

# 'Engine of inequality': delegates discuss AI's global impact at Paris summit

Emmanuel Macron's tech envoy warns attendees current trajectory of artificial intelligence is unsustainable

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The impact of artificial intelligence on the environment and inequality have featured in the opening exchanges of a global summit in Paris attended by political leaders, tech executives and experts.

Emmanuel Macron's AI envoy, Anne Bouverot, opened the two-day gathering at the Grand Palais in the heart of the French capital with a speech referring to the environmental impact of AI, which [requires vast amounts of energy and resource to develop and operate.](#)

“We know that AI can help mitigate climate change, but we also know that its current trajectory is unsustainable,” Bouverot said. Sustainable development of the technology would be on the agenda, she added.

The general secretary of the UNI Global Union, Christy Hoffman, warned that without worker involvement in the use of AI, the technology risked increasing inequality. The UNI represents about 20 million workers worldwide in industries including retail, finance and entertainment.

“Without worker representation, AI-driven productivity gains risk turning the technology into yet another engine of inequality, further straining our democracies,” she told attendees.

On Sunday, Macron promoted the event by posting a montage of [deepfake images of himself on Instagram](#), including a video of “him” dancing in a disco with various 1980s hairstyles, in a tongue-in-cheek reference to the technology’s capabilities.

Macron deepfakes on Instagram.

Composite: Instagram/Guardian

Composite

Although safety has been downplayed on the conference agenda, some in attendance were concerned about the pace of development.

Max Tegmark, the scientist behind a 2023 letter calling for a pause in producing powerful AI systems, cautioned that governments and tech companies were inadvertently re-enacting the ending of the Netflix climate crisis satire [Don't Look Up](#).

The film starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence uses a looming comet, and the refusal by the political and media establishment to acknowledge the existential threat, as a metaphor for the climate emergency – with the meteor ultimately wiping out the planet.

“I feel like I have been living that movie,” Tegmark told the Guardian in an interview. “But now it feels like we’ve reached the part of the film where you can see the asteroid in the sky. And

people are still saying that it doesn't exist. It really feels like life imitating art.”

Tegmark said the promising work at the inaugural summit at Bletchley Park in the UK in November 2023 had been partly undone. “Basically, asteroid denial is back in full swing,” he said.

The Paris gathering has been badged as the AI action summit, [whereas its UK cousin](#) was the AI safety summit. Macron is co-chairing the summit with India's prime minister, Narendra Modi. The US vice-president, JD Vance, and Chinese vice-premier, Zhang Guoqing, are among the other political attendees, although the UK prime minister, Sir Keir Starmer, is [not attending](#).

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Existential concerns about AI focus on the development of artificial general intelligence, the term for systems that can match or exceed human intellectual capabilities at nearly all cognitive tasks. Estimates of when, and if, AGI will be reached vary but Tegmark said based on statements from industry figures “the

asteroid is going to strike ... somewhere between one and five years from now.

Developments in AI have accelerated since 2023, with the [emergence of so-called reasoning models](#) pushing the capabilities of systems even further. The release of a freely available reasoning model by the Chinese company DeepSeek has also intensified the competitive rivalry between China and the US, which has led AI breakthroughs.

The head of Google's AI efforts, Demis Hassabis, said on Sunday the tech industry was "perhaps five years away" from achieving AGI and safety conversations needed to continue. "Society needs to get ready for that and ... the implications that will have."

Speaking in Paris before the summit, Hassabis added that AGI carried "inherent risk", particularly in the field of autonomous "agents", which carry out tasks without human intervention, but those concerns could be assuaged.

"I'm a big believer in human ingenuity. I think if we put the best brains on it, and

with enough time and enough care ...  
then I think we'll get it right.”