# United Nations Activities on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

## 2023

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# Executive Summary

### Highlights

- *47 entities participated, 408 projects reported.*
- *An increase of 18% in participating entities and 45% in projects reported.*
- *Strong focus continues to be maintained by the reported projects on SDGs 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (Partnership for the Goals), with SDG 13 (Climate Action) returning to the top 5 list again, similar to the 2021 edition of the Report. In 2022, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) had featured among the top five SDGs and while focus remains consistent on it this year as well, the number of projects reporting work on SDG 13 (Climate Action) has increased, bringing it back to the top 5 SDGs addressed.*
- *More focus continues to be needed on SDGs 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), 14 (Life Below Water) and 15 (Life on Land), which is a finding that remains consistent with the 2022 edition of the Report.*
- *Multi-stakeholder collaborations continue to remain a priority for the UN system. Nearly 60% of the UN projects have reported collaborations with the UN system, the private sector, governments, civil society, academia, or with another international organization, demonstrating the UN's focus on maintaining strong partnerships with internal and external stakeholders.*
- *Consistent with the findings of the 2022 edition, the most common outputs of the UN system's work on AI remain reports and software tools like mobile applications, web applications, searchable dashboards, and generative AI-powered chatbots. Besides, about 13% indicated a focus on creating datasets.*

Urgent action is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. With the potential to drive progress across all 17 SDGs, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help speed and scale interventions for this purpose.

Recognizing this, the different bodies, agencies, offices and departments of the UN system have been exploring ways to leverage the potential of AI to drive change and impact across their issue areas. In 2020, the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and its High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) established the Interagency Working Group on AI (IAWG-AI), co-led by ITU and UNESCO, to bring together UN system expertise on AI in support of the CEB and HLCP workstreams on the ethics of AI (led by UNESCO) and the strategic approach and road map for supporting capacity development (led by ITU), and the related gap analysis effort carried out by ITU, informed by the UN Activities on AI Report, to identify the gaps in UN AI-related activities in order to help the UN system prioritize strategic actions.

Since 2021, the IAWG-AI has successfully galvanized expertise from across the UN system as well as external stakeholder groups to advance the responsible development and use of AI in the UN, underpinned by ethics and human rights, while driving forward the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. As part of the IAWG-AI, UNESCO and OICT have led the development of the Principles for the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in the United Nations System, which were based on UNESCO's Ethics of AI Recommendation and endorsed by the HLCP at its 43rd

session and the CEB in 2022. In addition, the IAWG-AI United Nations System White Paper on AI Governance, which analyses the UN system's institutional models, functions, and existing international normative frameworks applicable to global AI governance, has been approved by HLCP at its 47th session and was subsequently endorsed by the CEB in May 2024.

In 2023, the AI for Good platform, organized by ITU in partnership with more than 40 UN Sister Agencies and co-convened with Switzerland, reached over 1 million online views and grew its online community to over 100,000. The 2023 AI for Good Global Summit was joined by 2,500 in-person attendees and 10,000 online audience[1]. This multi-stakeholder community includes representatives from 180+ countries and has consistently attracted broad based international media coverage, making it the leading action-oriented, global and inclusive United Nations platform on AI.

The AI for Good Neural Network continues to grow: an AI-powered community networking and content platform designed to help users build connections with innovators and experts, link innovative ideas with social impact opportunities, and bring the community together to advance the SDGs using AI. AI for Good Partners showcase their work on the Neural Network through weekly live sessions, virtual exhibitions, networking features and interactive content. UN Partners have also created "poster boards" in the "UN SDG Zone" of the platform to virtually exhibit their work on AI, viewable by all Neural Network users, and open for interaction with users via the booth wall and smart matching system. The chapters of this Report are available on the respective poster boards of the UN entities as well.

Complementary to these efforts, ITU, the UN's specialized agency on digital technologies, has been coordinating the compilation of an annual up-to-date directory since 2018 of all the AI-related projects, initiatives, events and processes that are being carried out within the UN system in the form of the UN Activities on AI Report.

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[1] This publication is being released during the 2024 AI for Good Summit – which is expected to have a significantly larger audience.

### Methodology:

- This edition's chapters were updated by each of the participating UN bodies and agencies respectively, based on the 2022 UN Activities on Artificial Intelligence Report.
- New chapters were drafted for the 7 additional entities who have contributed to this Report for the first time.
- Updated inputs were not provided by 7 entities for this edition. Their chapters and projects have been retained from the 2022 edition in this Report.
- All submissions received this year have been harmonized and formatted for the purpose of reproduction in the Report.
- For the Executive Summary, select data points were extracted from the submissions received to develop an analysis along five specific indicators: SDGs addressed, multi-stakeholder collaborations, types of projects, sectoral focus, and project status.
- All submissions received by 30 April 2024 have been included in the Executive Summary analysis.

