Addressing the impact of AI data centres on humans and the environment

SPC

Issue Description:

To train and operate AI models, data centres are crucial. AI data centres contain a large number of specialised processors which require electricity and cooling, while also producing heat and noise pollution. As demand for AI grows, so does the demand for electricity, water, and physical infrastructure.

Why has this issue not been resolved?

AI companies want more data centres, cheap electricity and low costs to profit more from their AI models.

Governments want to invest in the AI industry because it can benefit them with money, jobs and new technologies. But at the same time, they must also follow environmental regulations. This means that most governments will choose to disobey these regulations to allow for further expansion.

Environmental organisations and local communities see the negative effects of these data centres and want to act on it. This means that they put pressure on their local and national government to regulate the construction of new data centres.

So, this issue has not been resolved because of the conflict of interests that occur between these parties.

Important stances on the issue

Developed countries mostly support the expansion of the AI industry. Although there are countries such as the Netherlands and the UK where stricter rules have been put in place to prevent overexpansion. Singapore has even required new data centres to only use green energy sources.

What organizations are currently involved (or have been involved) and what have they achieved?

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warns of the threats AI data centres pose to the climate, because of this they have released guidelines to help reduce energy and water consumption. (1)

The International Energy Agency has been collecting data on AI data centres and publishing many reports. To better understand the connections between AI and energy, they started a new initiative in 2024: Energy for AI, and AI for Energy. (2)

The EU wants to streamline the use and development of AI data centres; to address the challenges they proposed the Cloud and AI Development Act. (3)

Useful Sources

1. (2025). Sustainable Procurement Guidelines for Data Centres and Servers. UNEP - UN Environment Programme. https://www.unep.org/resources/toolkits-manuals-and-guides/sustainable-procurement-guidelines-data-centres-and-servers
2. (2024). Artificial Intelligence – Topics - IEA. IEA. https://www.iea.org/topics/artificial-intelligence
3. Cloud and AI Development Act. (2026). European Commission. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cloud-and-ai-development-act
4. Environmental Cost of Artificial Intelligence: Carbon, Water, and Land Footprints. (2026, September 24). United Nations University. https://unu.edu/inweh/collection/environmental-cost-of-AIs-Enrgy-Use-Carbon-water-and-land-footprints
5. UNEP. (2024, September 21). AI Has an Environmental problem. Here's What the World Can Do about that. UNEP. https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/ai-has-environmental-problem-heres-what-world-can-do-about
6. UN News. (2026, June 4). AI's environmental costs threaten water, land and climate. UN News. https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/06/1167658

Good luck with your research reports delegates!

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