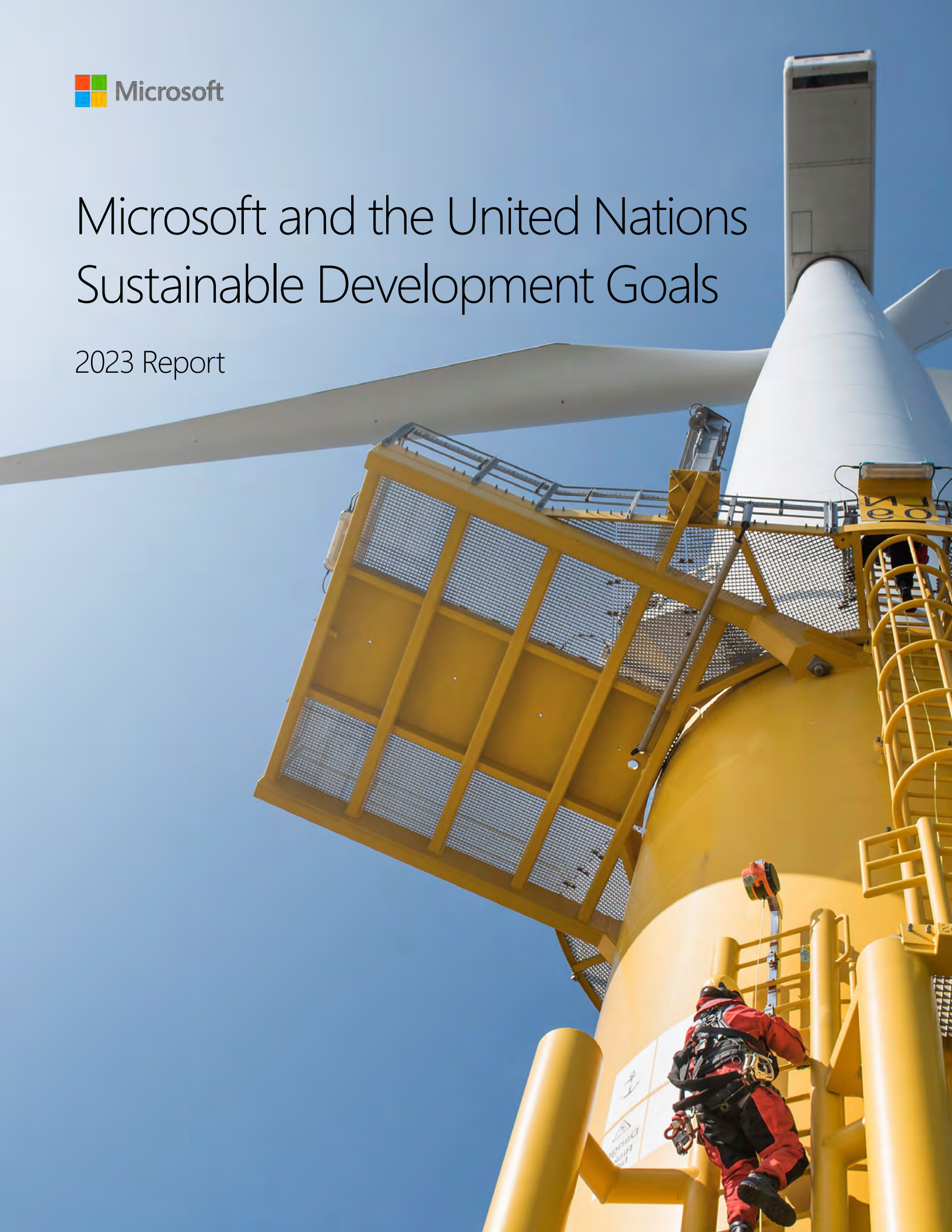
Microsoft

# Microsoft and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

2023 Report



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# Welcome

**When Microsoft launched the AI Skills Initiative in June, it was an important expansion of our efforts to close a widening skills gap and drive global economic opportunity. It reflected the pace of technological advancement and the need to rapidly reskill a global workforce to meet new demands.**

But I think the AI Skills Initiative is also an example of a deeper, more meaningful opportunity. It's an opportunity that sits at the heart of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: the chance to truly make a difference for people and the planet.