The Report is a joint effort between ITU and 46 other UN agencies and bodies, all partners of AI for Good and members of the UN Interagency Working Group on AI. It presents use cases, projects and initiatives run by the UN system, in areas covering all 17 SDGs and ranging from smart agriculture and food systems to transportation, financial services, and healthcare. This Report is not intended to produce an exhaustive inventory of the UN system's work on AI. Rather, it is a tool to further collaboration and build common understanding around emerging AI technologies and solutions.

In the 2023 edition, 47 UN entities were engaged, 7 entities for the first time, and 408 projects have been presented. A brief analysis of the key tracks and trends arising from the submissions is provided below to help provide an overview of the extensive work that is taking place within the UN system as well as to assist UN bodies and agencies to identify the areas which could benefit from increased interventions as they develop future projects.
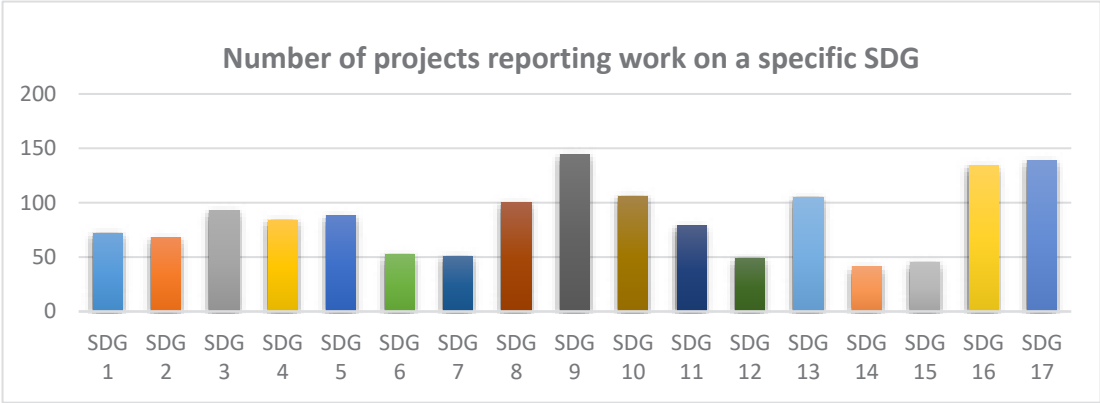
With the increased number of projects submitted for the Report this year, along with the updates made to the existing ones, the findings of this edition remain substantially consistent with those of the 2022 edition of this Report. Some of the fluctuations in the analysis detailed below are likely attributable to standard deviations occurring due to changes in personnel and the level of reporting annually. Significantly, the substantial increase in project numbers demonstrates the emphasis that is now being placed across the UN system on leveraging the potential of AI across several issue areas through concrete projects.

Relative stability on the key thematic priorities and SDGs across the 2022 and 2023 editions indicates a steadiness of efforts from entities in those areas. It could also be emblematic of the demand that is emanating from Member States and stakeholders for UN action and intervention across these topics. In particular, the renewed emphasis on SDG 13 (Climate Action), which aligns the priority SDGs once again with those of the 2021 Report, is illustrative of the critical timelines associated with achieving this SDG, the level of investment and effort needed to move the needle in this respect, as well as a potential recognition of the capacity of the technology to drive progress. Future editions of the Report will aim to continue analyzing these trends with an aim to provide insight into the nature and status of the UN AI activities.

