECTIVE 4

ADVANCE RESPONSIBLE, EQUITABLE AND INTEROPERABLE DATA GOVERNANCE APPROACHES

DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY,
DATA EXCHANGES AND STANDARDS,
SDGS, CROSS-BORDER DATA FLOWS,
INTEROPERABILITY, DATA GOVERNANCE

In the following articles, we explore this objective in practice.

DATA: POOLED, GOVERNED, SHARED



The Amazon Rainforest Evolution Index, developed by the CERTI Amazônia Institute, shows how data commons can improve interoperability. Focusing on Brazil's Legal Amazon, the initiative integrates and standardizes fragmented datasets on deforestation and land-use change into a shared resource for decision-making.

Photo credit: © Instituto CERTI Amazônia Correspondent

An innovative solution emerged when researchers from **UNDP Malawi**, the NYU Peace Research and Education Program, Ushahidi, the Malawi Peace and Unity Commission, Mozilla Common Voice, and Malawian Universities (Malawi University of Science and Technology, University of Malawi, and Malawi University of Business and Applied Science) teamed up. They combined machine learning, local infrastructure and language-model optimization to create the Malawi Voice Data Commons, enabling AI-powered speech recognition to improve emergency-response systems while creating digital resources for historically underrepresented languages such as Chichewa, Chitumbuka and Chiyao.

Local communities can now report emergencies in their native languages using just a basic mobile phone and toll-free numbers. The tool reduced emergency-response times from 72 to 6 hours and gave voice to approximately 17.2 million citizens speaking these languages.



Malawi Voice Data Commons (MVDC) co-creation workshop at the University of Malawi (UNIMA) in Zomba.

Photo credit: © Malawi Voice Data Commons, NYU Peace Research and Education Program (PREP) Correspondent

Data as a commons

Data commons represent one response to the challenge of data inequity. They are governed environments where data is pooled and reused for clearly defined purposes under participatory oversight. They sit between full openness and restrictive control: access is structured, purposes are limited, and governance arrangements can include community or multistakeholder oversight. Accountability and equitable benefit-sharing are embedded in their design.

This matters because open data alone does not guarantee fairness. Data shared in good faith can be reused commercially or to train AI systems without returning value to the communities that helped create it. Data commons rely on participatory governance to make reuse possible while reducing extractive practices.

"The significance of Malawi Voice Data Commons lies in its governance model, spearheaded by Marine Collins Ragnet, which involves traditional authorities, women's leaders, youth representatives, educators, and religious leaders in decisions on how data is collected, used, and shared," says Katerina Siira, Deputy Director of the NYU Peace Research and Education Program. "The aim is to ensure communities are not merely sources of data but active participants in its governance and benefits."

Sharing the value

Today, data sits alongside connectivity, infrastructure and skills as a strategic determinant of economic opportunity, social equity and sustainable development. Yet much of the digital continues to treat data as an infinitely extractable and exploitable commodity. The acceleration of AI is amplifying these trends.

Data value is generated across many stages: collection, curation, analysis and reuse; but the benefits are seldom distributed evenly. Farmers, public institutions, communities or individuals often contribute the upstream data; it is downstream actors with advanced analytics, proprietary infrastructure or platform power, who are better placed to turn that into products or services, capturing most of the value.

As Stefaan Verhulst, Co-Founder of TheGovLab based in New York, argues: "Benefit-sharing from data cannot be treated as a voluntary afterthought. It must be built into governance frameworks, contracts, standards, financing models, intellectual property rules, and public-interest safeguards from the start."

The benefits of data also go beyond economic gains from innovation and trade, to include social benefits such as better healthcare, education, disaster response, public administration and environmental protection.

Absent from the data, absent from the decision

Many countries and communities are at risk of becoming mere providers of raw data, unable to capture value across the data lifecycle and the economic opportunities it generates. They also face the growing threat of digital underrepresentation from AI models trained on data in languages and in contexts foreign to them.

In this scenario, the experiences and knowledge embedded in data from entire populations, cultures and geographies remain absent from or poorly reflected in the digital systems and AI that increasingly shape public policy, resource allocation, scientific research and economic decision-making.

The problem of digital underrepresentation can also be tackled in other ways. In Portugal, researchers confronted a similar question at a different scale: how can AI better reflect a language and context that remains underrepresented in leading models?