The power and opportunity of AI is difficult to understate. But it's how we put it to use that will truly define our generation—and how we shape the future.

For Microsoft, there's an inherent alignment between our AI Skills Initiative and our corporate commitments to expand opportunity, earn trust, protect fundamental rights, and advance sustainability. That alignment extends to our support for the UN SDGs.

I see tremendous opportunity for technology to accelerate the progress we've made so far. In fact, looking back from the midway point, I think it's clear we will not succeed in achieving these shared goals without innovation that scales. And we need partnerships that maximize our collective impact.

As an SDG advocate, I've had the privilege to participate in several initiatives over the past year that highlight the roles of technology and multistakeholder partnerships in advancing peace and prosperity. The *Early Warnings for All* initiative, for example, brings together governments, NGOs, technology, and financial institutions to deliver affordable, accessible, life-saving solutions to communities burdened by the effects of climate change. At the LDC5 Private Sector Forum, I joined heads of state and business representatives to explore and commit to digital development opportunities that will support the resilience, health, and wellbeing of millions of people living in some of the least developed countries.

I firmly believe in our responsibility to build tech that benefits everyone on the planet and the planet itself, and I'm inspired by the immense opportunity to accelerate our impact through innovation and partnerships built on trust. It's only by working together, and empowering everyone to achieve more, that we can unlock the full potential of digital technology and AI to address today's challenges and create a better future for all.

Brad Smith
Vice Chair and President, Microsoft

# Foreword

**The world faces pressing challenges, and Microsoft's mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet has never been more vital or more urgent.**

Our mission underpins our engagement with the work of the United Nations and our efforts to support the UN Charter. We are optimistic about the role of technology, including recent groundbreaking developments in artificial intelligence, to make a positive impact in the lives of people around the world, and we believe that this potential can only be realized by working in partnership with others.

We also recognize our enormous responsibility and opportunity to ensure the technology we create benefits everyone on the planet, as well as the planet itself.

Microsoft can only succeed when we help the world around us succeed. But at the half-way point in the SDG process, according to the SDG Progress Report, only 12 percent of the SDGs are on track, and progress on more than 30 percent of the SDGs has stalled or gone into reverse.

We must all continue to do our part to address these shortfalls. The common threats and challenges the world faces are complex, and they cannot be solved by any government or organization alone. By bringing together the diverse perspectives and resources of governments, businesses, civil society, and international organizations, multistakeholder collaboration enhances our ability to create and implement innovative solutions that will drive lasting and sustainable impact.

As we look forward to the year ahead, we continue to focus on four commitments to help people and organizations everywhere achieve more: expand opportunity, earn trust, protect fundamental rights, and advance sustainability.

Microsoft has also called for a multistakeholder approach to the responsible use of powerful new AI technology. As the international debate on global governance of AI has gained momentum, Microsoft has played an active role in providing input for the UN's Global Digital Compact (GDC).[1] Working together, we can help build a governance model that ensures AI is developed and deployed in ways that are safe, secure, and trustworthy. Our inputs on topics such as AI, privacy, data flows, and human rights demonstrate our commitment to shaping responsible and ethical digital technology practices.

Our work with the **United Nations** aligns with these priorities and centers around the Sustainable Development Goals. We strongly support the SDGs as a set of 17 universal goals for all parties to achieve by 2030. This report emphasizes our work on goals 4 (Quality Education); 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth); 13 (Climate Action); and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Microsoft has a 20-year history of working with the UN, and Microsoft vice chair and president Brad Smith is one of the appointed SDG advocates to promote the advancement of these efforts.

"Expand opportunity, earn trust, protect fundamental rights, and advance sustainability."

## Growing our engagement in 2023

In the past year, Microsoft's commitment to multistakeholder partnerships has grown in importance through our active participation at the UN and in major international events. The opening of our office a few blocks away from the United Nations in New York symbolizes our dedication to building a platform for engaging with the world, reinforcing our partnership with the UN and facilitating interactions with key stakeholders.

