

SECTOR 06 OF 12

HOW SURE WE ARE: STRONG INFERENCE

8 min read

AI and technology

The UN has set up new bodies on artificial intelligence and funded none of them, while Africa's real limits are electricity and buyers who will commit to paying.

IN BRIEF

- This year the UN set up a scientific panel and a yearly meeting of governments on artificial intelligence (AI), and proposed a \$3 billion fund with no pledges yet.
- Africa holds 0.6% of the world's data-centre capacity, and a \$1 billion project in Kenya stalled for lack of power and of a committed buyer.
- Governments should publish their technology deals, buy cloud services together and agree one position on the UN fund.



A small server room.

Photo: iphilipp, [CC BY-SA 2.0](#), via [source page](#).

0.6%

Africa's share of the world's data-centre capacity, with 360 MW in use

[Source: \[africadca.org\]\(https://africadca.org\)](https://africadca.org)

None

Pledges announced to the proposed UN Global Fund for AI, against a \$3bn target

[Source: \[un.org\]\(https://un.org\)](https://un.org)

17 of 54

African countries with an adopted national AI strategy in April 2026

[Source: \[oecd.org\]\(https://oecd.org\)](https://oecd.org)

5%

Share of African AI practitioners with the computing power they need

[Source: \[undp.org\]\(https://undp.org\)](https://undp.org)

\$850m

Nigeria's yearly spending on cloud and hosting services abroad

[Source: \[africa.hyperscalers.news\]\(https://africa.hyperscalers.news\)](https://africa.hyperscalers.news)

35.7%

People in sub-Saharan Africa using the internet in 2025, against 73.6% worldwide

[Source: \[api.worldbank.org\]\(https://api.worldbank.org\)](https://api.worldbank.org)

01

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

What happened at the UN

In February the General Assembly appointed a panel of 40 scientists to report on the risks and uses of AI. The vote was 117 to 2, with the United States and Paraguay against. Tunisia was one of two countries that abstained. The panel published a first report on 1 July. In the same month, delegates from 163 countries met in Geneva for the first Global Dialogue on AI Governance. Ministers from Gabon and Senegal co-chaired two of its four working groups, which gives Africa visible seats in the process.

At the Assembly in September, the Secretary-General called for binding international cooperation on AI. On 11 September he proposed a Global Fund for AI of about \$3 billion over two to four years. It would pay for computing power, energy, internet links, data and public digital systems. The fund could sit inside or outside the UN. Its goals and its rules on who decides are to be settled during the current session of the Assembly. No government announced a pledge, so Africa still has time to shape how the money is spent.

African leaders said little about AI. The AU's published priorities for the week did not mention it, and Kenya's speech did not address it. South Africa asked for a final statement on AI with no money attached. The Secretary-General also said that weapons which choose and attack targets on their own must have no place in the future. The expert talks on these weapons, held under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), end at a review conference in Geneva from 16 to 20 November. Support for UN resolutions on such weapons fell from 164 states in 2023 to 156 in 2025. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) backed new binding rules in 2024.

Sources for this section (6)

- [UNRIC: the vote to appoint the AI panel](#)
- [UN: the panel's first report](#)
- [UN: co-chairs' summary of the first Global Dialogue](#)
- [UN: the proposed Global Fund for AI](#)
- [Reaching Critical Will: the CCW review conference, 16 to 20 November](#)
- [Stop Killer Robots: votes on UN resolutions and the ECOWAS Freetown Communiqué](#)

02

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

What is really going on

Africa has 360 megawatts (MW) of data-centre capacity in use, 0.6% of the world total. Another 238 MW is being built and 656 MW is planned. The Africa Data Centres Association expects Africa's share to stay flat, because capacity elsewhere is growing faster. Electricity is now a bigger limit than internet links. In 2024 only 55.1% of people in sub-Saharan Africa had electricity. Outside South Africa, only about a third of the capacity already built is running.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that AI could raise the region's output by about 4% over ten years, if power, internet access and skills improve. Without those investments the gain would be about 0.2%. These are model estimates. They show that the return from AI depends on basic services that many African countries still lack.

