

Core Overview

The parallel input/output (PIO) core with Avalon® interface provides a memory-mapped interface between an Avalon® Memory-Mapped (Avalon-MM) slave port and general-purpose I/O ports. The I/O ports connect either to on-chip user logic, or to I/O pins that connect to devices external to the FPGA.

The PIO core provides easy I/O access to user logic or external devices in situations where a “bit banging” approach is sufficient. Some example uses are:

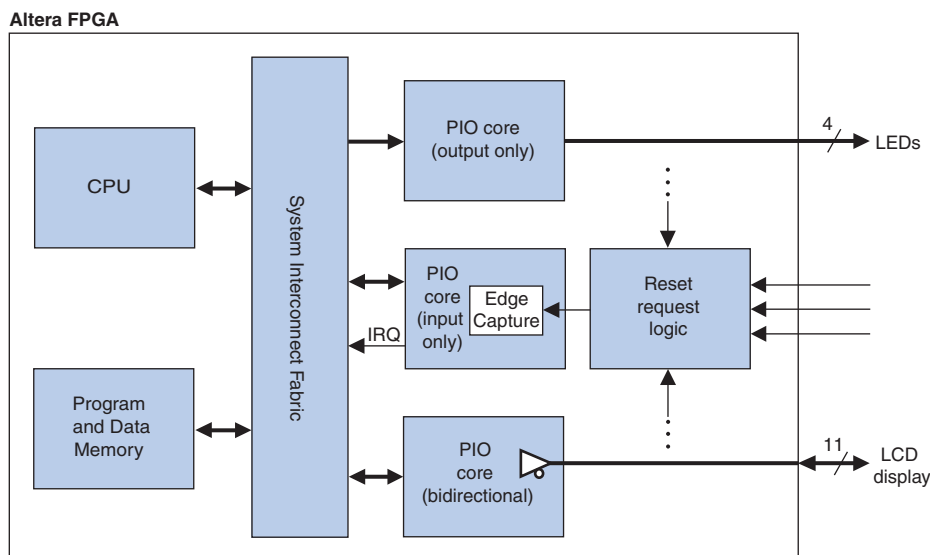
- Controlling LEDs
- Acquiring data from switches
- Controlling display devices
- Configuring and communicating with off-chip devices, such as application-specific standard products (ASSP)

The PIO core interrupt request (IRQ) output can assert an interrupt based on input signals. The PIO core is SOPC Builder ready and integrates easily into any SOPC Builder-generated system. This chapter contains the following sections:

- “Functional Description”
- “Example Configurations” on page 9-4
- “Instantiating the PIO Core in SOPC Builder” on page 9-5
- “Device and Tools Support” on page 9-6
- “Software Programming Model” on page 9-6

Functional Description

Each PIO core can provide up to 32 I/O ports. An intelligent host such as a microprocessor controls the PIO ports by reading and writing the register-mapped Avalon-MM interface. Under control of the host, the PIO core captures data on its inputs and drives data to its outputs. When the PIO ports are connected directly to I/O pins, the host can tristate the pins by writing control registers in the PIO core. [Figure 9-1](#) shows an example of a processor-based system that uses multiple PIO cores to blink LEDs, capture edges from on-chip reset-request control logic, and control an off-chip LCD display.

Figure 9–1. An Example System Using Multiple PIO Cores

When integrated into an SOPC Builder-generated system, the PIO core has two user-visible features:

- A memory-mapped register space with four registers: data, direction, interruptmask, and edgecapture.
- 1 to 32 I/O ports.

The I/O ports can be connected to logic inside the FPGA, or to device pins that connect to off-chip devices. The registers provide an interface to the I/O ports via the Avalon-MM interface. See [Table 9–2 on page 9–7](#) for a description of the registers. Some registers are not necessary in certain hardware configurations, in which case the unnecessary registers do not exist. Reading a non-existent register returns an undefined value, and writing a non-existent register has no effect.

