

11th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

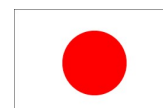
Wed 06 May 2026, 10.00 am – Thu 07 May 2026, 6.00 pm

【Side Event】

Building Government AI Capacity: Insights from the City, National and Regional Perspectives

Venue: UNU-CPR, One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, 885 2nd Avenue, 14th Floor, New York

Date and Time: 13:30 - 14:45 (EST, New York time) 5 May 2026



Co-organized by:

- United Nations University-Center for Policy Research (UNU-CPR)
- United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

With the support of:

Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

Background / Context

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping public policy, economic systems, and social infrastructure worldwide. As AI technologies become more widely adopted, governments face the dual challenge of both regulating AI systems and developing internal capabilities to effectively understand, manage, and deploy these technologies in the public interest, while also ensuring that progress contributes to closing digital divides.

In response, many governments have begun strengthening their institutional capacity by integrating AI expertise within public administration, with growing recognition of the importance of extending such capacity-building efforts to global south. This includes establishing dedicated AI units, appointing Chief AI Officers, and embedding technical experts within ministries and regulatory bodies, alongside international cooperation and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

At the same time, the rapid advancement of AI has raised growing concerns regarding AI security and the potential misuse of AI systems, with disproportionate risks for countries with more limited institutional and technical capacities. Risks such as misinformation, cyber-enabled manipulation, automated disinformation campaigns, and other forms of technological misuse have heightened concerns about societal resilience, public trust, and the stability of democratic institutions, particularly in contexts where safeguards and response mechanisms are still evolving.

Approaches to building government AI capacity vary significantly across countries and regions, reflecting differences in governance structures, innovation ecosystems, and policy priorities, as well as disparities in access to resources and expertise. Comparative analysis of these approaches, can provide valuable insights into how governments can more effectively institutionalize AI expertise while ensuring accountability, transparency, and public trust in line with the objectives of the Global Digital Compact. By examining emerging institutional models and practical experiences, the discussion aims to identify lessons learned, highlight good practices, and explore opportunities for inclusive international cooperation that supports capacity-building.

Event Objectives and Outcomes

The discussion is particularly timely given the accelerating global dialogue on AI governance, digital cooperation, and technological risk management, alongside growing international attention to addressing the digital divide. Strengthening AI expertise within governments is a critical enabler for achieving these objectives.

The discussion will contribute to global dialogue on responsible and inclusive AI governance and support progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular:

- SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)
- SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Specific Objectives

- Examine emerging institutional models for integrating AI expertise within government institutions, and share practical experiences and lessons with a view to informing capacity-building efforts.
- Identify key challenges and opportunities in strengthening public-sector AI capacity. Promote cross-regional dialogue and cooperation on building government AI capacity in support of sustainable development and closing digital divides.
- Explore how governments can strengthen internal technical capacity to address challenges related to AI governance, AI security, and the risks of technological misuse.

Practical Outcomes

- Foster dialogue among policymakers, practitioners, and experts, including representatives from developing countries, on strengthening government AI capacity in an inclusive manner. Provide comparative insights into how governments are integrating AI expertise into public administration.
- Identify opportunities for cross-regional collaboration and knowledge exchange on AI governance, including partnerships that support capacity-building and contribute to bridging digital and AI divides.
- Contribute policy-relevant perspectives to ongoing global discussions on responsible, inclusive, and equitable AI governance, in line with the principles and objectives of the Global Digital Compact.

Event Format and Agenda

[Format]

Hybrid event (in-person* and online participation)

*Refreshments, including light lunch, will be provided. Participants are encouraged to arrive by **13:15 (EST, New York time), 5 May 2026.**

[Proposed Agenda and Speakers]

➤ Opening Remarks

- Christina McElwaine, Chief Operations Officer, UNU-CPR
- Trisha Meyer, Professorial Fellow at UNU-CRIS and Research Director of the Centre on Digitalization, Democracy and Innovation at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

➤ Presentations and Panel Discussion

[Speakers]

- Vincenzo Aquaro, Chief of Digital Government Branch, Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- Gabriele Mazzini, Expert in AI governance at MIT, former principal advisor at the European Commission and led the drafting of the Commission's EU AI Act.
- Masahiro Ihara, Executive Director and Chief Technology Officer, GovTech Tokyo

[Moderator]

- Yu Ping: Head of Digital Partnerships, Digital, AI and Innovation Hub, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, United Nations Development Programme

➤ Closing Remarks

- Representatives from Permanent Mission of Member States
- Keita Azuma, Associate Research Fellow, UNU-CRIS

Target Audience

The side event is intended for a diverse group of stakeholders engaged in the governance and policy implications of emerging technologies, including:

- Representatives of Permanent Missions to the United Nations; Policymakers and government officials involved in digital policy, AI governance, and technology policy
- Representatives from UN entities and international organizations working on digital governance and innovation
- Experts from academia, research institutions, and policy think tanks specializing in AI governance and public-sector innovation; Representatives from industry and civil society engaged in responsible AI development and digital policy

By bringing together policymakers, technical experts, and practitioners from different regions and institutional contexts, the event aims to foster constructive dialogue and strengthen international cooperation on building government AI capacity.

For further information regarding the event or participation, please contact Keita Azuma (kazuma@cris.unu.edu) and Christina McElwaine (mcelwaine@unu.edu)