This Report is being released at the [2024 edition of the annual AI for Good Global Summit](#).
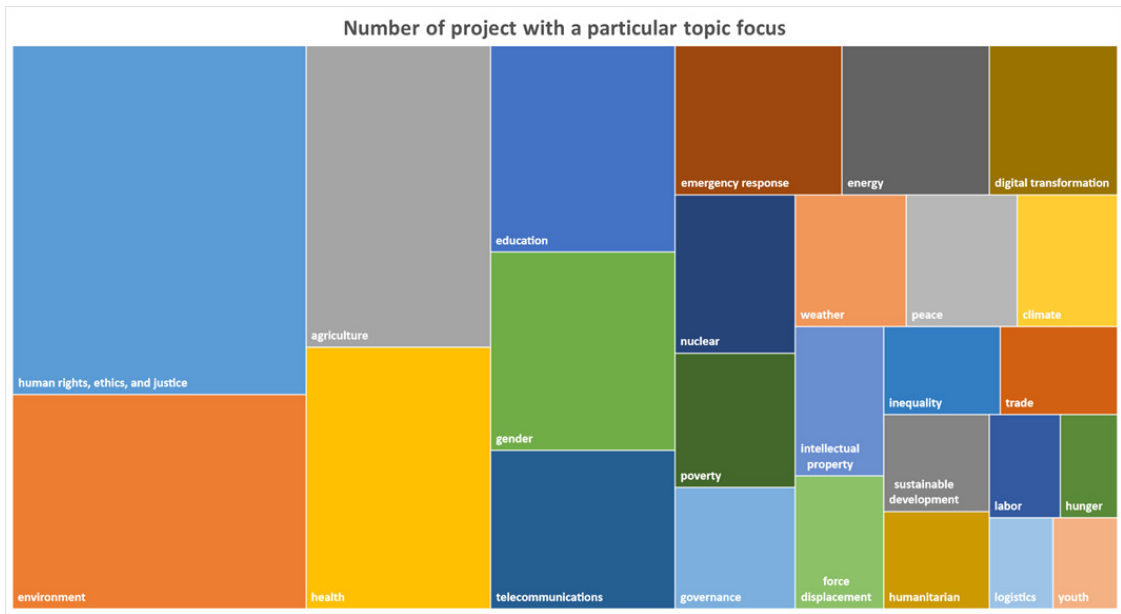
## Key tracks and trends

### 1. SDG Mapping



**Number of projects reporting work on a specific SDG**

Around 83% of the submissions have linked their projects with outcomes driving forward specific SDGs. Among them, the overwhelming majority address more than one SDG, signaling holistic, multidimensional projects.

SDGs 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and 17 (Partnership for the Goals) continue to remain among the top five most common SDGs addressed by the UN AI projects. However, this year's edition reports that while focus on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) remains consistent, there is an increase in the number of projects reporting on SDG 13 (Climate Action) bringing it up to the list of the top five most common SDGs addressed by projects this year. Meanwhile, similar to the last edition, more targeted action could be taken across SDGs 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), 14 (Life Below Water) and 15 (Life on Land).
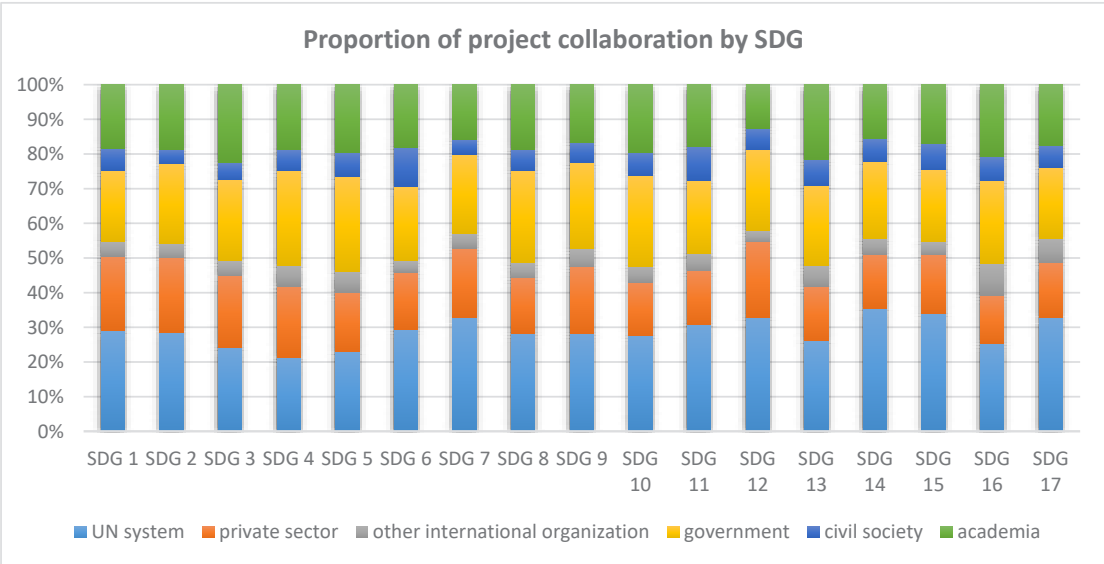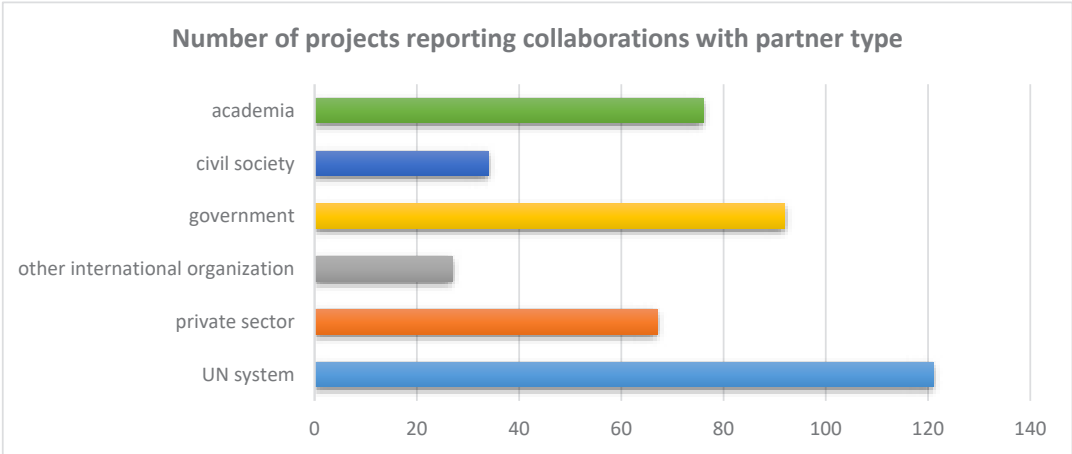
## 2. Project Subject Areas