In March 2023, Microsoft co-chaired with the UN the Private Sector Forum (PSF) at the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) in Doha, Qatar: the first time a private company co-chaired such an event at a UN conference. The conference was truly a multistakeholder, gathering Heads of State and Government, and ministers from UN Member States with representatives from parliaments, civil society, youth, and media. The private sector forum allowed 400 business representatives to join those discussions on ways to mobilize long-term investment and finance for LDCs and announce new transformative partnerships. The 46 LDCs account for 13% of the world's population, but only about 1.5 percent of global GDP and less than one percent of global trade. The SDGs will not be met unless we also support those who are at greatest risk of being left behind.

In Doha, we heard again how digital technologies can promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and advance better government services. In May this year, the UN Secretary-General talked about the "cross-cutting potential of digital technologies to advance progress on the SDGs". And in July, International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Secretary-General, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, said "If we want to get the SDGs back on track … we must double down on digital technologies."

The past year has also marked the arrival of generative AI as an accessible tool and point of conversation on the world stage, and Microsoft has found itself at the center of this technological shift. AI represents the unparalleled potential to overcome many of the obstacles we face. When used responsibly, in appropriate partnerships, and in a manner that is consistent with fundamental rights and freedoms, AI enables us to tackle pressing challenges. The transformative combination of AI, cloud computing, and data provides opportunities to address societal imbalances and bridge the gaps that hinder progress, pushing the boundaries of innovation to build a sustainable future for generations to come.

# Chapter 1
# Digital development as a global opportunity

**With more than 100 countries across Asia, Latin America, and Africa, digital inclusivity and resilience are critical to global development, especially in rapidly urbanizing parts of the world.**

Large numbers of people living in poverty continue to be a key characteristic of these countries, shaping how technology is leveraged for economic recovery from shocks such as the global pandemic and for resilience. Many governments in these regions focus on the digital economy as a national priority. Sustainability is recognized as a priority but comes second to economic recovery and stability.

As governments in Asia, Latin America, and Africa bet on the digital economy, they recognize that cyber resilience—especially for micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which comprise 60% of GDP and 50% of employment—will directly impact economic growth. As countries develop post-pandemic recovery and growth strategies, policymakers are looking to strengthen resilience to future crises as part of building back better, focusing on potential vulnerabilities in global supply chains, climate-driven changes, and kinetic and digital security threats.

These voices and their innovative digital solutions are central to rebuilding and putting nations on a path toward green, resilient, and inclusive growth. With the Indonesian, Indian, Brazilian, and South African Presidencies of G20 happening in succession, there exists a unique opportunity to reshape the global economy—a global collaboration that can bring about equitable economic inclusion for all.

Poverty is exacerbated by gender barriers, disability, and limited opportunities in rural areas. If inclusive and innovative, the potential for economic growth and productivity gains through technology adoption could have an outsized impact.

Microsoft's Airband Initiative[2] continues to scale internet access through a new agreement with Liquid Intelligent Technologies. In Africa, the Airband Initiative will make internet coverage available to an additional 100 million people by 2025—just a portion of our commitment to extend high-speed internet access to 250 million people[3] living in underserved areas around the world.

Entrepreneurs and workers also require skills to make the best use of this new connectivity, which is why Microsoft has targeted programs on digital skilling to increase capacity building and security among underserved communities. Our partnership with the International Organization of Employers (IOE)[4] to deploy digital skills curriculum in select Least Developed Countries (LDCs) is one example.

While there are no silver bullets, transformational technology such as AI provides new and real ways to make progress toward the SDGs in 2023 and beyond. This opportunity, combined with the slow pace of progress toward the goals, creates urgency for all involved parties to focus on developing digital infrastructure and enhancing digital skilling, so people in LDCs have the technological abilities to better their lives—and so we avoid the opening of new gaps and widening the existing ones.