AMALIA (Agente Multimodal Automático de Linguagem com IA) is the first open large-language model specifically developed in Portuguese. Developed through a partnership of six universities and research institutes, its ~9 billion parameter model was pre-trained on 4 trillion words. The dataset behind AMALIA is openly available for users building applications in Portuguese. Its creators hope the model will not only preserve Portuguese proverbs and cultural references, but also spur a wave of AI-solutions for local challenges.

The barriers are also within countries

Interoperability remains one of the most significant barriers to unlocking the developmental value of data.

Recognizing these challenges, the GDC mandated the creation of a Working Group on Data Governance for Development at All Levels to make recommendations and propose options to improve equity, benefits-sharing and interoperability of data. A progress report will be presented by the Working Group at the upcoming session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development in April 2027.

While international discussions often focus on cross-border data sharing, equally consequential barriers exist within countries themselves. Government ministries, public agencies and sectoral institutions frequently operate through disconnected systems, incompatible standards and fragmented administrative practices that limit their ability to share, combine and reuse data effectively. Data remains siloed across institutions.

The Amazon Rainforest Evolution Index, developed by the CERTI Amazônia Institute, shows how data commons can improve interoperability. Focusing on Brazil's Legal Amazon, the initiative integrates and standardizes fragmented datasets on deforestation and land-use change into a shared resource for decision-making. In doing so, it transforms fragmented information into actionable knowledge while preserving environmental data as a collective resource.

Going one step further, the Amazon Rainforest Evolution Index created AI-ready tools to monitor changes in the forest due to deforestation and land use.

OBJECTIVE 5

ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANITY

SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING,
DIALOGUE, CAPACITY-BUILDING,

5

In the following articles, we explore this objective in practice.

INDEPENDENT, EVIDENCE-BASED ASSESSMENT OF CAPABILITIES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS



“The evidence dilemma is serious, but not insurmountable.”

Independent International Scientific Panel on AI
Preliminary Report, July 2026

Governments today face high-stakes decisions about AI, drawing on evidence that is often limited or conflicting, and frequently shaped by assumptions that do not necessarily reflect realities across all regions. As AI capabilities take big strides, so do the stakes of getting these decisions wrong.

This is the evidence gap the **UN Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence** was created to close.

Established by the GDC and brought to life in General Assembly resolution 79/325, the Panel is composed of 40 independent experts from all UN regions, chosen from over 2,600 applicants across 140 countries. Serving in their personal capacities, the Panel’s mandate is strictly scientific: to assess evidence on AI’s opportunities, risks and impacts in non-military domains.

On 1 July 2026, the Panel released its Preliminary Report: “Evidence-based assessment of opportunities, risks and impacts of artificial intelligence.” The report covers progress and risks in seven domains: from AI’s technical trajectory to its economic, security, human rights and governance implications. It warns that scientific understanding is struggling to keep pace with the rapid evolution of AI, with consequences for evidence-based policymaking and governance.

The Panel is expected to issue its first annual summary report at the second Global Dialogue on AI Governance in May 2027. A series of thematic briefs is also planned in the period leading up to the Dialogue.

THE PANEL AT A GLANCE

40 experts

Every UN region represented

Gender-balanced, interdisciplinary expertise

Findings across 7 domains

1. AI Science, AI Advances, and Trajectories
2. Societal Applications – AI Integration in Science, Health, Education and Agriculture
3. Economic Implications – Labour, Productivity, and Development
4. Security, Systems, and Environmental Implications
5. Human Rights, Information, and Democracy
6. Cultural and Individual Flourishing and Autonomy
7. Management Practice and Frameworks, Capacity Building, and Reliability

THE GLOBAL DIALOGUE ON AI GOVERNANCE

> “If AI is to be powerful, it must be governed. If AI is to be trusted, those who build it must be accountable. If AI is to be global, it must be fair. And if AI is to serve the future, it must not consume the future.”

António Guterres
Secretary-General
Global Dialogue on AI Governance
(Geneva, 2026)



Photo credit: © UN Photo Geneva

The United Nations Global Dialogue on AI Governance is the UN's universal, inclusive forum for countries and stakeholders to address how artificial intelligence should be governed.

First discussed in the Global Digital Compact, the Dialogue was established by the General Assembly in 2025 to build shared understanding of the challenges, exchange practical experiences, and strengthen cooperation across a fragmented global governance landscape.

