

WORLD ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (WAICO): PROMOTING INCLUSIVE GLOBAL AI GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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The world is witnessing another technological revolution that is fundamentally transforming economies, societies, and international politics. Following the Industrial Revolution, the Information Age, and the digital transformation driven by the Internet, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the defining technologies of the twenty-first century. The rapid advancement of large language models, generative AI, intelligent manufacturing, autonomous systems, and AI-enabled scientific research is reshaping global production, governance, and economic competitiveness. At the same time, AI has introduced new challenges relating to digital inequality, cybersecurity, algorithmic governance, ethical standards, and technological monopolies. As countries increasingly compete for technological leadership, there is a growing realization that AI governance cannot remain fragmented or dominated by a few technologically advanced states. Rather, it requires an inclusive and cooperative international framework that promotes innovation while ensuring that emerging technologies contribute to sustainable development and shared prosperity.

Establishment of WAICO and the Emerging Global AI Landscape

In the evolving global technological landscape, China has emerged as an important advocate of international cooperation on AI. On 17 July 2026, in a significant step towards strengthening global cooperation on Artificial Intelligence, representatives from 29 countries, including Pakistan, signed the Agreement on the establishment of the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO).¹ This was announced during the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance in Shanghai.² The agreement establishes WAICO as an independent intergovernmental international organization headquartered in Shanghai. Its establishment fulfils China's proposal to create a dedicated international organization for promoting cooperation in AI governance and technological development. WAICO seeks to promote international cooperation across the AI ecosystem, including innovation, scientific research, industrial collaboration, policy coordination, capacity building, technology transfer, and governance. At a time when AI is increasingly becoming a strategic driver of economic growth, industrial modernization, and national competitiveness, WAICO represents an important effort to strengthen multilateral cooperation and reduce the widening technological divide between developed and developing countries.

China's Vision for Global AI Governance

The establishment of WAICO is closely linked with China's broader vision of promoting an inclusive global AI governance framework. In October 2023, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global AI Governance Initiative, calling for the development of AI in a manner that is people-centered, secure, inclusive, and beneficial to humanity.³ Since then, China has promoted international dialogue on AI governance through the United Nations and other multilateral forums. The UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/78/311 "Enhancing International Cooperation on Capacity-Building of Artificial Intelligence," was adopted by consensus on July 1, 2024, after being tabled by China.⁴ Its core focus is on enhancing international cooperation to help developing countries build capacity in artificial intelligence. China's follow-up *AI Capacity-Building Action Plan for Good and for All* and the *AI Plus*

¹ The Signing Ceremony for the Agreement Establishing the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization Was Held in Shanghai — Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, accessed August 24, 2026, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/202607/t20260716_11984399.shtml.

² Mankind Creates First Global Intergovernmental AI Cooperation Organization, accessed August 24, 2026, <https://english.news.cn/20260717/d4e26796023e48edadbc77b7b6d2d7f8/c.html>.

³ China Launches Global AI Governance Initiative, Offering an Open Approach in Contrast to US Blockade - Global Times, accessed August 24, 2026, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202310/1300092.shtml>.

⁴ UNGA Adopts China-Proposed Resolution to Enhance Int'l Cooperation on AI Capacity-Building, accessed August 24, 2026, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202407/02/content_WS668394a7c6d0868f4e8e8c58.html.

International Cooperation Initiative demonstrate its growing emphasis on making AI an international public good rather than an exclusive technological advantage.

Delivering the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference, President Xi Jinping described the current period as "an unprecedented period of active innovation on AI technologies." He acknowledged that AI has created new governance challenges, including ethical concerns, algorithmic decision-making, security risks, and the widening AI divide. Stressing that "all countries should take a people-centered approach and develop AI for the positive and for good," President Xi called upon the international community to "join hands to build a just and equitable system for global AI governance." He emphasized openness and innovation, AI security, inclusiveness, and multilateral cooperation as key principles for future global AI governance.⁵

President Xi further observed that "AI development should not be a solo performance by a single country, but a symphony of international cooperation." He further described it as "a major move by China to answer the call of the Global South" and "an important milestone in the history of AI development."⁶ China also announced 5,000 AI training and seminar opportunities over the next five years, international AI application cooperation centres with ASEAN, BRICS, SCO, the African Union, the League of Arab States and CELAC, and access for 30 countries to its AI-powered meteorological early warning system (MAZU).⁷ For Pakistan, these initiatives could provide opportunities for AI skills development, research cooperation and applications in areas such as disaster management and climate resilience. Pakistan should therefore seek to benefit from such capacity-building and application-oriented initiatives through appropriate WAICO and bilateral Pakistan-China mechanisms. These initiatives underscore China's emphasis on AI capacity building, technology sharing, talent development, and narrowing the global AI divide.

Pakistan as a Founding Member State of WAICO

For Pakistan, becoming a founding member of WAICO aligns with its growing emphasis on digital transformation, technological innovation, and multilateral cooperation in emerging technologies. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar signed the agreement establishing WAICO on behalf of Pakistan and participated in the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence

⁵ Chair's Statement of the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference & High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, accessed August 24, 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202607/t20260717_11984715.html.

⁶ Ibid.,.

⁷ China Pledges 5,000 AI Training Opportunities for Developing Countries - CGTN, accessed August 24, 2026, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2026-07-17/China-pledges-5-000-AI-training-opportunities-for-developing-countries-1OQBiuRQdlk/p.html>.