# Chapter 2
# Seizing the AI moment: AI for Good

**When the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it also recognized technology, innovation, data, and capacity-building as essential "means of implementation" for delivering that agenda.**

AI represents a once-in-a-lifetime technology, capable of having significant global impacts. To achieve these impacts, we have established several protocols and toolkits to help organizations and governments understand how to use AI responsibly. One of those is our AI for Good Lab.[5]

The AI for Good Lab is fueled by a passionate commitment to leverage AI's transformative power for the greater good of humanity. This means first identifying and prioritizing the most significant challenges. We focus on areas where AI can make a tangible difference in fields such as healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, and growth inequality.

The AI for Good Lab also marks a step toward fulfilling the White House voluntary commitments we made recently with the United States government. That agreement includes the clause, "The companies commit to develop and deploy advanced AI systems to help address society's greatest challenges," which was the intent of our AI for Good Lab long before the agreement was signed.

We believe that collaboration is key to unlocking AI's true potential. We will partner with domain experts, researchers, and organizations worldwide to pool our collective knowledge and expertise in cloud, AI, and edge technologies, to create a collaborative ecosystem that drives progress. By forging alliances with like-minded organizations, we can amplify our AI expertise to tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

Our partnerships are already demonstrating progress. Working in concert with the United Nations, the American Red Cross, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the International Organization for Migration, we have invested in more effective disaster response and community resilience.

"The companies commit to develop and deploy advanced AI systems to help address society's greatest challenges."

Severe weather events like hurricanes, tornados, wildfires,[6] and flooding put lives at risk and create costs reaching the trillions of dollars. Just as climate change is expected to drive up the pace and severity of these events, the AI for Good Lab combines geospatial data, like high-resolution satellite imagery, with innovative machine learning techniques to analyze the impacts of disasters—which can help governments respond once an event has happened. We're also developing tools to help predict natural disaster impacts ahead of time, so governments can better target efforts to prevent loss of life and mitigate damage.

Another among our key focus areas is Natural Language Processing (NLP), where we develop AI-driven systems that understand and generate human language. This allows us to bridge communication gaps and increase inclusive access to information and resources, contributing to educational improvement and reducing inequality.

It's not enough to focus only on the many opportunities to use AI to improve people's lives. As AI technology becomes a bigger part of our lives, it's critical that governments, civil society, and industry come together to develop guardrails and ensure that we develop laws, norms, and standards to keep pace with technological breakthroughs.

Generally, frameworks for responsible AI governance should be based on human-centric values, fair and ethical practices, and risk-mitigation. They should also be interoperable across borders, adaptive, and aligned to international norms and standards.

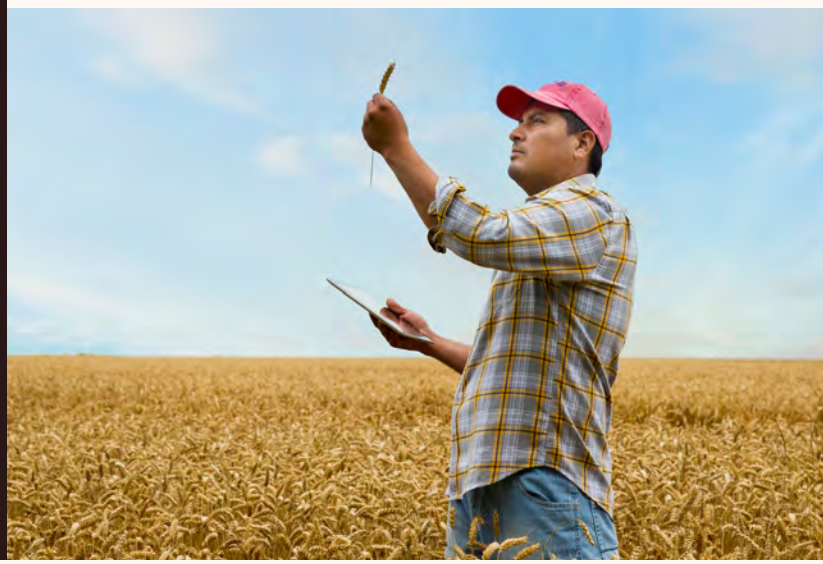
Collectively developing a responsible governance structure will help ensure that AI is safe, secure, and trustworthy.

