

Commentary: AI Continent Action Plan

The Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers welcomes the European Commission's AI Continent Action Plan and shares the urgency outlined by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen: "AI is no longer 'just' a competitive advantage; it's a necessity."

Europe indeed boasts world-class universities and research institutions, as well as 30% more AI researchers than the US. We also applaud the ambition to launch AI Gigafactories, establish AI Factories, and mobilize €20 billion through the InvestAI Facility. However, to turn this potential into real-world impact, the business environment must be fit for purpose. Today, the reality for many European companies is that navigating fragmented regulations and overlapping standards is a barrier to growth. AI startups are innovative, but without legal clarity and simplified compliance, they risk being outpaced by global competitors operating in more agile frameworks. We support European Commission's goal to minimise regulatory burdens and ensure a simple and innovation-friendly implementation of the AI Act. The AI Service Desk and accompanying guidance are welcome steps—but they must complement, not substitute, real structural reform. In this context, the introduction of regulatory sandboxes is a particularly important tool: these environments allow businesses to test AI solutions under the supervision of regulators, helping to clarify legal requirements, reduce uncertainty, and speed up time to market—without compromising safety or compliance.

Skills and talent

As part of the Skills Union, the European Commission is investing in talent development: an AI Skills Academy will be set up, and scholarships, study and internship programs in artificial intelligence will be launched. Facilitating the migration of highly skilled professionals and the return of European talent is also a priority. Innovation centers will offer courses for employees of small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups.

Simple and transparent rules for European businesses

Following the entry into force of the AI Act, a number of tools are planned to support its implementation: a focal point, national regulatory sandboxes, the AI Pact initiative and codes of conduct. The aim is to create a predictable and simplified regulatory environment while preserving space for innovation.

For us, the message is clear:

- Simplify compliance, for companies facing cascading obligations through supply chains;
- Ensure regulatory certainty, so companies can confidently scale innovation;
- Accelerate AI adoption across strategic sectors, backed by public-private cooperation;
- Boost talent pipelines, including streamlined access to AI education.

Now, to truly lead in AI, Europe must go one step further—moving from ambition to enablement. That means removing red tape, streamlining frameworks, and ensuring that businesses can thrive.

Our call to the Commission is clear: continue working closely with the business community to ensure this Action Plan empowers—not entangles—the very actors driving Europe's AI future.