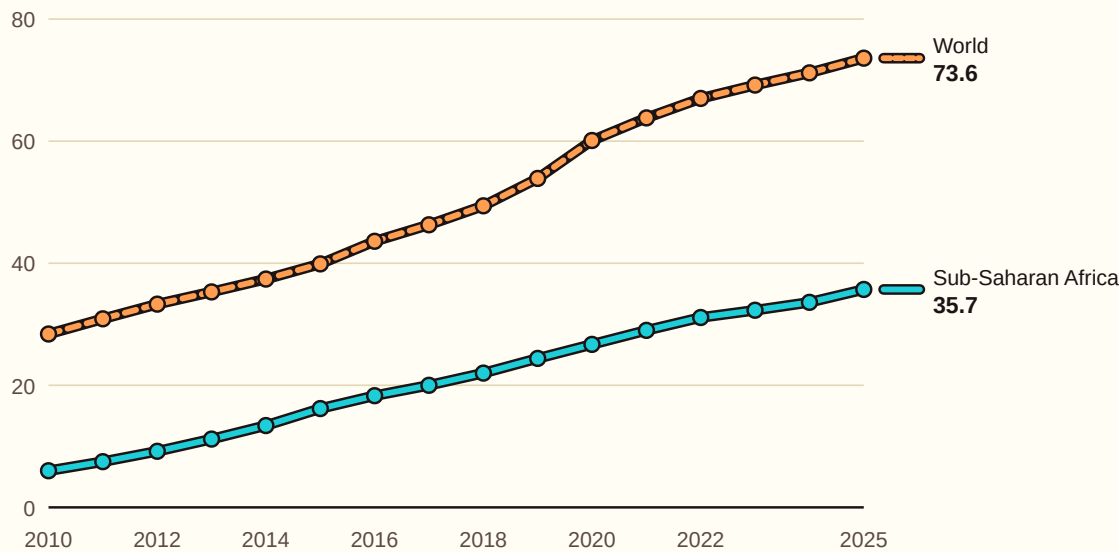
Computing power for AI is scarce and mostly built by foreign firms. In June 2025, Cassava Technologies and the chipmaker Nvidia placed 3,000 graphics processing units (GPUs), the chips used to train AI, in South Africa. They plan 12,000 more across Egypt, Kenya, Morocco and Nigeria over three to four years, in a \$700 million programme. A survey by the UN Development Programme found that only 5% of African AI practitioners have the computing power they need. About \$1,000 a month in cloud credit buys two hours a day on an older Nvidia chip.

Internet links have improved, but use has not caught up. The 2Africa undersea cable, switched on in November 2025, reaches 33 countries. It carries more capacity than all of Africa's other undersea cables combined. Meta designed and led it, with the telecoms firms Bayobab of MTN, Orange, Telecom Egypt, Vodafone and WIOCC. Even so, only 35.7% of people in sub-Saharan Africa used the internet in 2025, against 73.6% worldwide.

Africa has written many rules and applies them thinly. African ministers of information and communications technology adopted a Continental AI Strategy for 2025 to 2030 in June 2024, and AU leaders endorsed it in July. By April 2026, 17 African countries had adopted national AI strategies, and more than 40 have data protection laws. The AU's treaty on cyber security and personal data, the Malabo Convention, took nine years to gain the 15 ratifications it needed. It came into force in June 2023.

About a third of people in sub-Saharan Africa use the internet, half the world rate

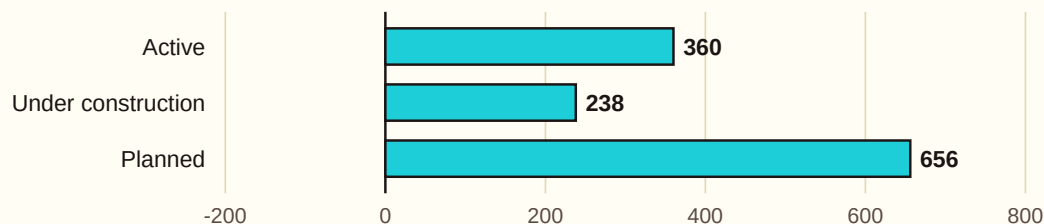
Individuals using the internet, % of population



Source: [World Bank, from ITU data \(IT.NET.USER.ZS\)](#)

Africa's data-centre pipeline would roughly triple capacity, and its global share would stay flat

Megawatts of data-centre capacity, 2026



Active capacity equals 0.6% of the global total.