The inaugural Dialogue, held in Geneva on 6–7 July 2026, brought together more than 3,000 participants from 163 countries, including Heads of States and Government, more than 60 ministers and over 1,000 organizations. Discussions were anchored from the outset in scientific evidence from the preliminary report of the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI.

Across plenaries and thematic debates, participants agreed: no Government, company or institution can govern AI alone. Several areas of emerging convergence gave the Dialogue a clear direction.

Build safety, trust and guardrails
Rapid progress in AI capability reinforces the need for safety, human oversight and accountability. Common baselines, methodologies and standards remain underdeveloped.

Preserve human dignity
Set red lines against discrimination and human rights violations. Machines can inform, but humans must decide.

Bridge the AI Divide
Sustained investments in infrastructure, compute, data, skills and institutions are required so all countries can benefit from AI and participate in shaping its governance.



Photo credits: © UN Photo Geneva

"Ultimately, this Dialogue has been about ensuring that every country, every institution and every stakeholder has the opportunity not only to be heard, but to shape our collective future."

Egriselda López
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of the Republic of El Salvador to the United Nations
Co-Chair of the Global Dialogue on AI Governance

New Co-Chairs will be appointed to guide consultations and preparations for the second Dialogue, to be held on 3 and 4 May 2027 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

THE DIALOGUE IN NUMBERS

3,062
participants

163
countries

6
Heads of State or Government

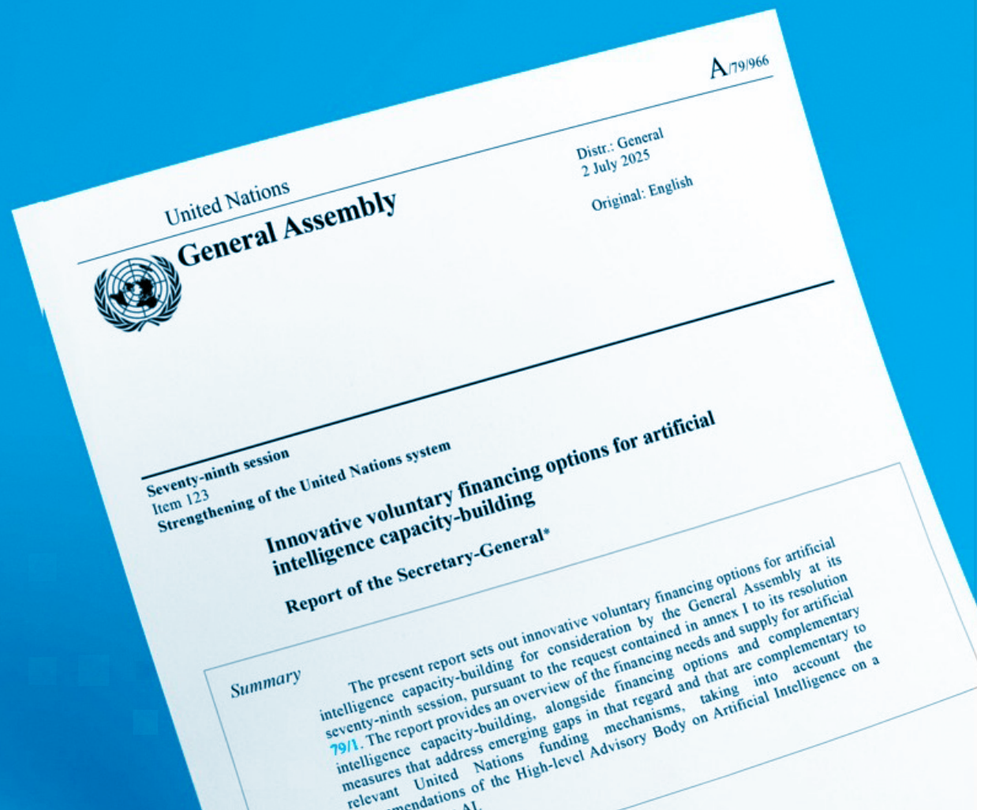
60+
ministers



WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO FINANCE AI CAPACITY FOR ALL?

Artificial intelligence capacity remains highly concentrated. Just 100 firms, primarily based in the United States and China, account for 40 per cent of global corporate R&D spending, and firms such as NVIDIA, Apple and Microsoft have each reached market valuations exceeding US$3 trillion—comparable to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the entire African continent or that of the United Kingdom.