Number of project with a particular topic focus

In addition to the SDG mapping, participants have also set out some of the issue areas within which their AI projects are operating. Nearly 83% of the projects reported their specific issue areas. In most cases, the projects are often reported as addressing multiple areas. Consistent with the 2022 edition, human rights, ethics and justice, environment, agriculture, health, education, gender, and telecommunications are tagged as priority subject areas in this edition. In particular, projects focusing on agriculture and environment have increased since 2022 which correlates to the overall increased focus on SDG 13 (Climate Action) in this year's projects.

## 3. Driving Multi-stakeholder Collaboration

**Number of projects reporting collaborations with partner type**
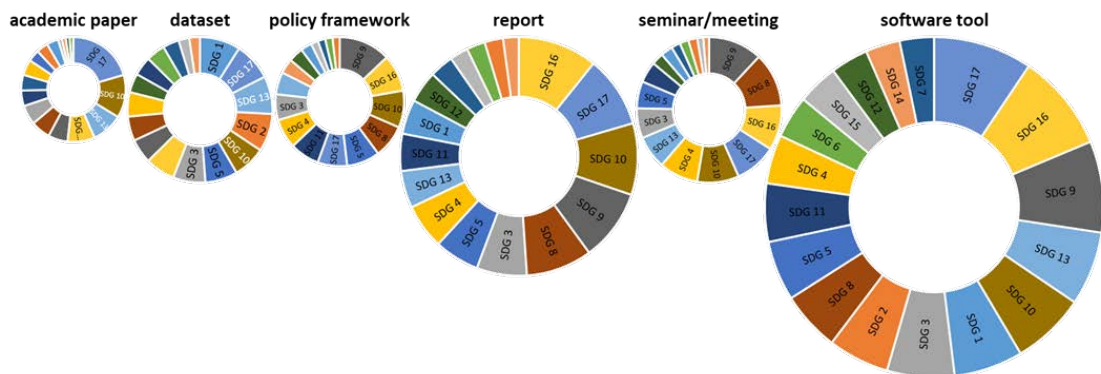


**Proportion of project collaboration by SDG**



Almost 60% of the UN projects have reported collaborations with the UN system, the private sector, governments, civil society, academia, or with another international organization, demonstrating the UN's focus on maintaining strong partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. A breakdown of the collaborations demonstrates

- Nearly 30% of the projects reporting collaborations with entities within the UN system; and
- 24% of the projects reporting collaborations with government, 20% with academia, and 17% with the private sector.

In particular, the data shows a 33% increase in projects collaborating with governments in comparison to the 2022 edition.