Source: [Africa Data Centres Association, Data Centres in Africa 2026](#)

Sources for this section (12)

- [Africa Data Centres Association: capacity, pipeline and the power constraint](#)
- [World Bank: access to electricity, 2024](#)
- [World Bank: internet users, 2025](#)
- [CNBC Africa, reporting the IMF: AI could lift output by 4%](#)
- [IMF: Unlocking the potential of AI in sub-Saharan Africa](#)
- [Intelligent CIO: the Cassava and Nvidia rollout](#)
- [UNDP: only 5% of African AI talent has the computing power it needs](#)
- [Engineering News: the 2Africa cable switched on](#)
- [AU: ICT ministers adopt the Continental AI Strategy, June 2024](#)
- [AU: the Continental AI Strategy](#)
- [OECD: national AI strategies in Africa, April 2026](#)
- [EJIL:Talk!: the Malabo Convention enters into force](#)

03

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

Country by country

Kenya has at least 12 documented agreements or joint projects with large technology firms since 2023. They include content moderation for Meta through the contractor Sama, work with Microsoft on farming, and an August 2026 agreement between Amazon Web Services and Konza Technopolis. Most of the terms are unpublished. Investigators found no evidence that the government assessed the risks to personal data before signing.

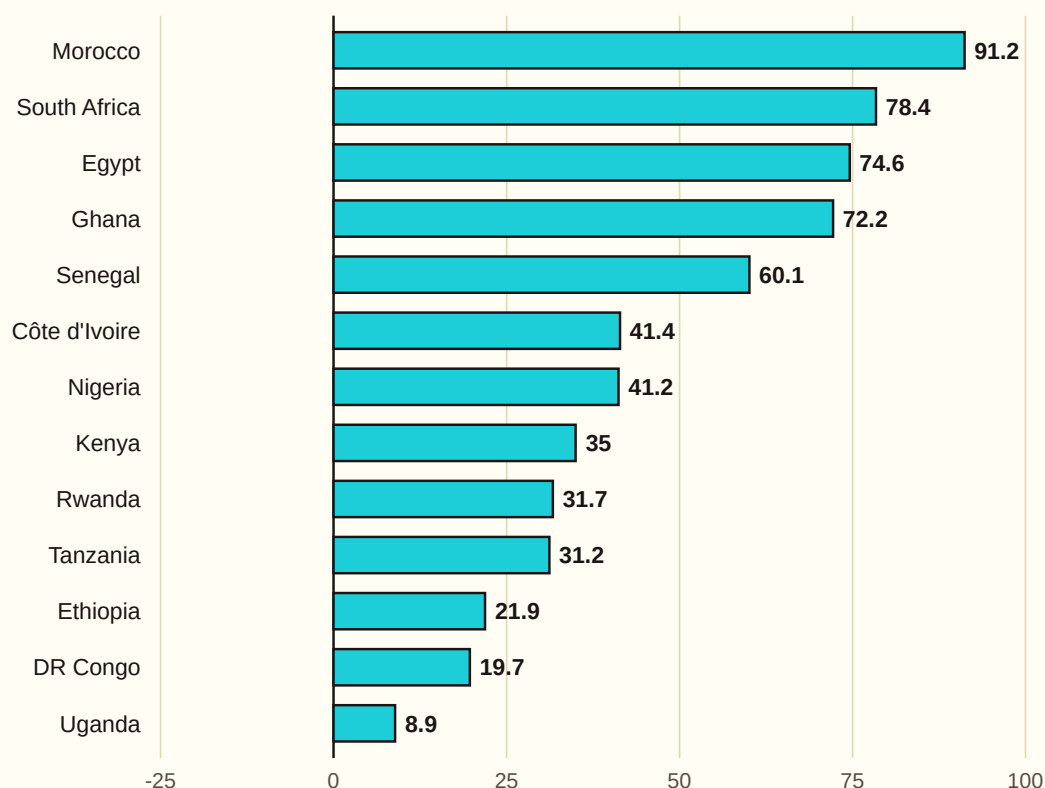
The \$1 billion Microsoft and G42 data centre in Kenya stalled. The site needed a third of the country's power, and the government could not commit to renting its capacity each year. On 19 August, Parliament passed the Business Laws (Amendment) Bill, which now awaits the President's signature. It makes the outsourcing firm answerable for any claim by its workers. In practice, this keeps client firms such as Meta out of reach of those claims. Kenya also replaced its 1.5% tax on digital services with a tax on foreign firms that have a significant economic presence in the country.

