General-Purpose AI Models in the AI Act – Questions & Answers

General questions about the code of practice

Why do we need rules for general-purpose AI models?

Artificial Intelligence ("AI (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_1683)") promises huge benefits (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_6474) to our economy and society. General-purpose AI models play an important role in that regard, as they can be used for a variety of tasks and therefore form the basis for a range of downstream AI systems, used in Europe and worldwide.

The AI Act (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1689) aims to ensure that general-purpose AI models are safe and trustworthy.

To achieve that aim, it is crucial that providers of general-purpose AI models ensure a good understanding of their models along the entire AI value chain, so as to allow downstream providers both to integrate such models into AI systems and to fulfil their own obligations under the AI Act. More specifically, and as explained in more detail below, providers of general-purpose AI models must draw up technical documentation for their models to make available to downstream providers and to provide upon request to the AI Office and national competent authorities, put in place a copyright policy, and publish a training content summary. In addition, providers of general-purpose AI models posing systemic risks, which may be the case either because the models are very capable or because they have a significant impact on the internal market for other reasons, must notify the Commission of those models, assess and mitigate the systemic risks stemming from them, including through performing model evaluations, reporting serious incidents, and ensuring adequate cybersecurity of these models.

In this way, the AI Act contributes to safe and trustworthy innovation in the European Union.

What are general-purpose AI models?

The AI Act defines a general-purpose AI model as "an AI model, including where such an AI model is trained with a large amount of data using self-supervision at scale, that displays significant generality and is capable of competently performing a wide range of distinct tasks regardless of the way the model is placed on the market and that can be integrated into a variety of downstream systems or applications" (Article 3(63) AI Act).

The recitals to the AI Act further clarify which models should be deemed to display significant generality and to be capable of performing a wide range of distinct tasks.

According to recital 98 AI Act, "whereas the generality of a model could, inter alia, also be determined by a number of parameters, models with at least a billion of parameters and trained with a large amount of data using self-supervision at scale should be considered to display significant generality and to competently perform a wide range of distinctive tasks."

Recital 99 AI Act adds that "large generative AI models are a typical example for a general-purpose AI model, given that they allow for flexible generation of content, such as in the form of text, audio, images or video, that can readily accommodate a wide range of distinctive tasks."

Note that significant generality and ability to competently perform a wide range of distinctive tasks may be achieved by models within a single modality, such as text, audio, images, or video, if the modality is flexible enough. This may also be achieved by models that were developed, fine-tuned, or otherwise modified to be particularly good at a specific task or at a number of tasks in a specific domain.

Different stages of the development of a model do not constitute different models.

The Commission provides further clarification in section 2.1 of its guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act) models. Notably, an indicative criterion for a model to be considered a general-purpose AI model is that its training compute is greater than 10^23 FLOP and it can generate language (whether in the form of text or audio), text-to-image, or text-to-video.

What are general-purpose AI models with systemic risk?

Systemic risks are risks of large-scale harm from the most advanced (i.e. state-of-the-art) models at any given point in time, or from other models that have an equivalent impact (see Article 3(65) AI Act). Such risks can manifest themselves, for example, through the lowering of barriers for chemical or biological weapons development, or through unintended issues of control over autonomous general-purpose AI models (recital 110 AI Act). The most advanced models at any given point in time may pose systemic risks, including novel risks, as they are pushing the state of the art. At the same time, some models below the threshold corresponding to the state of the art may also pose systemic risks, for example through reach, scalability, or scaffolding.

Accordingly, the AI Act classifies a general-purpose AI model as a general-purpose AI model with systemic risk if it is one of the most advanced models at that point in time or if it has an equivalent impact (Article 51(1) AI Act). Which models are considered general-purpose AI models with systemic risk may change over time, reflecting the evolving state of the art and potential societal adaptation to increasingly advanced models. Currently, general-purpose AI models with systemic risk are developed by a handful of companies, although this may change in the future.

To capture the most advanced models, i.e. models that match or exceed the capabilities recorded in the most advanced models so far, the AI Act lays down a threshold of 10^25 floating-point operations (FLOP) used for training the model (Article 51(1)(a) and (2) AI Act). Training a model that meets this threshold is currently estimated to cost tens of millions of Euros (Epoch AI, 2024 (https://epoch.ai/blog/how-much-does-it-cost-to-train-frontier-ai-models)). The AI Office is continuously monitoring technological and industrial developments, and the Commission may update the threshold, through the adoption of a delegated act (Article 51(3) AI Act), to ensure that it continues to single out the most advanced models as the state of the art evolves. For example, the value of the threshold itself could be adjusted and/or additional thresholds introduced.