Data Input and Output

The PIO core I/O ports can connect to either on-chip or off-chip logic. The core can be configured with inputs only, outputs only, or both inputs and outputs. If the core will be used to control bidirectional I/O pins on the device, the core provides a bidirectional mode with tristate control.

The hardware logic is separate for reading and writing the data register. Reading the data register returns the value present on the input ports (if present). Writing data affects the value driven to the output ports (if present). These ports are independent; reading the data register does not return previously-written data.

Edge Capture

The PIO core can be configured to capture edges on its input ports. It can capture low-to-high transitions, high-to-low transitions, or both. Whenever an input detects an edge, the condition is indicated in the `edgecapture` register. The type of edges to detect is specified at system generation time, and cannot be changed via the registers.

IRQ Generation

The PIO core can be configured to generate an IRQ on certain input conditions. The IRQ conditions can be either:

- *Level-sensitive*—The PIO core hardware can detect a high level. A NOT gate can be inserted external to the core to provide negative sensitivity.
- *Edge-sensitive*—The core's edge capture configuration determines which type of edge causes an IRQ

Interrupts are individually maskable for each input port. The interrupt mask determines which input port can generate interrupts.

Example Configurations

Figure 9–2 shows a block diagram of the PIO core configured with input and output ports, as well as support for IRQs.

Figure 9–2. PIO Core with Input Ports, Output Ports and IRQ Support

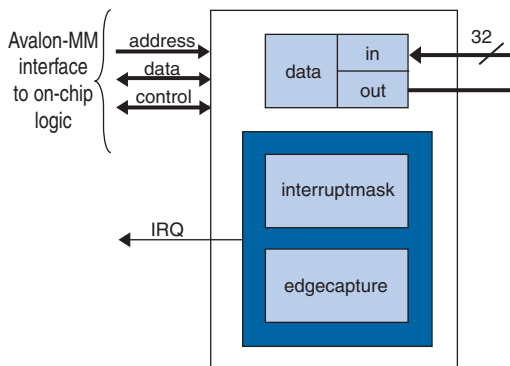
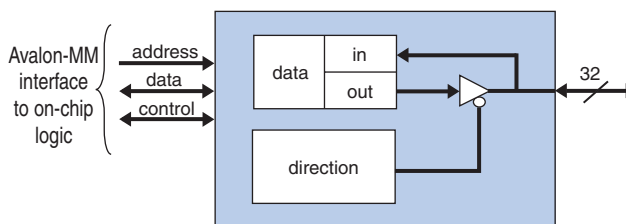


Figure 9–3 shows a block diagram of the PIO core configured in bidirectional mode, without support for IRQs.

Figure 9–3. PIO Core with Bidirectional Ports



Avalon-MM Interface

The PIO core's Avalon-MM interface consists of a single Avalon-MM slave port. The slave port is capable of fundamental Avalon-MM read and write transfers. The Avalon-MM slave port provides an IRQ output so that the core can assert interrupts.

Instantiating the PIO Core in SOPC Builder

Designers use the MegaWizard® interface for the PIO core in SOPC Builder to configure the hardware feature set. The following sections describe the available options.

The MegaWizard interface has two tabs, **Basic Settings** and **Input Options**.

Basic Settings

The **Basic Settings** page allows the designer to specify the width and direction of the I/O ports.

- The **Width** setting can be any integer value between 1 and 32. For a value of n , the I/O ports become n -bits wide.
- The **Direction** setting has four options, as shown in [Table 9–1](#).

Table 9–1. Direction Settings

Setting	Description
Bidirectional (tristate) ports	In this mode, each PIO bit shares one device pin for driving and capturing data. The direction of each pin is individually selectable. To tristate an FPGA I/O pin, set the direction to input.
Input ports only	In this mode the PIO ports can capture input only.
Output ports only	In this mode the PIO ports can drive output only.
Both input and output ports	In this mode, the input and output ports buses are separate, unidirectional buses of n bits wide.

