APPLY AI STRATEGY

Policy briefing

Weblink	https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/apply-ai
Relevance	☐ National policy X EU policy ☐ other: _____
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Short summary of the policy

The European Commission's Apply AI Strategy explains how the EU moves from developing AI to using it at scale in real economic sectors and public administrations. It is **Europe's central sectoral AI strategy**. It addresses the industrial and public application of AI and, together with AI in Science, forms the strategic core of the EU AI system under the umbrella of the AI Continent Action Plan. Unlike earlier EU AI initiatives (that focused mainly on research and pilot projects), the strategy places strong emphasis on large-scale deployment, sector ownership and operational use of AI solutions. It focuses on sectoral flagships, AI infrastructures, data spaces, regulatory support, and a European **AI-first decision-making logic**.

Main objectives of the policy

The Apply AI Strategy focuses on sectoral applications. Instead of focusing primarily on research, the strategy forms the operational arm of an AI-oriented industrial policy with the following objectives.

- Mobilise the transformative potential of AI to strengthen innovation, productivity, European competitiveness and technological sovereignty.
- Accelerate AI uptake across the EU economy, with particular attention to SMEs, mid-caps and the public sector.
- Promote an "AI-first" approach in organisational decision-making, prioritising the use of European AI solutions.
- Implement sector-specific initiatives ("sectoral flagships") in areas such as
  - Health
  - Manufacturing
  - Mobility
  - Energy
  - Agri-Food
  - Public sector
  - Robotics
  - Defence, Security and Space
  - Electronic communications
  - Climate and environment
  - Cultural and creative sector
- Address cross-cutting challenges including access to computing resources, high-quality data, testing facilities, and SME-oriented support structures.
- Develop an AI-ready workforce through targeted skills programmes and training measures.

- Strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy by supporting the development of sovereign AI infrastructures, stacks and ecosystems.
- Establish coordinated governance through the Apply AI Alliance and the AI Observatory to monitor progress, trends and policy impacts.

Context and relation to the Digital Europe Programme (DEP)

The Apply AI Strategy sets the political and strategic direction and priorities for large-scale AI deployment in Europe, while the Digital Europe Programme (and other EU programmes) provide concrete funding instruments to implement parts of that agenda. In other words, the Apply AI Strategy defines *what* Europe aims to achieve with AI, the Digital Europe Programme helps determine *how* these goals can be operationalized and funded.

Parts of the policy directly related to specific objectives (SO) in DEP

The Apply AI Strategy directs main objectives of the DEP. Its emphasis on boosting the use of AI, particularly among SMEs and small mid-caps, and facilitating AI integration to enhance the competitiveness of European industries aligns with DEP's goal of accelerating the best use of digital technologies across sectors, also in public administrations (SO5).

The Strategy's creation of AI Factories and access to frontier AI compute infrastructure supports the DEP objectives on HPC (SO1) and Chips (SO6), ensuring that Europe has the computational and semiconductor capacity required for advanced AI development.

To advance the DEP's AI Continent objective, the Strategy proposes developing frontier AI models and advanced AI systems capable of performing complex tasks. The strategy also suggests establishing Acceleration Pipelines, which help move AI innovations from research laboratories into real-world applications, that way enabling companies and public institutions to access and deploy cutting-edge AI technologies effectively. This corresponds to the DEP's AI Continent objective (SO2) by fostering a European-wide AI ecosystem.

Furthermore, the Strategy highlights the importance of enabling an AI-ready workforce across sectors through training, reskilling, and upskilling, directly supporting the DEP initiatives under the Advanced Digital Skills (SO4). Finally, the Strategy emphasizes trustworthy and secure AI deployment, including AI-enabled cybersecurity threat detection and mitigation, which maps to DEP's Cybersecurity objective (SO3), ensuring safe, compliant, and ethical adoption of AI across Europe.

Activities in the DEP Work Programme 2025-27 contributing to the objectives of the policy

The main objective of the Apply AI Strategy is to accelerate the widespread, safe and trustworthy uptake of AI across Europe so that public and private actors can reap social and economic benefits while respecting fundamental rights and regulatory requirements.

All DEP call topics that are somehow linked to AI do support the policy´s objectives. The Specific Objective „AI continent" includes activities in the area of „Data for AI factories" (Data Spaces, Regulatory compliance) and activities that support the „Apply AI Implementation" (GenAI in public administration, AI based solution for the health sector, Virtual Worlds Testbeds, Virtual Human Twins).

Beside, also activities under SO4 – Advanced Digital Skills are implementing Apply AI Strategies (Skills Academies, Skills Competitions, Training Programmes). Additionally DEP also funds

activities that enable the relevant infrastructure (SO1) needed for experiments with and deployment of AI solutions.

In an nutshell, the Digital Europe Programme has the necessary instruments to implement concrete activities in support of the Apply AI Strategy. For Member States, the Apply AI Strategy offers a common EU framework to align national AI strategies, investments and participation in DEP calls around shared sectoral priorities.

Related policies and further information

Further EU policies that directly constrain or enable AI deployment are:

- AI Act
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Data Governance Act
- Data Act

For finding related events, please check out the following online calendars: Shaping Europe's digital future, HADEA