Conference and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance.⁸ Pakistan's participation reflects both the strength of the Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership and its support for an inclusive international framework that enables developing countries to benefit from AI. Speaking at the occasion, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar appreciated China's leadership in advancing international cooperation on AI and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to working with the international community in this emerging field. He emphasized Pakistan's interest in cooperation in AI governance, innovation, capacity building, digital technologies, and human resource development.⁹ Pakistan's engagement with WAICO also complements its National AI Policy 2025, which focuses on AI skills, research and innovation, infrastructure, responsible AI and international cooperation.¹⁰ WAICO can therefore provide an additional platform for advancing Pakistan's domestic AI priorities through international capacity building, research partnerships and technology cooperation.

Advantages for Pakistan

Pakistan's membership of WAICO offers opportunities to strengthen AI skills, research capacity, technology access and international cooperation. It can facilitate training, scientific exchanges, technology partnerships and participation in global AI policy discussions, while enabling Pakistan to advance the interests of developing countries and the Global South in emerging AI governance frameworks. Pakistan's membership in WAICO also complements its efforts to strengthen the digital economy, expand information technology exports, encourage innovation, and develop digital skills. AI can contribute significantly to healthcare, agriculture, education, disaster management, manufacturing, financial services, and public administration. However, limited research capacity, shortage of skilled professionals, inadequate computing infrastructure, and the digital divide remain important challenges. WAICO can therefore provide Pakistan with opportunities for AI research, scientific exchanges, technology transfer, policy coordination, and capacity building.

Pakistan's participation in WAICO also comes at an important stage in the evolution of CPEC. While the first phase focused primarily on energy, transport infrastructure, and connectivity, the second phase increasingly emphasizes industrial cooperation, science and technology, innovation,

⁸ "Deputy Prime Minister / Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar Concluded His Two-Day Visit to Shanghai, China, on 17 July 2026," accessed August 24, 2026, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/deputy-prime-minister-foreign-minister-senator-mohammad-ishaq-dar-concluded-his-two-day-visit-to-shanghai-china-on-17-july-2026>.

⁹ "Pakistan Signs WAICO Agreement in China," The Nation, July 17, 2026, <https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Jul-2026/pakistan-signs-waico-agreement-china>.

¹⁰ Hadia Akhtar, *Issue Brief on "Pakistan's National AI Policy 2025: Developing AI Ecosystem and Ethical Data Governance"* | Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, December 15, 2025, <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-pakistans-national-ai-policy-2025-developing-ai-ecosystem-and-ethical-data-governance/>.

agriculture, information technology, and high-quality development. In this context, AI can become an important pillar of future Pakistan-China cooperation. AI-enabled manufacturing, smart logistics, precision agriculture, digital healthcare, and smart energy management can improve productivity and competitiveness. Cooperation under the Digital Silk Road can also support joint research centers, university partnerships, AI incubators, technology parks, and skills development programs.

Pakistan-China cooperation provides an important foundation for realizing these opportunities. Both countries have identified AI, digital economy, science and technology, and human-resource development as areas for enhanced cooperation.¹¹ WAICO can complement this bilateral partnership by facilitating joint research, skills development, technology cooperation and AI applications in areas such as smart agriculture, healthcare, industry and disaster management. Going forward, Pakistan and China could explore cooperation in AI research and development, university and research-institution partnerships, joint laboratories, AI skills and training programs, smart agriculture, healthcare, industrial automation, disaster management, and digital governance.

Beyond its bilateral dimension, WAICO provides Pakistan an opportunity to contribute to the evolving international discourse on AI governance. For countries of the Global South, AI represents both an opportunity and a challenge. While it can accelerate economic growth and contribute to sustainable development, unequal access to technology and inadequate institutional capacities risk creating a new technological divide. China's emphasis on openness, technology sharing, AI capacity building, and South-South cooperation therefore resonates with the priorities of developing countries, including Pakistan. Through active engagement with WAICO, Pakistan can contribute to an inclusive framework that promotes equitable access to AI while ensuring that technological advancement remains people-centred, secure, and beneficial for all.

Conclusion

The establishment of WAICO under China's leadership offers an important platform for inclusive global AI governance, international cooperation and narrowing the technological divide. For Pakistan, membership can strengthen AI capacity, complement its National AI Policy, deepen Pakistan-China cooperation in science and technology, support CPEC's digital transformation, and enhance its voice in global AI governance. By combining WAICO engagement with national and bilateral initiatives, Pakistan can leverage AI for innovation, sustainable development and the broader interests of the Global South.

¹¹ "Pakistan Digital Authority," accessed August 25, 2026, <https://pda.gov.pk/press-details.php?id=islamabad-ai-declaration>.

Next Steps

Pakistan should adopt a proactive strategy towards WAICO rather than limiting its role to membership.

- First, it should establish an effective national coordination mechanism involving relevant ministries, research institutions, universities, and the private sector to identify and pursue opportunities emerging from WAICO.
- Second, Pakistan should actively seek participation in WAICO's institutional mechanisms, including relevant committees, working groups, technical bodies, and, where permitted under the organization's governing framework, opportunities to contribute personnel and expertise to its Secretariat. This would allow Pakistan to have a more substantive role in shaping the organization's agenda and priorities.
- Third, Pakistan should develop a Pakistan-China AI cooperation agenda that links WAICO with existing bilateral mechanisms, CPEC 2.0, the Digital Silk Road, and cooperation in science and technology.
- Fourth, Pakistan should actively seek to utilize available international AI training, research, technology-sharing, and capacity-building opportunities, including the 5,000 training and seminar opportunities announced by China.
- Fifth, Pakistan should ensure that WAICO engagement remains aligned with the National AI Policy 2025 and the Islamabad AI Declaration, particularly in the areas of human capital, research and development, AI infrastructure, responsible AI, and international partnerships.
- Finally, Pakistan should use its position as a founding member to advocate for the interests of developing countries and the Global South, particularly on equitable access to AI technologies, capacity building, technology transfer, data and computing resources, and inclusive participation in global AI governance.