Input Options

The **Input Options** page allows the designer to specify edge-capture and IRQ generation settings. The **Input Options** page is not available when **Output ports only** is selected on the **Basic Settings** page.

Edge Capture Register

Synchronously Capture

When **Synchronously capture** is on, the PIO core contains the edge capture register, `edgecapture`. The user must further specify what type of edge(s) to detect:

- **Rising Edge**
- **Falling Edge**
- **Either Edge**

The edge capture register allows the core to detect and (optionally) generate an interrupt when an edge of the specified type occurs on an input port.

When **Synchronously capture** is off, the `edgecapture` register does not exist.

Enable Bit Clearing for Edge Capture Register

Turning on **Enable bit-clearing for edge capture register** allows you to clear individual bit(s) in the edge capture register. To clear a given bit, write 1 to the bit in the edge capture register. Example—To clear bit 6 in the edge capture register, write 01000000 to the register.

Interrupt

When **Generate IRQ** is on, the PIO core is able to assert an IRQ output when a specified event occurs on input ports. The user must further specify the cause of an IRQ event:

- **Level**—The core generates an IRQ whenever a specific input is high and interrupts are enabled for that input in the `interruptmask` register.
- **Edge**—The core generates an IRQ whenever a specific bit in the edge capture register is high and interrupts are enabled for that bit in the `interruptmask` register.

When **Generate IRQ** is off, the `interruptmask` register does not exist.

Device and Tools Support

The PIO core supports all Altera® FPGA families.

Software Programming Model

This section describes the software programming model for the PIO core, including the register map and software constructs used to access the hardware. For Nios® II processor users, Altera provides the HAL system library header file that defines the PIO core registers. The PIO core does not match the generic device model categories supported by the HAL, so it cannot be accessed via the HAL API or the ANSI C standard library.

The Nios II Embedded Design Suite (EDS) provides several example designs that demonstrate usage of the PIO core. In particular, the **count_binary.c** example uses the PIO core to drive LEDs, and detect button presses using PIO edge-detect interrupts.

Software Files

The PIO core is accompanied by one software file, `altera_avalon_pio_regs.h`. This file defines the core's register map, providing symbolic constants to access the low-level hardware.

Legacy SDK Routines

The PIO core is supported by the legacy SDK routines for the first-generation Nios processor. For details about these routines, refer to the PIO documentation that accompanied the first-generation Nios processor.



For details about upgrading programs based on the legacy SDK to the HAL system library API, refer to *AN 350: Upgrading Nios Processor Systems to the Nios II Processor*.

Register Map

An Avalon-MM master peripheral, such as a CPU, controls and communicates with the PIO core via the four 32-bit registers, shown in [Table 9–2](#). The table assumes that the PIO core's I/O ports are configured to a width of n bits.

Table 9–2. Register Map for the PIO Core							
Offset	Register Name		R/W	(n-1)	...	2	1 0
0	data	read access	R	Data value currently on PIO inputs			
		write access	W	New value to drive on PIO outputs			
1	direction (1)		R/W	Individual direction control for each I/O port. A value of 0 sets the direction to input; 1 sets the direction to output.			
2	interruptmask (1)		R/W	IRQ enable/disable for each input port. Setting a bit to 1 enables interrupts for the corresponding port.			
3	edgecapture (1), (2)		R/W	Edge detection for each input port.			

Notes to [Table 9–2](#):

- (1) This register may not exist, depending on the hardware configuration. If a register is not present, reading the register returns an undefined value, and writing the register has no effect.
- (2) Writing any value to `edgecapture` clears all bits to 0.

data Register

Reading from `data` returns the value present at the input ports. If the PIO core hardware is configured in output-only mode, reading from `data` returns an undefined value.

Writing to data stores the value to a register that drives the output ports. If the PIO core hardware is configured in input-only mode, writing to data has no effect. If the PIO core hardware is in bidirectional mode, the registered value appears on an output port only when the corresponding bit in the `direction` register is set to 1 (output).

direction Register

The `direction` register controls the data direction for each PIO port, assuming the port is bidirectional. When bit *n* in `direction` is set to 1, port *n* drives out the value in the corresponding bit of the data register.