To capture models with an impact equivalent to the most advanced models, the AI Act empowers the Commission to designate additional models as posing systemic risk, based on criteria such as the evaluations of capabilities of the model, number of users, scalability, or access to tools (Article 51(1)(b) and Annex XIII AI Act).

The Commission provides further clarification in section 2.3 of its Guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act). Notably, the guidelines outline how providers must notify the AI Office of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk, and how they may contest the classification of a model as a general-purpose AI models with systemic risk.

What is a provider of a general-purpose AI model?

The AI Act rules on general-purpose AI models apply to providers placing such models on the market in the Union, irrespective of whether those providers are established or located within the Union or in a third country (Article 2(1)(a) AI Act).

A provider of a general-purpose AI model means a natural or legal person, public authority, agency or other body that develops a general-purpose AI model or that has such a model developed and places it on the market, whether for payment or free or charge (Article 3(3) AI Act).

To place a model on the market means to make available for the first time on the Union market (Article 3(9) AI Act), that is, to supply it for distribution or use on the Union market for the first time in the course of a commercial activity, whether in return for payment or free of charge (Article 3(10) AI Act). Note that a general-purpose AI model is also considered to be placed on the market if that model's provider integrates the model into its own AI system which is made available on the market or put into service, unless the model is (a) used for purely internal processes that are not essential for providing a product or a service to third parties, (b) the rights of natural persons are not affected, and (c) the model is not a general-purpose AI model with systemic risk (recital 97 AI Act).

The Commission provides further clarification in section 3 of its Guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act).

What are the obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models?

Providers of general-purpose AI models must document technical information about their models for the purpose of providing that information upon request to the AI Office and national competent authorities (Article 53(1)(a) AI Act) and making it available to downstream providers (Article 53(1)(b) AI Act). They must also put in place a policy to comply with Union law on copyright and related rights (Article 53(1)(c) AI Act) and draw up and make publicly available a sufficiently detailed summary about the content used for training the model (Article 53(1)(d) AI Act).

The General-Purpose AI Code of Practice (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/contents-code-gpai) provides signatories with further detail on how to ensure compliance with the obligations laid down in Article 53(1)(a), (b), and (c) in the chapters dealing with transparency and copyright (led by Working Group 1), and the Commission's Template for the Public Summary of Training Content for General-Purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/explanatory-notice-and-template-public-summary-training-content-general-purpose-ai-models) outlines the required content for Article 53(1)(d) of the AI Act.

Under the AI Act, providers of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk have additional obligations. They must assess and mitigate systemic risks, in particular by performing model evaluations, keeping track of, documenting, and reporting serious incidents, and ensuring adequate cybersecurity protection for the model and its physical infrastructure (Article 55 AI Act).

The General-Purpose AI Code of Practice provides signatories with further detail on how to ensure compliance with these obligations in the chapter dealing with systemic risk assessment, technical risk mitigation, and governance risk mitigation (led by Working Groups 2, 3, and 4 respectively).

The obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models apply from 2 August 2025 (Article 113(b) AI Act), with special rules for general-purpose AI models placed on the market before that date (Article 111(3)) AI Act.

If someone open-sources a model, do they have to comply with the obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models?

The obligations to draw up and provide documentation to the AI Office, national competent authorities, and downstream providers (Article 53(1)(a) and (b) AI Act) do not apply if the model is released under a free and open-source license and its parameters, including the weights, the information on the model architecture, and the information on model usage, are made publicly available (Article 53(2) AI Act). Recitals 102 and 103 AI Act further clarify what constitutes a free and open-source license and the Commission provides further clarification in section 4 of its Guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act).

This exception does not apply to general-purpose AI models with systemic risk. After an open-source model release, measures necessary to ensure compliance with the obligations of Article 55 may be more difficult to implement (Recital 112 AI Act). Consequently, providers of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk may need to assess and mitigate systemic risks before releasing their models as open-source.

The General-Purpose AI Code of Practice (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/contents-code-gpai) provides signatories with further detail on how to comply with the obligations in Articles 53 and 55 in relation to the different ways of releasing general-purpose AI models, including open-sourcing.