Nigeria spends about \$850 million a year on cloud and hosting services abroad. Its new cloud policy seeks \$250 million of private investment within 12 months and \$750 million within 24. It also proposes a national marketplace through which government bodies buy together. Nigeria shows too how penalties get traded away. Its data protection commission fined Meta \$32.8 million in February 2025. Under a settlement adopted by the Federal High Court in November 2025, the fine was set aside and Meta paid only the commission's legal fees. Orders to ask users' consent before targeting advertising at them were dropped.

South Africa hosts most of the continent's data-centre capacity and the Cassava AI centre. Yet it has only a policy framework and no adopted national AI strategy. Ethiopia adopted a strategy in 2024. It has enrolled 49.1 million people in its Fayda digital ID, aims for 90 million by 2027, and has run more than 194 million identity checks. Rwanda, Mauritius, Egypt and Tunisia were the first African countries with AI strategies. Senegal and Gabon now hold visible seats in the UN process.

Internet use ranges from nine in ten people in Morocco to fewer than one in ten in Uganda

Individuals using the internet, % of population, 2024

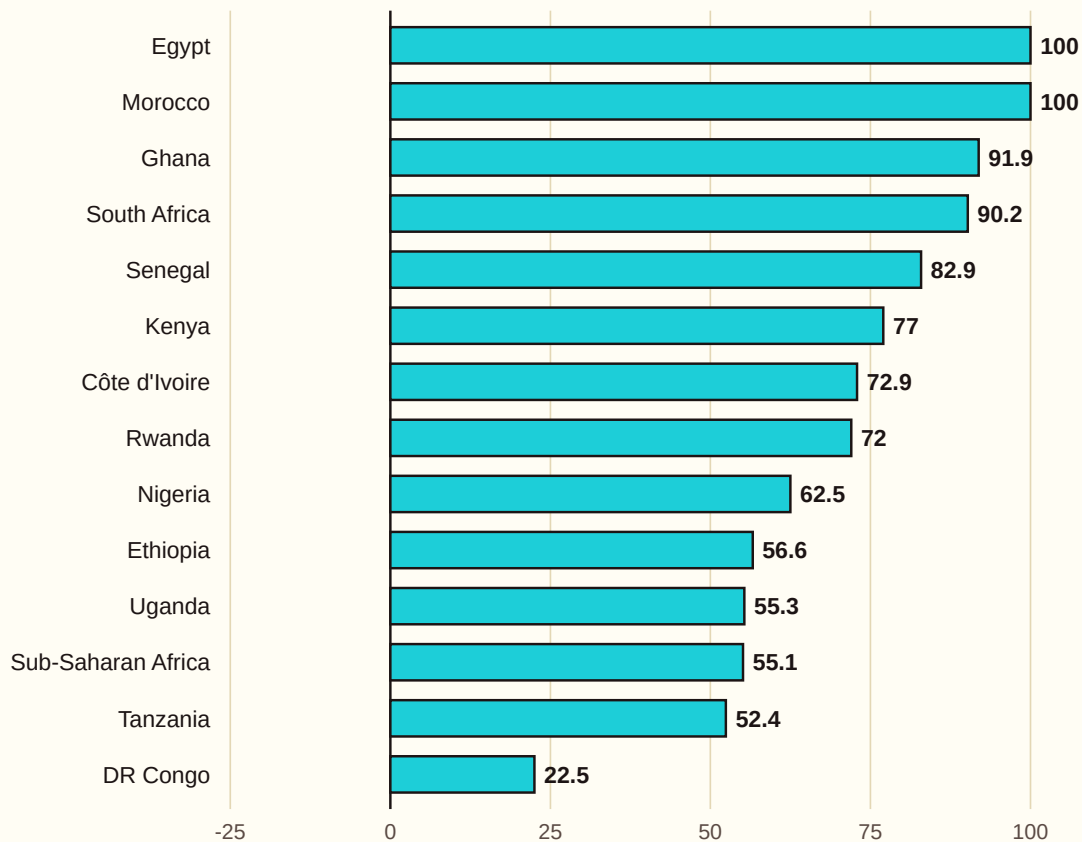


Sub-Saharan Africa averaged 35.7% and the world 73.6% in 2025. Country estimates come from ITU and differ in survey method, so small gaps should not be over-read.

Source: [World Bank WDI, indicator IT.NET.USER.ZS \(ITU data\)](#)

Data centres need power that half of sub-Saharan Africa still lacks

Access to electricity, % of population, 2024



World average 91.9%. Access measures household connection and says nothing about reliability or the spare grid capacity a data centre needs.

