



# United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General  
28 November 2025

Original: English

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## Sixteenth session

Geneva

20–23 October 2025

## Harnessing artificial intelligence for inclusive and sustainable development

### Ministerial round table

#### Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD emphasized the potential of artificial intelligence to support development, while noting that its impact depended on the choices made in relation to investment and governance as well as on whose voices shaped the rules. Countries needed comprehensive strategies focused on improving infrastructure, data and skills. She highlighted the importance of global cooperation on artificial intelligence and data governance to promote accountability and the role of shared digital facilities in bridging digital divides.
2. The round table was organized around two panel discussions. The first panel comprised the Secretary for Economic and Financial Affairs of Brazil; Permanent Secretary of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland; Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; and Deputy Minister, Ministry of Industry and Technology of Türkiye. Panellists for the second panel were the Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment of the Gambia; Deputy Minister for Economic and Development Affairs of Estonia; Deputy Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union; and Secretary-General of the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity. The Head of the Coordination Unit, Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies of the United Nations, served as moderator.
3. The first panel considered the experiences of different countries with artificial intelligence.
4. One panellist said that artificial intelligence would influence countries' development paths both directly and indirectly. Direct impacts included sector-specific applications, as exemplified by healthcare facilities in Brazil that were enabled by artificial intelligence. Indirectly, artificial intelligence drove demand for digital infrastructure and electricity that should align with sustainability and environmental goals. He called for working to move beyond simple Internet access and to focus rather on connectivity suitable for artificial intelligence operations. In addition, he emphasized that developing countries often lacked governance frameworks, specifically legislation and effective enforcement mechanisms.
5. Another panellist stressed that artificial intelligence could act as a catalyst for development only if it was paired with initiatives that promoted access and equity. Countries should foster artificial intelligence skills for individuals. In the case of Finland, that had been



achieved through open, online artificial intelligence courses. He also emphasized that using artificial intelligence for agriculture and resource mobilization, including through more effective public revenue collection, could particularly aid development in the least developed countries.

6. Another panellist noted that realizing the potential of artificial intelligence to enhance development required strengthening infrastructure, institutions and interoperable governance frameworks. Capacity-building was key to achieving inclusive artificial intelligence development. He shared examples of how the Republic of Korea was working towards that goal, through initiatives such as an Asia–Pacific artificial intelligence hub, a digital flagship project with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and an artificial intelligence initiative of the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

7. Another panellist highlighted the transformative power of artificial intelligence. Developing countries could no longer compete solely based on low-cost labour and should instead prioritize building human capital and workforce proficiency. He called for human-centric, resilient and sustainable artificial intelligence development strategies, underscoring efforts of the Science and Technological Research Council of Türkiye to strengthen artificial intelligence skills domestically and function as a mentor for neighbouring and developing countries.

8. The second panel focused on artificial intelligence opportunities and governance.

9. One panellist underscored that artificial intelligence could cause job displacement but could also provide opportunities for growth and the creation of new jobs, which was a central objective of the national artificial intelligence strategy of Ghana. She highlighted the critical need for financing efforts and large-scale skills training. Also, as the world had become a “global village,” both global and regional cooperation were essential for countries to harmonize their approaches to artificial intelligence and collectively seize its benefits.

10. Another panellist stressed that realizing the potential of artificial intelligence to enhance governance and efficiency across sectors required a trustworthy and human-centric approach. She underlined the need for data management and skills initiatives grounded in the principles of security and ethics. She pointed to the Artificial Intelligence Act of the European Union as a regulatory model that aimed to balance transparency and accountability, while supporting innovation.

11. Another panellist highlighted the urgent need for investment in digital infrastructure and skills development in developing countries. He stressed that the greatest benefits of artificial intelligence arose from its application in specific sectors, which required skills development and international standards to lower technology costs. He encouraged countries to seek support from United Nations agencies. He emphasized the importance of national policies, though he also noted that many countries still lacked artificial intelligence strategies.

12. The last panellist called for a shift from the traditional consumer–producer model to a model based on the prioritization of human resources and capital as the key drivers of development. He emphasized the importance of “human governance” that fostered development grounded on respect for human dignity. He further noted that ethics should be viewed not as a hinderance to development, but rather as essential for ensuring that the benefits of progress are equitably shared.

13. Overall, many panellists highlighted the potential of artificial intelligence to boost development, noting that artificial intelligence could transform healthcare, agriculture and public administration. However, realizing that potential required national strategies focused on infrastructure, data and skills. They also emphasized the importance of global cooperation as a means to promote accountability, ethics and trust, as well as the importance of capacity-building initiatives centred on humans.

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