In Microsoft's blueprint for the public governance of AI,[7] we offer views on some ways this can be done. This includes implementing and building upon government-led AI safety frameworks and requiring effective safety brakes for AI systems that assist in the operation of critical infrastructure.

### A five-point blueprint for the public governance of AI:

1. Implement and build upon new government-led AI safety frameworks.
2. Require effective safety brakes for AI systems that control critical infrastructure.
3. Develop a broad legal and regulatory framework based on the technology architecture for AI.
4. Promote transparency and ensure academic and nonprofit access to AI.
5. Pursue new public-private partnerships to use AI as an effective tool to address the inevitable societal challenges that come with new technology.

# Chapter 3
# Microsoft's commitment to the UN SDGs



**As we look forward to the year ahead, we will continue to accelerate progress on the SDGs while remaining steadfast in our commitments to expand opportunity, earn trust, protect fundamental rights, and advance sustainability.**

Our work on these commitments aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. And while many of our actions directly and indirectly contribute to progress on all 17 SDGs, we focus on four SDGs closely connected to these commitments where we believe we can have the greatest impact: Goal 4 – Quality Education; Goal 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth; Goal 13 – Climate Action; and Goal 16 –Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

SDGs 4 8

## Expand opportunity

We believe economic growth and opportunity must reach every person, organization, community, and country. This starts with ensuring everyone has the skills to thrive in a digital, AI-enabled economy, and extends to empowering nonprofits, entrepreneurs, and other organizations to digitally transform and address society's biggest challenges. This work supports our efforts on SDGs 4 and 8.

### Examples of our work

Microsoft is dedicated to supporting both the United Nations and the nonprofit ecosystem committed to advancing the SDGs.

- The United Nations Operations and Crisis Center (UNOCC) is a great example of our commitment. Through a close collaboration with Microsoft, UNOCC successfully developed a cutting-edge capability that harnesses satellite imagery and AI technology. This innovation enables the organization to deliver prompt, precise, and impartial information concerning the extent and severity of building damage during the current Ukraine crisis and future emergencies. Microsoft is

committed to accelerating digital transformation in the broader nonprofit ecosystems and this year we supported nonprofits around the world with $3.8 billion in discounts and donations serving 325,000 nonprofits on the Microsoft Cloud, making it the most accessible, affordable, and trusted cloud in the industry. We will add another 50,000 nonprofits in the year ahead in our quest to ensure that every nonprofit has the technology they need to advance their mission.

- In partnership with the International Labour Organization and its International Training Centre (ITCILO), Microsoft is supporting women entrepreneurs from small and micro businesses to access digital business curriculum, business coaching, mentorship, certifications, and stipend funding to digitize their businesses. The program will provide 30,000 women entrepreneurs from small and micro enterprises across 10 countries with training and coaching opportunities to build their digital skills to grow their businesses.
- The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), an agency of the United Nations, focuses on fostering community building, guidance, and senior-junior solidarity for women in cybersecurity. Today, women make up only 25% of the global cybersecurity workforce[8] so it's more important than ever to encourage and empower women to pursue these careers. Our partnership with ITU supports hundreds of women in the Women in Cyber Mentorship Program[9] with a special emphasis on the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.
- Microsoft and UNICEF have partnered together to deliver children and young adults with access to digital education and skills through Community Training which is an innovative digital platform optimized to deliver learning in the Global South.
- The Passport to Earning[10] initiative provides young people aged 15–24 years with free, world-class and job-relevant skills training and positions them for employment opportunities.
- The Learning Passport[11] Initiative provides children in K–12 grades access to digital educational experiences in close partnership with local Ministries of Education. Combined, these initiatives are live in 27 countries with 25+ countries in the process of deployment. Approximately 4.7M children and young adults are registered and more than 1.4M have completed training.

AI can contribute to bridge the global education gap, ensuring every child has access to quality education to help unlock their full potential. Making education more accessible, personalized, and impactful benefits educators and students alike. AI has immense potential to transform training for students, teachers, and school staff. It can help analyze vast swaths of data to see which pedagogical and practical approaches work best. Students with learning difficulties can benefit from AI supporting teachers in the creation of individualized learning tracks. All these efforts will likely reduce school dropout rates and enable differentiated learning programs.