Source: [World Bank WDI, indicator EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS](#)

Sources for this section (10)

- [Business Day: inside Kenya's hidden deals with big technology firms](#)
- [Datacenter Dynamics: why the Microsoft and G42 data centre stalled](#)
- [The Elephant: the Business Laws \(Amendment\) Bill and the Konza agreement](#)
- [TechCabal: the bill makes outsourcing firms answerable for worker claims](#)
- [VATCalc: Kenya replaces its digital services tax](#)
- [Hyperscalers Africa: Nigeria's cloud spending and new policy](#)
- [Premium Times: how Nigeria's fine against Meta was written off](#)
- [OECD: South Africa and early movers on AI strategy](#)
- [Biometric Update: Ethiopia's Fayda digital ID](#)
- [UN: Senegal and Gabon as co-chairs at the Global Dialogue](#)

Why this matters

Rules on AI written without African computing power, research and buying power will govern a dependence they do not end. Africa's bargaining power lies in what its governments buy, in its power grids and in access to its markets. Nigeria's spending on foreign cloud services, joined with that of other governments and tied to conditions, could support data centres in Africa. Nigeria already plans to pool government demand at home. Doing the same across borders would give investors the committed buyer that Kenya could not offer Microsoft and G42.

Work is the second concern. In June 2026 the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the first convention on decent work for people who earn through digital platforms. It includes a right to have automated decisions reviewed. Kenya's bill moves the other way. It invites a race between African countries to offer the weakest protection, just as demand for data-labelling work grows.

Secret deals and written-off fines teach firms that African rules can be bargained away one country at a time. That weakens every African government at the table, including those that enforce their laws.

Sources for this section (3)

- [Hyperscalers Africa: Nigeria's plan to pool government demand](#)
- [Datacenter Dynamics: no government commitment to lease capacity in Kenya](#)
- [ILO: the convention on decent work in the platform economy](#)

The case against this view

Leaving AI out of the AU's priorities can be read as putting first things first: power, internet links and data law. Africa's small share of data centres may reflect the choices of buyers more than any failure of policy. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) worked with 12 African governments on AI. It found that most of the value from AI comes from using it in services. Building advanced models or large computing centres alone is not viable for most countries. On that view, cheap access to foreign cloud services may serve Africa better than owning the machines. A settled fine may also reflect a young regulator choosing promises it can enforce over a penalty it could not collect.

Sources for this section (1)

BY AUDIENCE

What you can do

Governments

DO THIS

Publish every agreement with large technology firms, and assess the risks to personal data before signing.

WHY

Kenya's unpublished deals show how terms escape scrutiny.

Governments

DO THIS

Match any data-centre deal to the power actually available and to a lease the treasury can pay.

WHY

The Microsoft and G42 project in Kenya failed on both counts.

AU and regional bodies

DO THIS

Table one African position on how the UN AI fund is run and how it buys.

WHY

The fund's design is being decided during this session of the Assembly.

AU and regional bodies

DO THIS

Back the call at the CCW review conference in November to negotiate binding rules on autonomous weapons.

WHY

ECOWAS has already backed this, and the expert talks end there.

Business and investors

DO THIS

Bid for pooled government cloud demand, with hosting in Africa and published prices.

WHY

A guaranteed buyer is what African data-centre investors lack.

NGOs and civil society

DO THIS

Track data protection fines until they are paid, and publish what was settled.

WHY

Nigeria's \$32.8 million fine against Meta was set aside in a court-approved settlement.

Philanthropy

DO THIS

Pay for shared access to AI chips in Africa for African universities and start-ups.

WHY

Only 5% of African AI practitioners have enough computing power.

Young people and citizens

DO THIS

Press governments to ratify the ILO convention on platform work before they sign outsourcing deals.

WHY

It protects data workers' right to organise and to challenge automated decisions.