In 2025, the United Nations Secretary-General set out the case for a global response on AI capacity-building: Only a global effort can put a "floor under the AI divide", he wrote in the report Innovative Voluntary Financing Options for Artificial Intelligence Capacity-Building.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Seventy-ninth session
Item 123
Strengthening of the United Nations system

Innovative voluntary financing options for artificial intelligence capacity-building

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report sets out innovative voluntary financing options for artificial intelligence capacity-building for consideration by the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session, pursuant to the request contained in annex I to its resolution 79/1. The report provides an overview of the financing needs and supply for artificial intelligence capacity-building, alongside financing options and complementary measures that address emerging gaps in that regard and that are complementary to relevant United Nations funding mechanisms, taking into account the recommendations of the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence on a

The 2026 AI Index Report by the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence finds that the United States hosts the largest share of global data centres and AI compute, while China accounted for 74.2 per cent of all AI patent grants worldwide in 2024.

Many developing countries, meanwhile, continue to face significant barriers to participating in the AI economy, including limited computing capacity, weak connectivity, shortages of specialized talent and a lack of locally relevant datasets. These capacity gaps are matched by striking governance gaps: drawing on data through the end of 2023, **UNCTAD** noted that out of 89 national AI strategies worldwide, only six were from least developed countries (LDCs).

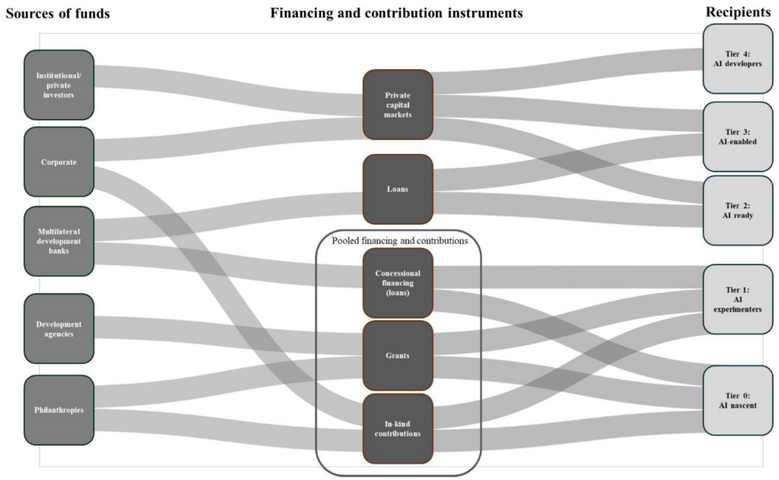
A floor under the AI divide

In 2025, the United Nations Secretary-General set out the case for a global response on AI capacity-building:

Only a global effort can put a "floor under the AI divide", he wrote in the report *Innovative Voluntary Financing Options for Artificial Intelligence Capacity-Building* (2025).

Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model, the report advocates for a tiered approach, aligning financing and technical support to each country's level of AI readiness. For developing countries, the priority is building foundational AI capabilities, including computing and data infrastructure, technical skills, national AI strategies, locally relevant datasets, and piloting AI applications in sectors such as health, education and agriculture. For more advanced economies, the focus shifts to frontier AI research, advanced model development, sophisticated governance frameworks and international cooperation.

Financing mechanisms should evolve with a country's AI maturity: from grants and philanthropic support for foundational AI capacities, to blended finance and private investment for more mature ecosystems.



Overview of AI financing instruments presented in the UN Secretary- General's 2025 report on innovative voluntary financing options for AI capacity-building.

Photo credit: © United Nations Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (UN ODET), Innovative Voluntary Financing Options for Artificial Intelligence Capacity-Building: Report of the Secretary-General (A/79/966), 2025, p. 11

For AI to drive sustainable development instead of deepening inequality, investment in capacity-building must match the ambition. The Secretary-General's report in 2025 proposed the creation of a US$3 billion Global Fund for AI to help developing countries establish minimum AI capabilities.

A year later, the financing gap remains. Writing in August 2026 on the unique challenges faced by developing countries in building AI capacity, the Secretary-General recommends that the General Assembly endorse the need for a Global Fund for AI Capacity-Building and take steps to advance it, elaborating its strategic objectives, governance and administration at the eighty-first session.