AI can play a pivotal role in eradicating poverty and promoting inclusive economic growth. By analyzing socio-economic data, it can identify patterns of inequality, recommend targeted interventions, and enable policymakers to design effective poverty alleviation strategies. AI will reduce the drudgery in many jobs and, when used effectively, will help people be more creative in their work and impactful in their lives.

SDG 16

## Earn trust

To create positive impact with technology, people must be able to trust the technologies they use and the companies behind them. That's why we're committed to the responsible use of AI, protecting privacy, and advancing digital safety and cybersecurity. Our focus on earning trust helps support several SDGs, including SDG 16.

**Examples of our work**

- Microsoft AccountGuard[12] provides cybersecurity service in 33 countries around the world as an extra layer of protection to the high-risk, highly targeted organizations that are foundational to democracy, including political campaigns, election officials, advocacy organizations, journalists, human rights organizations, nonprofits, and public policy organizations.
- As a member of the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA),[13] Microsoft has been partnering to secure the integrity and accountability of media content. In FY23, the power of this partnership was demonstrated in promoting public accountability and awareness of crimes committed during wartime.
- Microsoft partnered with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Global Forum for Cybersecurity Expertise (GFCE),[14] and the International Telecommunication Union[15] to secure the adoption of universal cybersecurity goals and targets.
- Through the World Economic Forum's Global Coalition for Digital Safety,[16] Microsoft co-led the development of "Global Principles on Digital Safety" to advance digital safety while respecting human rights.
- Microsoft is a founding signatory and a leading voice in the Cybersecurity Tech Accord,[17] a commitment by more than 150 global technology companies to foundational cybersecurity principles. Since 2018, the coalition has served as a prominent voice in support of the UN expert working groups on information security and the committee negotiating a new comprehensive convention on cybercrime. The group has also called attention to the need to curb the rise of cyber mercenary[18] firms that jeopardize the security and stability of the online world.
- Following the widespread use of cyber and influence operations in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Microsoft has worked to advance understanding of multistakeholder roles and responsibilities in the context of unprecedented hybrid warfare. This includes the publication of the Digital Front Lines[19] report series, focused on how different stakeholders can cooperate to promote stability and security in a new domain of conflict.
- Microsoft is a founding sponsor of the CyberPeace Institute,[20] an independent NGO focused on addressing escalating conflict in cyberspace. Through its volunteer program, CyberPeace Builders,[21] the Institute is linking cybersecurity professionals with vulnerable communities to improve security. And through the cyberattacks in conflict platform,[22] the Institute is tracking the use of offensive cyberweapons in the war in Ukraine.

SDGs 8 16

## Protect fundamental rights

We have a responsibility to protect people's fundamental rights and help all communities succeed in an increasingly digital world. For us, this means promoting responsible business practices, expanding accessibility and connectivity, and advancing fair and inclusive societies. When we protect fundamental rights, we support SDG 8 and 16.

**Examples of our work**

- We work every day to implement the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)[23] throughout Microsoft, both at headquarters and offices in approximately 200 countries and territories, and throughout our global supply chains.
- Through the Accessibility Nonprofit Tech Accelerator,[24] we support the African Health Innovation Centre[25] in its partnership with Ghana National Association of the Deaf[26] as they work to improve health outcomes in Africa through innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology. The Tech for Independent Communication project aims to create an accessible video-based survey system for collating feedback from Deaf students.
- As part of our commitment to extending high-speed internet access[27] to 250 million people living in underserved areas around the world, we're working to make internet coverage available to 100 million people in Africa by the end of 2025.
- With support from Microsoft, AI4Bharat[28] is using AI to make applications more accessible for the Indian Sign Language (ISL) community and promoting digital inclusion by empowering the deaf and hard of hearing community as co-creators and key data providers.
- In partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Internews, Microsoft is working to develop a Media Viability Accelerator[29] to help independent news outlets become more financially sustainable. In addition, we're working with Global Press on Duty of Care training for female journalists.