An important but difficult question that underpinned the process of drawing up the General-Purpose AI Code of Practice is that of finding a balance between pursuing the benefits and mitigating the risks from the open-sourcing of advanced general-purpose AI models: open-sourcing advanced general-purpose AI models may indeed yield significant societal benefits, including through fostering AI safety research; at the same time, when such models are open-sourced, risk mitigations are more easily circumvented or removed.

Do the obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models apply in the development phase?

Article 2(8) AI Act provides that, as a general matter, the AI Act "does not apply to any research, testing or development activity regarding AI systems or AI models prior to their being placed on the market or put into service."

At the same time, certain obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models (with and without systemic risk) explicitly or implicitly pertain to the development phase of models intended for, but prior to, the placing on the market. This is the case, for example, for the obligations for providers to notify the Commission that their general-purpose AI model meets or will meet the training compute threshold laid down in Article 51(2) AI Act (Articles 51 and 52 AI Act), to document information about training and testing (Article 53 AI Act), and to assess and mitigate systemic risk (Article 55 AI Act). In particular, Article 55(1)(b) AI Act explicitly provides that "providers of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk shall assess and mitigate possible systemic risks at Union level, including their sources, that may stem from the development (...) of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk."

The AI Office expects discussions with providers of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk to start early in the development phase. This is consistent with the obligation for providers of general-purpose AI models that meet the training compute threshold to "notify the Commission without delay and in any event within two weeks after that requirement is met or it becomes known that it will be met" (Article 52(1) AI Act). Indeed, training of general-purpose AI models takes considerable planning, which includes the upfront allocation of compute resources, and providers of general-purpose AI models are therefore able to know if their model will meet the training compute threshold before the training is complete (recital 112 AI Act). The Commission provides further clarification on this matter in section 2.3 of its Guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act).

If someone fine-tunes or otherwise modifies a model, do they have to comply with the obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models?

General-purpose AI models may be further modified or fine-tuned into new models (recital 97 AI Act). Accordingly, downstream entities that fine-tune or otherwise modify an existing general-purpose AI model may become providers of new models. The specific circumstances in which a downstream entity becomes a provider of a new model is a difficult question with potentially large economic implications, since many organisations and individuals fine-tune or otherwise modify general-purpose AI models developed by another entity.

In the case of a modification or fine-tuning of an existing general-purpose AI model, the obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models in Article 53 AI Act should be limited to the modification or fine-tuning, for example, by complementing the already existing technical documentation with information on the modifications (Recital 109). The obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk in Article 55 AI Act should only apply in clearly specified cases. The Commission provides further clarification in section 3.2 of its Guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act). Notably, the Commission deems that it is not necessary for every modification of a general-purpose AI model to lead to the downstream modifier being considered the provider of the modified general-purpose AI model. An indicative criterion for when a downstream modifier is considered to be the provider of a general-purpose AI model is that the training compute used for the modification is greater than a third of the training compute of the original model.

Regardless of whether a downstream entity that incorporates a general-purpose AI model into an AI system is deemed to be a provider of the general-purpose AI model, that entity must comply with the relevant AI Act requirements and obligations for AI systems.

What is the General-Purpose AI Code of Practice?

Based on Article 56 of the AI Act, the General-Purpose AI Code of Practice (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-code-practice) details the manner in which providers of general-purpose AI models and of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk may comply with their obligations under the AI Act. The AI Office facilitated the drawing-up of this Code of Practice, with four working groups chaired by independent experts and involving nearly 1,000 stakeholders, EU Member States representatives, as well as European and international observers.

More precisely, the Code of Practice details how providers of general-purpose AI models may comply with the obligations laid down in Articles 53 and 55 AI Act. The Commission (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/commission-opinion-assessment-general-purpose-ai-code-practice) and the AI Board (https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/118687) have assessed the Code of Practice published on 10th July 2025 as adequate.

The Code of Practice includes commitments by providers of general-purpose AI models that sign the Code to document and report additional information, as well as to involve the AI Office and third parties throughout the entire model lifecycle, in so far as this is considered necessary for providers to effectively comply with their obligations under the AI Act.

What is not part of the Code of Practice?

The Code of Practice (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-code-practice) does not address inter alia the following issues: defining key concepts and definitions from the AI Act (such as "general-purpose AI model"), updating the criteria or thresholds for classifying a general-purpose AI model as a general-purpose AI model with systemic risk (Article 51), outlining how the AI Office will enforce the obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models (Chapter IX, Section 5), and questions concerning fines, sanctions, and liability.