The design is not settled. The report suggests initial commitments in the range of US$3 billion over two to four years, for a fund that would complement existing mechanisms rather than replace them, and that could sit inside or outside the United Nations system. It points to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the Global Financing Facility as possible models. To put this amount in context, the same Stanford University AI Index Report 2026 estimates that global corporate investment in AI reached US$581.7 billion in 2025, up 129.9 per cent from 2024, reflecting the rapid expansion of AI development, compute capacity, and supporting infrastructure.

Capacity-building for AI, for everybody

The risk that AI could widen the divide between countries that shape emerging technologies and those that merely consume them has driven a wave of new partnerships to promote AI capacity-building, infrastructure and research.

For example, In October 2025, US philanthropic players pooled resources to launch Humanity AI, a US$500 million fund for people-centred AI research. With US$100 million from France, the not-for-profit Current AI raised US$400 million in July 2026 from various partners to develop open, public AI infrastructure. The same month, the World AI Cooperation Organization was launched in Shanghai with 29 signatory countries and the objectives of capacity-building, open-source and open-weight model sharing for equitable AI-access.

Not all of the capacity-building response is financial. Training on AI, justice and the rule of law is available through the UNESCO partnership with the Saïd Business School, the Blavatnik School of Government and the Faculty of Law, University of Oxford.

Nevertheless, the report of the Secretary-General draws on an analysis of announcements and concludes that current financing for AI capacity-building is fragmented and leaves significant geographical gaps. A needs-based global fund could help mobilize and direct resources at scale.

Knowing what to ask for

Amidst such excitement and worry, many countries ask the question: what do we need in terms of AI? While some countries may focus on building the pillars of AI-readiness, others are ready to source chips, power and cool data centres, or refine legislation.

One diagnostic methodology is offered by the ILIA – the Latin American AI Readiness Index published by the **UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean** in collaboration with Chile's National Centre for Artificial Intelligence (CENIA). The 2025 ILIA evaluated 19 countries against more than 100 sub-indicators on enabling factors, research, development, adoption and AI governance. By identifying strengths and gaps within national AI ecosystems, the index provides policymakers and development partners with a practical basis for prioritizing interventions and targeting investments. Following a diagnostic, what should a country's national AI and data strategy look like?

In August 2026, led by the **UN Resident Coordinator's Office** in support of the Government of Lesotho, **UN ODET** hosted a five-day national AI and data strategy workshop. With participation from **UNESCO**, **ITU**, **UNICEF**, **OECD**, **the World Bank**, **UNDP**, and experts from multiple sectors, participants examined the practical choices involved in developing AI capacity: demand, energy, connectivity, environmental and social impacts, institutional arrangements, financing and private-sector participation.

The Blueprint for National AI and Data Strategies born out of this collaboration provides a guided methodology organized around seven capability components, five maturity tiers, a set of guiding principles and a strategy lifecycle, paired with detailed implementation plans for each component. Plans are underway to replicate the experience in more countries.

The power of the network

Research and academic organizations are likewise driving efforts to meet AI capacity-building needs. To facilitate pooling of expertise and resources among the like-minded, a new Global Network of Centres for AI Capacity-Building supported by the UN was launched in July 2026 with 26 centres participating.



One of its founders Seydina Moussa, Director at the Université Numérique Cheikh Hamidou Kane in Senegal, explains: *"AI readiness is not about building a data centre or adopting technology in isolation, but about connecting infrastructure with skills, data governance, institutional capacity, financing and demonstrated national needs. The Network is not there to prescribe a single model, but to enable peer learning, mobilize expertise and resources across regions, and help countries translate their own strategies into implementation."*

Next steps

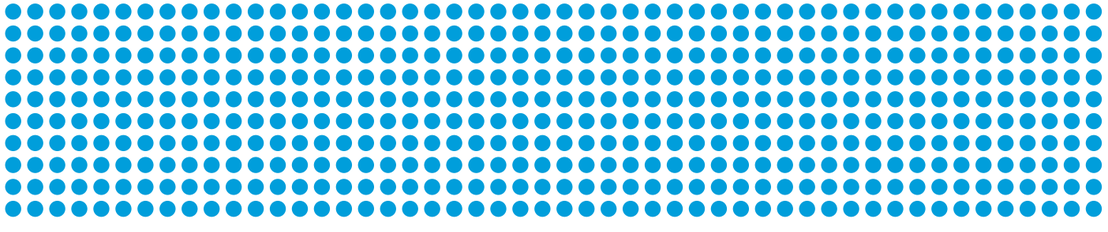
As AI investment accelerates globally, the real test is whether all countries can build the capabilities needed to benefit from it. Closing the AI divide will require sustained financing, practical partnerships and a commitment to making AI opportunity truly universal.

