

The European Union's AI code of practice

As part of its efforts to regulate artificial intelligence (AI), the EU recently developed a code of practice for general-purpose AI (GPAI) models. This code details how to implement the obligations related to GPAIs as set out in the AI Act. Being key to the AI Act's implementation, the code has been at the centre of heated discussions.

Regulating GPAI models

Adopted in 2024, the [AI Act](#) aims to improve the functioning of the internal market, promote a human-centric approach to AI, limit risks and support innovation. The AI Act distinguishes between [AI systems](#) and [GPAI](#) models and lays out a common framework for their use and supply in the EU. AI systems are machine-based systems capable of inferring an output based on an input, while GPAI models are AI models trained on a large amount of data and able to perform a wide range of distinct tasks. Moreover, GPAI models may present a systemic risk when they meet the conditions specified in Article 51 of the AI Act. The AI Act lists additional obligations for GPAI with systemic risks, such as the obligations to perform model evaluation, assess and mitigate possible systemic risks, and ensure cybersecurity.

Most of the AI Act's provisions will come into [effect](#) several months or years after its adoption. The AI Act also establishes several deadlines for instruments facilitating its implementation, with the code of practice being one of these instruments. The code specifically covers GPAI obligations (see section below), and the European Commission has chosen [independent experts](#) to draft it. The AI Act states that the code was to be ready by 2 May 2025 at the latest, but this deadline has passed without adoption.

A code of practice to implement GPAI obligations

The AI Act establishes high-level legal obligations related to all types of GPAI models, such as adopting policies to ensure compliance with EU law on copyright; the relevant stakeholders may use different technical means to meet these obligations. The code of practice is a non-binding document that provides guidance on how providers can technically implement their GPAI obligations.

Article 56 of the AI Act states that the AI Office of the Commission and the AI Board (the EU-level governance body set up by the AI Act) must ensure that the code of practice covers at least the obligations applying to GPAI models, including those presenting systemic risks. Article 56 adds that the AI Office may encourage the participation of relevant stakeholders in the drafting process of the code. However, this article says that GPAI providers may be invited to adhere to the code of practice.

The challenge of operationalising the rules

According to some of the [experts](#) involved in drafting the code, 'it is the first time that legal rules are turned into more detailed guidelines for the responsible development and deployment of GPAI'. However, defining the requirements and practical measures is challenging, because GPAI providers, businesses and civil society representatives have differing preferences regarding the solutions that the code should promote.

The AI Act obligation for GPAI providers to put in place a policy to comply with EU copyright law and related rights is a clear example of differing preferences. To contribute to its proper application, the AI Act mandates the code to address this obligation. On the one hand, rights-holders would prefer the code to implement strict technical measures on the use of copyrighted works for GPAI training. On the other hand, GPAI providers would prefer measures providing them with more freedom. Due to legal [uncertainties](#), both approaches could potentially be incorporated into the code.

The fourth and final [version](#) of the code includes 40 measures categorised under transparency, copyright, security and safety, with each measure consisting of one or more points. The code sets out five measures for GPAI providers to comply with EU copyright law. One measure is to 'identify and comply with rights reservations when crawling the World Wide Web', which includes five points. The first point specifies that



signatories will 'employ web-crawlers that read and follow instructions expressed in accordance with the Robot Exclusion Protocol (robots.txt) ...' and 'identify and comply with other appropriate machine-readable protocols to express rights reservation...'. The use of robots.txt to express rights reservations has been [controversial](#) as it was not originally designed for this purpose. Rights-holders argue that this technology does not offer them enough possibilities. However, given their varying interests, rights-holders have not reached a consensus on a single solution to replace robots.txt. A [researcher](#) listed six other available standards, including the spawning protocol, HTTP response headers and Hypertext Markup Language.

The challenge of the new political context

EU AI policies have [evolved](#) since the adoption of the AI Act, with a clear objective to make Europe a leading AI continent. In April 2025, the Commission released an AI continent [action plan](#) outlining a comprehensive strategy to achieve this goal. The action plan includes measures such as cutting [red tape](#) and simplifying EU rules for citizens and businesses. It also echoes one of the recommendations made by former Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi in his 2024 [report](#), aimed at closing the innovation gap with competitors. It forms part of a broader initiative – the [competitiveness compass](#) – which aims to increase the EU's [competitiveness](#).

As a result, the code of practice faces a challenging political situation. It is supposed to clarify rules from a regulation adopted during the Commission's previous mandate, yet the EU's priorities have shifted. There is tension between turning established legal rules into technical rules and, at the same time, trying to simplify them. Furthermore, several [EU industries](#) have called for a pause in the AI Act's implementation. The [Commission](#) answered in July 2025, specifying that there is no pause for the AI Act's legal deadlines, although the code of practice's implementation date can be discussed. The Commission suggested the end of 2025.

The fourth and final version of the code of practice

The independent experts started drafting the code in July 2024, basing their [approach](#) on stakeholder [feedback](#). The [Commission](#) reported that nearly 1 400 participants took part in the first round of drafting. The code has evolved significantly throughout its four drafts – the three first drafts [failed](#) to satisfy stakeholders; the fourth and final version has received [mixed](#) reactions. Some [representatives](#) of GPAI providers and other large technology companies have criticised the code for introducing [measures](#) they consider beyond the scope of the AI Act. However, other [representatives](#) of large technology companies have welcomed the changes, seeing them as improvements. In a 16 July 2025 press release, the European Parliament's AI Act working group co-chairs [welcomed](#) the finalisation of the code. Representatives of [civil society](#), including [rights-holders](#), have acknowledged the improvements but expressed dissatisfaction.

Next steps and considerations for the European Parliament

The Members of the European Parliament are closely monitoring the AI Act's implementation, including the development of the GPAI code of practice, through a joint IMCO-LIBE [working group](#). According to the co-chairs, the group has also discussed interplay with other pieces of EU legislation and upcoming guidelines. On 1 August 2025, the AI Office and the Board – composed of one representative per Member State – published their [assessment](#) of the adequacy of the final code of practice. The AI Office invited GPAI providers to adhere to the code and published the [list](#) of its signatories. Not all major GPAI providers have fully signed the code of practice yet. [Meta](#) – the provider of the Meta AI and [Llama](#) models – has refused to sign. However, securing the signatures of all major providers would be an important step in implementing the AI Act. [Experts](#) believe that a successful code of practice could 'set the standard for future AI safety rules worldwide', and that 'guaranteeing the safety of frontier AI is a shared goal by all key global leaders'.

The Commission may approve the code of practice through an [implementing act](#), granting it general validity in the EU. This procedure involves a committee of experts appointed by the Member States, who can reject the Commission's draft implementing act with a qualified majority vote. The AI Office may also facilitate the review of the code of practice, in the light of emerging standards.

In a few [years](#), the code of practice will be supplemented by the harmonised [standards](#), which will bring further concrete guidance on how GPAI providers can comply with the AI Act.