These issues have and will be addressed through other means (Commission Guidelines, decisions, delegated acts, implementing acts, further communications from the AI Office, etc.).

Do AI systems play a role in the Code of Practice?

The AI Act distinguishes between AI systems and AI models, imposing requirements for certain AI systems (Chapters II-IV) and obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models (Chapter V). While the provisions of the AI Act concerning AI systems depend on the context of use of the system, the provisions of the AI Act concerning general-purpose AI models apply to the model itself, regardless of what is or will be its ultimate use. The Code of Practice (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-code-practice) only concerns the obligations in the AI Act for providers of general-purpose AI models.

Nevertheless, there are interactions between the two sets of rules, as general-purpose AI models are typically integrated into and form part of AI systems. If a provider of a general-purpose AI model integrates that model into an AI system, that provider must comply with the obligations for providers of general-purpose AI models and, if the AI system falls within the scope of the AI Act, with the requirements for AI systems. If a downstream provider integrates a general-purpose AI model into an AI system, the provider of the general-purpose AI model must cooperate with the downstream provider of the AI system to ensure that the latter can comply with its obligations under the AI Act if the AI system falls within the scope of the AI Act (for example by providing certain information to the downstream provider).

Given these interactions between models and systems, and between the obligations and requirements for each, an important question underlying the Code of Practice concerns which measures are appropriate at the model layer, and which need to be taken at the system layer instead.

How does the Code of Practice take into account the needs of start-ups?

The Code of Practice set out Objectives, Commitments, and Measures. Commitments and Measures related to the obligations applicable to providers of all general-purpose AI models take due account of the size of the provider and allow simplified ways of compliance for SMEs, including start-ups, in order not to represent an excessive cost and not to discourage the use of such models (Recital 109 AI Act). Moreover, the reporting commitments related to the obligations applicable to providers of general-purpose AI models with systemic risk reflect differences in size and capacity between various providers (Article 56(5) AI Act), while ensuring that they are proportionate to the risks (Article 56(2)(d) AI Act).

What are the legal effects of the Code of Practice?

Once assessed as adequate, adherence to the Code of Practice (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-code-practice) becomes a means to demonstrate compliance with the AI Act, while not providing a presumption of conformity with the AI Act. Providers may also demonstrate compliance with the AI Act in other ways. In that case, providers would be expected to adopt alternative adequate measures to ensure compliance with their AI Act obligations, which may include reporting to the AI Office. Providers who do not sign and adhere to the Code

of Practice must be able to justify why their proposed alternative means of compliance are adequate, for instance by carrying out a gap analysis compared to the Code of Practice that has been assessed as adequate.

Based on the AI Act, additional legal effects of the Code of Practice are that the AI Office may take a provider's adherence to the Code of Practice into account when monitoring its effective implementation and compliance with the AI Act (Article 89(1) AI Act) and may take into account commitments made in the Code of Practice as a mitigating factor when fixing the amount of fines depending on the specific circumstances (Article 101(1) AI Act).The Commission provides further clarification in section 5 of its Guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act).

How will the Code of Practice be reviewed and updated?

Based on Article 56(8) AI Act, "the AI Office shall, as appropriate, also encourage and facilitate the review and adaptation of the codes of practice, in particular in light of emerging standards". The Commission provides further elaboration on this in section 4 of its adequacy assessment of the Code of Practice (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/commission-opinion-assessment-general-purpose-ai-code-practice).

Which enforcement powers does the AI Office have?

The AI Office will supervise and enforce the obligations laid down in the AI Act for providers of general-purpose AI models (Article 88 AI Act) and, exceptionally, the obligations for providers of AI systems based on general-purpose AI models if the provider of the model and the system are the same (Article 75 (1) AI Act). The AI Office will support the relevant market surveillance authorities of the Member States in their enforcement of the requirements for AI systems (Article 75 (2) and (3) AI Act), among other tasks. Enforcement by the AI Office is underpinned by the powers given to it by the AI Act, namely the powers to request information (Article 91 AI Act), conduct evaluations of general-purpose AI models (Article 92 AI Act), request measures from providers, including implementing risk mitigations, and recalling the model from the market (Article 93 AI Act), and to impose fines of up to 3% of global annual turnover or 15 million Euros, whichever is higher (Article 101 AI Act). The Commission provides further elaboration on this in section 5 of its Guidelines on the scope of the obligations for general-purpose AI models (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/guidelines-scope-obligations-providers-general-purpose-ai-models-under-ai-act).
