New Technology Pioneers Are Building the Infrastructure for the Next Era of AI: WEF Announces 2026 Cohort

The World Economic Forum has announced its 2026 Technology Pioneers cohort, selecting 100 early-stage companies from 23 countries that are developing breakthrough technologies expected to reshape industries and societies.

The annual selection highlights emerging innovators working at the frontier of science and engineering. This year’s cohort stands out for its strong emphasis on building the underlying infrastructure for the next generation of artificial intelligence (AI), rather than focusing solely on consumer-facing applications.

According to the Forum, many of the selected companies are addressing foundational challenges required to scale AI globally. These include systems for autonomous AI agents such as identity verification, secure payments, enterprise integration, and cybersecurity.

Another major focus area is the growing demand for computing power, energy efficiency, and data storage as AI systems expand in size and complexity. Several startups are developing advanced hardware, energy systems, and optimization tools aimed at supporting this rapid technological growth.

The 2026 cohort reflects a widening geographic spread of deep-tech innovation. India contributes nine companies, particularly in space technology, biotechnology, and advanced mobility systems. The Republic of Korea also records its strongest representation to date, with startups focused on robotics, AI, and quantum technologies.

Emerging ecosystems in the Middle East, Latin America, and Southeast Asia are increasingly visible, signaling a more distributed global innovation landscape.

Breakthrough Technologies Across Industries

Beyond AI infrastructure, the selected companies are working across a wide range of sectors, including:

Clean energy and climate technologies such as hydrogen production, carbon capture, and fusion systems
Healthcare innovations including AI-based diagnostics, cancer detection, and fertility health solutions
Advanced manufacturing using robotics, automation, and synthetic biology
Space technologies, including satellite servicing, lunar resource extraction, and reusable launch systems
Next-generation materials, from biodegradable biomaterials to quantum and battery innovations

These developments, once limited to large corporations or government-funded programs, are now increasingly driven by agile early-stage startups leveraging AI, simulation, and automation.

“We meet today in a moment where early-stage companies are tackling challenges that once required enormous infrastructure and budgets,” said a World Economic Forum representative. “AI is not just what these companies are building; it is also what is enabling them to build it.”

Selected Companies and Global Participation

The cohort includes startups from the United States, China, India, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland, and many other countries, reflecting the increasingly global nature of frontier innovation.

Notable areas of work include autonomous robotics, quantum

communication, post-quantum cybersecurity, AI-driven materials discovery, and next-generation energy systems.

The selected companies will join a two-year engagement programme under the Forum’s Innovator Communities and contribute to global initiatives involving public and private sector leaders.

They will also participate in the Annual Meeting of the New Champions 2026, scheduled to take place in Dalian, China, from 23 to 25 June 2026 under the theme “Innovating at Scale”.

Launched in 2000, the Technology Pioneers initiative identifies early-stage companies with the potential to significantly impact business, society, and global innovation systems. The programme is part of the Forum’s broader Innovator Communities, which bring together startups and scale-ups working on transformative technologies.