One dot is one billion dollars

Private investment in AI infrastructure, annualized, against the proposed global fund for AI capacity-building.

Private investment in AI infrastructure

More than $500 billion a year



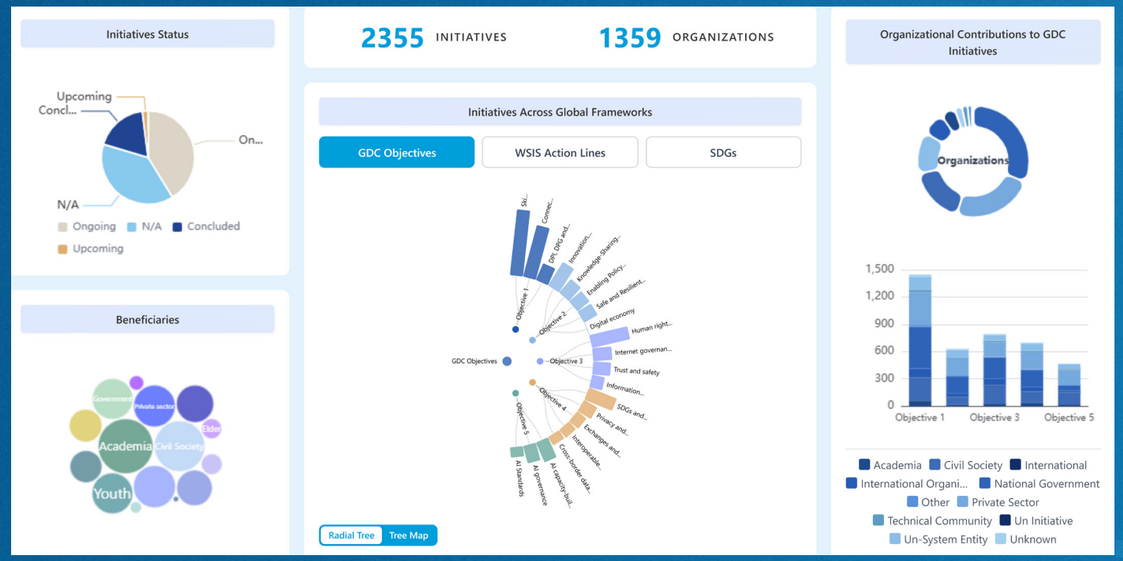
Proposed global fund for AI capacity-building

$3 billion in initial commitments, over two to four years

three dots

On a common annual basis the proposed fund is $0.75 to $1.5 billion a year, under 0.3 per cent of annual private investment in AI infrastructure.

Source: figures as cited in the draft text, notes 11 and 12.



UN Digital Cooperation Portal dashboard visualizing initiatives contributing to implementation of the Global Digital Compact.

Photo credit: © UN Digital Cooperation Portal – UN ODET, UNCTAD & UNIDO.

The UN Digital Cooperation Portal is a dynamic platform that helps map, track, and amplify the global implementation of the Global Digital Compact (GDC). Launched in December 2025, the Portal brings together initiatives, stakeholder profiles and stories from Governments, UN entities, civil society, academia, technical communities, youth-led organizations and the private sector, providing a real-time view of digital cooperation efforts around the world. By classifying contributions against key global frameworks, including GDC objectives, WSIS Action Lines, and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Portal enables stakeholders to better understand how digital initiatives contribute to shared international priorities and where opportunities for collaboration exist. Many of the stories featured in this Digital Cooperation Day 2026 magazine have been sourced from the Portal, highlighting the diverse ways organizations are advancing digital inclusion, digital public infrastructure, AI governance, connectivity, and other priority areas. With over 2,400 initiatives currently showcased, the Portal serves as a valuable resource for promoting transparency, knowledge exchange, and collective action across the digital cooperation ecosystem.

DIGITAL COOPERATION PORTAL

SHARE YOUR DIGITAL COOPERATION STORY