## 4. Reports and software tools to address challenges

**Project Outputs by SDGs**
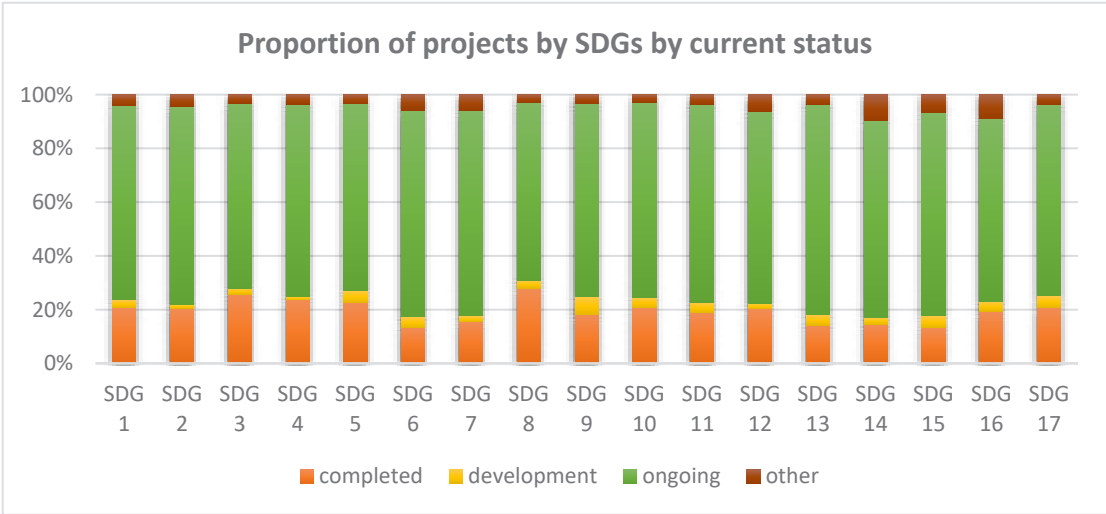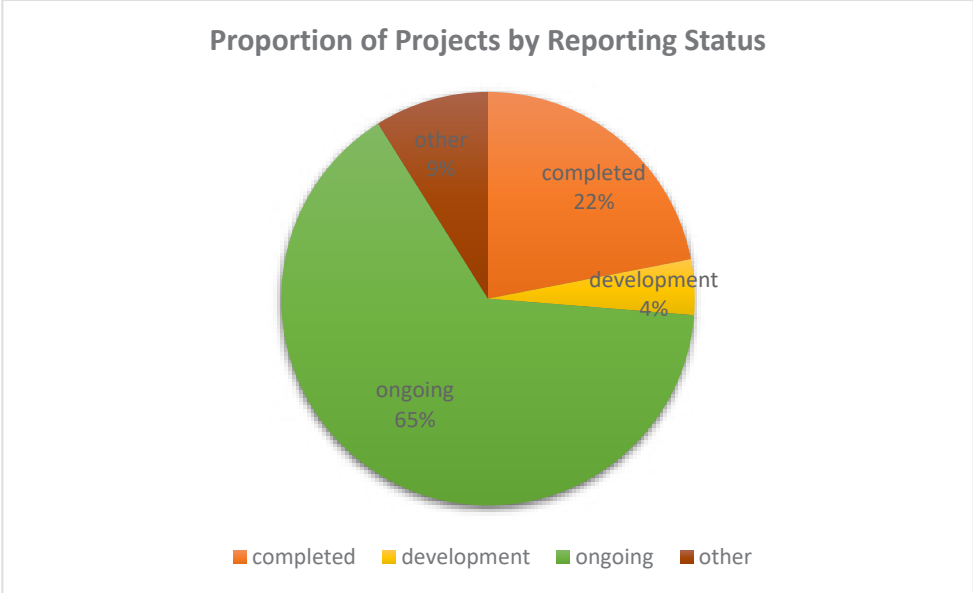


(Doughnut size = number of projects)

About 74% of the projects reported their project types or outputs this year. Among them, consistent with the findings of the 2022 edition, a significant number have focused on outcome-driven products and deliverables such as reports or software tools like mobile applications, web applications, searchable dashboards, or generative AI-powered chatbots. Besides, about 13% indicated a focus on creating datasets.

As of now, many of the current software tools produced on AI relate to SDGs 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and 13 (Climate action) as compared to 2022's focus on SDGs 3 (Good health and well-being) and 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Many reports relate to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which is consistent with the last edition. Focus on SDGs 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (Partnership for the goals) remains strong across all the project outputs.

## 5. Looking forward

### Project Status by SDG

While over 90% of the projects reported their current status, a number of projects did not report specific end dates, or in some cases, the project duration.



**Proportion of Projects by Reporting Status**

- completed 22%
- development 4%
- ongoing 65%
- other 1%

completed  development  ongoing  other



**Proportion of projects by SDGs by current status**

completed  development  ongoing  other

In terms of status of the projects (in development, ongoing or completed), the majority of the reported UN AI projects are currently ongoing, i.e. 65% projects compared to 57% in 2022, with those related to SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the goals) reporting the most completed projects.

Of the projects in development, the majority feature software tools that are working on topics such as intellectual property, environment, human rights, ethics, and justice.