OCTOBER 2026 TO DECEMBER 2027

Dates to watch

16 TO 20 NOVEMBER 2026

Review conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Geneva

Decides whether talks on binding rules for autonomous weapons begin. [Source](#)

3 AND 4 MAY 2027

Second Global Dialogue on AI Governance, New York

The main UN meeting where an African position on the fund can be tabled. [Source](#)

31 MAY TO 11 JUNE 2027

International Labour Conference, Geneva

Shows how many African states have ratified the platform-work convention. [Source](#)

SEPTEMBER 2027

End of the current session of the General Assembly, during which the Global Fund for AI is designed

The fund's board, voting and buying rules will be set in this period. [Source](#)

DECEMBER 2027

Ethiopia's target of 90 million people enrolled in the Fayda digital ID

The largest test in Africa of a national digital ID linked to banking. [Source](#)

Recommendations

1 YEAR · BY SEPTEMBER 2027

CONTINENTAL

Buy government cloud and AI services together across Africa, under one open agreement

Leads: The AU Commission and Smart Africa, with Nigeria as the first country

100 DAYS · BY EARLY JANUARY 2027

CONTINENTAL

Publish every government agreement with large technology firms, using one African standard

Leads: The AU Commission, with Kenya as the first country

1 YEAR · BY 3 MAY 2027 DIALOGUE

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African position on how the UN's AI fund is run

Leads: The AU Commission, with Gabon and Senegal as the first countries and the African Group in New York

Dig deeper

Data Centres in Africa 2026

Africa Data Centres Association

Capacity, pipeline and constraints across the continent.

Global Dialogue on AI Governance: co-chairs' summary

United Nations

Outcome of the first Dialogue, Geneva, July 2026.

Global Fund for AI

United Nations

The Secretary-General's proposal for a fund of about \$3bn.

General Assembly appoints AI panel

UNRIC

The vote and the positions taken on the Scientific Panel.

AI governance in Africa

OECD

National AI strategies and shared constraints, from a dialogue with 12 governments.

Inside Kenya's hidden deals with Big Tech

Business Day

Investigation into unpublished technology agreements.

Microsoft and G42 data centre in Kenya stalled

Datacenter Dynamics

Why a \$1bn project could not proceed.

Only five percent of Africa's AI talent has the compute it needs

UNDP

Survey of compute access among African AI practitioners.

Inside Nigeria's deal to write off the fine against Meta

Premium Times

How a data-protection penalty was settled.

A key opportunity to prevent unacceptable autonomous weapons

ICRC

The case for launching treaty talks at the 2026 CCW review conference.

Words used on this page

UN AI panel and Global Dialogue

Two UN processes on AI agreed in 2025: a scientific panel that reports on AI's risks and uses, and a yearly meeting of governments on how to govern it. A proposed UN fund would pay for AI skills in poorer countries. [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

UN General Assembly

The meeting of all 193 UN member states, each with one vote. It meets every year from September. It can make statements, elect members of other bodies and approve the UN budget, but most of what it says does not bind governments. [Glossary](#) ·

[Source: un.org](#)

UN Secretary-General

The head of the UN's staff and its main public voice. The Security Council recommends a candidate and the General Assembly appoints them, usually for five years. António Guterres's term ends on 31 December 2026. [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

African Union (AU)

The organisation of 55 African states, based in Addis Ababa. Its heads of state meet each February. It can suspend members after a coup. [Glossary](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

Autonomous weapons talks

Talks in Geneva under a weapons treaty on whether to ban or limit weapons that choose and attack targets without human control. [Glossary](#)

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger left it in January 2025. [Politics and governance briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

Data centres and compute

Buildings full of computers that store data and run AI. Their size is measured in megawatts (MW) of electricity. "Compute" means the computing power needed to build and run AI. [Glossary](#)

Data protection law

A law that sets rules on collecting, storing and sharing personal information, usually enforced by a national regulator. [Glossary](#)

Malabo Convention

The African Union's treaty on cyber security and personal data. It came into force in 2023, but fewer than half of AU members have ratified it. [Glossary](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

G42

An artificial intelligence company based in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. It builds data centres and AI services in several African countries. [Glossary](#) · [Source: g42.ai](#)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The UN agency for work, set up in 1919. Governments, employers and workers from 187 countries sit in it together. It sets labour standards and publishes figures on jobs. [Livelihoods and labour briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: ilo.org](#)

OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a Paris-based club of 38 mostly rich countries. It keeps the official figures on aid. [Development cooperation briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

ILO convention on platform work

A treaty adopted by the International Labour Organization in June 2026. It gives people who find work through digital platforms basic protections, whatever their job status. It also gives them a way to have decisions made by algorithms reviewed. It binds only the countries that ratify it. [Glossary](#) · [Source: ilo.org](#)

The Global Fund

An international fund that pays for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria programmes. It raises money from governments and private donors every three years. Health briefing · Glossary · Source: theglobalfund.org