AI can play a crucial role in promoting a healthy information ecosystem in democracies. "Content provenance" technologies—the practice of cryptographically watermarking an image or video to prove basic facts like who created it, when, and whether it has been altered since creation—can be used to label generative AI images and combat online disinformation.

As a member of the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA),[30] Microsoft has been partnering to secure the integrity and accountability of media content. In FY23, the power of this partnership was demonstrated in promoting public accountability and awareness of crimes committed during wartime.

The International Criminal Court prosecutes individuals for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression when member states are unable or unwilling to do so themselves. The ICC partnered with Microsoft to leverage our technology to develop a war crimes evidence management platform using advanced data and AI Cloud capabilities to collect, store, preserve, analyze, and correlate war crimes evidence. The new platform will enable victims, witnesses, journalists, and other relevant parties to securely submit evidence for ongoing cases and save precious time for investigators.

SDG 13

## Advance sustainability

Climate change is the defining issue of our generation, and addressing it requires swift, collective action and technical innovation. Microsoft is committed to meeting our own climate goals and enabling others to do the same by promoting rapid policy action, supporting the development of sustainability markets, and accelerating progress through AI-enabled solutions. Our commitment to advancing sustainability is directly aligned with SDG 13.

### Examples of our work

AI can be a powerful accelerant for the scale and pace of sustainability solutions needed to address the climate crisis. Microsoft's journey to use AI to advance sustainability started in 2017 with the AI for Earth grants program. Since then, it has become increasingly clear that AI is an essential technology for making meaningful climate progress. AI can accelerate sustainability by helping to integrate new sources of renewable energy onto the grid, optimizing energy and water consumption, anticipating hazardous weather events, and speeding up the discovery of low carbon building materials.

- Our AI for Good Lab in Egypt and Kenya is building a new team of data scientists on the ground in Africa that will work to improve climate resilience. The work of these data labs will be informed by a new Africa AI Innovation Council comprised of representatives from leading African organizations.
- The Global Renewables Watch (GRW) is a first-of-its-kind living atlas aiming to map and measure all utility-scale solar and wind installations on Earth using AI and satellite imagery, allowing users to evaluate clean energy transition progress and track trends over time. It is being built as a publicly available renewable energy atlas with country-by-country insights into production progress and development trends. The GRW is a joint program between Microsoft, Planet Labs PBC, and The Nature Conservancy.

Microsoft is accelerating climate innovation through our $1 billion Climate Innovation Fund (CIF). We invest in innovative technologies and business models that have the potential for meaningful, measurable climate impact by 2030. Since the founding of the CIF in 2020, Microsoft has allocated more than $700 million into a global portfolio of more than 50 investments, including sustainable solutions in energy, industrial, and natural systems.

We continue to advance toward our goal of providing 1.5 million people with access to clean water and sanitation services by 2030. By the end of FY22, we provided more than 550,000 people with access to clean water and sanitation solutions in Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Mexico, reaching just under one million people by the end of the calendar year 2022.

- We continue to take responsibility for the ecosystem impacts of our direct operations by protecting more land than we use by 2025. Microsoft has contracted to protect 17,268 acres of land, which is over 50 percent more than the land we use to operate, and 12,270 acres were designated as permanently protected, an area equivalent to 6,657 soccer fields.
- We contributed to the TNC Belize Maya Forest Project (BMF) to protect an additional 236,000 acres in a global biodiversity hotspot. With the University of Belize's Environmental Research Institute, the Belize Maya Forest Trust developed a Conservation Action Plan that provides a strategic framework for management over the next five years. The forest and aquatic ecosystems, wild cats, critically endangered Central American river turtle, and Sacred Pools of Cara Blanca have been identified as the main conservation targets. Anti-poaching and fire protection measures will be implemented to address threats in the region.

# Looking forward

As we reach the midway point of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we recognize how far the world still needs to go to reach its goals, and we call on the public and private sectors to come together to meet this challenge. We are optimistic about the role technology can play in making progress, and we remain determined to realize the SDGs and create a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous world for all.

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