The `direction` register only exists when the PIO core hardware is configured in bidirectional mode. The mode (input, output, or bidirectional) is specified at system generation time, and cannot be changed at runtime. In input-only or output-only mode, the `direction` register does not exist. In this case, reading `direction` returns an undefined value, writing `direction` has no effect.

After reset, all bits of `direction` are 0, so that all bidirectional I/O ports are configured as inputs. If those PIO ports are connected to device pins, the pins are held in a high-impedance state. In bi-directional mode, to change the direction of the PIO port, reprogram the `direction` register.

interruptmask Register

Setting a bit in the `interruptmask` register to 1 enables interrupts for the corresponding PIO input port. Interrupt behavior depends on the hardware configuration of the PIO core. See [“Interrupt Behavior” on page 9–9](#).

The `interruptmask` register only exists when the hardware is configured to generate IRQs. If the core cannot generate IRQs, reading `interruptmask` returns an undefined value, and writing to `interruptmask` has no effect.

After reset, all bits of `interruptmask` are zero, so that interrupts are disabled for all PIO ports.

edgecapture Register

Bit *n* in the `edgecapture` register is set to 1 whenever an edge is detected on input port *n*. An Avalon-MM master peripheral can read the `edgecapture` register to determine if an edge has occurred on any of the PIO input ports. Writing any value to `edgecapture` clears all bits in the register.

The type of edge(s) to detect is fixed in hardware at system generation time. The edgecapture register only exists when the hardware is configured to capture edges. If the core is not configured to capture edges, reading from edgecapture returns an undefined value, and writing to edgecapture has no effect.

Interrupt Behavior

The PIO core outputs a single IRQ signal that can connect to any master peripheral in the system. The master can read either the data register or the edgecapture register to determine which input port caused the interrupt.

When the hardware is configured for level-sensitive interrupts, the IRQ is asserted whenever corresponding bits in the data and interruptmask registers are 1. When the hardware is configured for edge-sensitive interrupts, the IRQ is asserted whenever corresponding bits in the edgecapture and interruptmask registers are 1. The IRQ remains asserted until explicitly acknowledged by disabling the appropriate bit(s) in interruptmask, or by writing to edgecapture.

Software Files

The PIO core is accompanied by the following software file. This file provide low-level access to the hardware. Application developers should not modify the file.

- **altera_avalon_pio_regs.h**—This file defines the core’s register map, providing symbolic constants to access the low-level hardware. The symbols in this file are used by device driver functions.

Referenced Documents

This chapter references the application note, *AN 350: Upgrading Nios Processor Systems to the Nios II Processor*.

Document Revision History

Table 9–3 shows the revision history for this chapter.

<i>Table 9–3. Document Revision History</i>		
Date and Document Version	Changes Made	Summary of Changes
May 2008 v8.0.0	No change from previous release.	—
October 2007 v7.2.0	Added the description for a new parameter, Enable Bit Clearing for Edge Capture Register .	—
May 2007 v7.1.0	Added table of contents to Overview section.	—
March 2007 v7.0.0	No change from previous release.	—
November 2006 v6.1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated Avalon terminology because of changes to Avalon technologies Changed old “Avalon switch fabric” term to “system interconnect fabric” Changed old “Avalon interface” terms to “Avalon Memory-Mapped interface” 	For the 6.1 release, Altera released the Avalon Streaming interface, which necessitated some rephrasing of existing Avalon terminology.
May 2006 v6.0.0	No change from previous release.	—
October 2005 v5.1.0	No change from previous release.	—
May 2005 v5.0.0	No change from previous release. Previously in the Nios II Processor Reference Handbook.	—
September 2004 v1.1	Updates for Nios II 1.01 release.	—
May 2004 v1.0	Initial release.	—