

Europe needs regulatory certainty on AI

Fragmented regulation means the EU risks missing out on the AI era.

We are a group of companies, researchers and institutions integral to Europe and working to serve hundreds of millions of Europeans. We want to see Europe succeed and thrive, including in the field of cutting-edge AI research and technology. But the reality is that Europe has become less competitive and less innovative compared to other regions and it now risks falling further behind in the AI era due to inconsistent regulatory decision making.

In the absence of consistent rules, the EU is going to miss out on two cornerstones of AI innovation. The first are developments in ‘open’ models that are made available without charge for everyone to use, modify and build on, multiplying the benefits and spreading social and economic opportunity. Open models strengthen sovereignty and control by allowing organisations to download and fine-tune the models wherever they want, removing the need to send their data elsewhere. The second are the latest ‘multimodal’ models, which operate fluidly across text, images and speech and will enable the next leap forward in AI. The difference between text-only models and multimodal is like the difference between having only one sense and having all five of them.

Frontier-level open models – based on text or multi-modal – can turbocharge productivity, drive scientific research, and add hundreds of billions of euros to the European economy. Public institutions and researchers are already using these models to speed up medical research and preserve languages, while established businesses and start-ups are getting access to tools they could never build or afford themselves. Without them, the development of AI will happen elsewhere – depriving Europeans of the technological advances enjoyed in the US, China and India. Research estimates that Generative AI could increase global GDP by 10% over the coming decade¹ and EU citizens shouldn’t be denied that growth.

The EU’s ability to compete with the rest of the world on AI and reap the benefits of open source models rests on its single market and shared regulatory rulebook. If companies and institutions are going to invest tens of billions of euros to build Generative AI for European citizens, they require clear rules, consistently applied, enabling the use of European data. But in recent times, regulatory decision making has become fragmented and unpredictable, while interventions by the European Data Protection Authorities have created huge uncertainty about what kinds of data can be used to train AI models. This means the next generation of open source AI models, and the products and services we build on them, won’t understand or reflect European knowledge, culture or languages.

Europe faces a choice that will impact the region for decades. It can choose to reassert the principle of harmonisation enshrined in regulatory frameworks like the GDPR and offer a modern interpretation of GDPR provisions that still respects its underlying values, so that AI innovation happens here at the same scale and speed as elsewhere. Or, it can continue to reject progress, contradict the ambitions of the single market and watch as the rest of the world builds on technologies that Europeans will not have access to.

We hope European policymakers and regulators see what is at stake if there is no change of course. Europe can’t afford to miss out on the widespread benefits from responsibly built open AI technologies that will accelerate economic growth and unlock progress in scientific research. For that we need harmonised, consistent, quick and clear decisions under EU data regulations that enable European data to be used in AI training for the benefit of Europeans. Decisive action is needed to help unlock the creativity, ingenuity and entrepreneurialism that will ensure Europe’s prosperity, growth and technical leadership.

Signed,

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Join us in calling for regulatory certainty: EUneedsAI.com

¹Is generative AI a game changer?, JP Morgan, February 2024