

“Trust Must Be Designed, Not Assumed”: Global Leaders Call for Human-Centric AI at India AI Impact Summit 2026

From Innovation to Accountability: The Summit Emphasises Ethics at the Core of AI Systems

Without Trust, Democratic Adoption of AI is Impossible: Brando Benifei

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At a time when artificial intelligence is moving from experimentation to systems that shape economies, governance and daily life, the session “Humanity in the Loop – Balancing Innovation and Ethics in the Age of AI” at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 made a decisive argument: trust is not a downstream outcome of innovation, it is a design choice. Bringing together leaders from multilateral institutions, legislatures, industry and public policy, the discussion focused on how ethical reflection, human oversight and risk-based regulation must be embedded into the architecture of AI from the very beginning if the technology is to scale democratically and deliver real societal value.



Rather than framing ethics and innovation as competing priorities, speakers positioned them as mutually reinforcing drivers of adoption, impact and long-term competitiveness. The conversation moved beyond abstract principles to operational questions: how to build transparency into products, how to design regulatory systems that act before harm becomes irreversible, and how to ensure that people remain decision-makers in high-stakes environments. Across regions and sectors, the central message was clear: AI will be trusted only when it is visibly accountable, explainable and aligned with human outcomes.

Brando Benifei, Member of the European Parliament, highlighted the cost of delayed regulation in earlier technology cycles and called for a calibrated, risk-based approach for AI. He noted that high-impact domains such as healthcare, workforce deployment and administrative decision-making require stronger oversight, adding that transparency, data quality, cybersecurity and clear governance are essential because “without trust, democratic adoption of AI is impossible.”

Dr. Tawfik Jelassi, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO, underscored that ethical reflection must be integrated at the design stage rather than applied retrospectively after harm occurs. He emphasised that systems that are “ethical by design” become more trusted, more widely used and therefore more impactful, noting that human-centric innovation must be contextual and guided by overarching frameworks rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

Debjani Ghosh, Distinguished Fellow, NITI Aayog, reframed the debate as a civilisational choice about how technology is used. She stressed that the real challenge is not choosing between innovation and ethics, but ensuring that oversight is embedded “from design to commercialisation so that ethics becomes by design, not an afterthought,” placing accountability firmly with human institutions and developers.

Paula Goldman, EVP and Chief Ethical and Humane Use Officer, Salesforce, brought an enterprise deployment perspective, emphasising that organisations scale AI only when people can see, question and control how systems operate. She pointed to the importance of built-in observability, human escalation pathways and user choice, noting that companies succeed when they “put people at the centre, giving them a voice in where AI actually helps.”

The session ultimately positioned ethics as the operating system of the AI era rather than a compliance layer. From global governance frameworks to product-level design choices, speakers converged on a single principle: the future of AI will be determined by whether people can trust it in the moments that matter.

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