

Statement by the Committee on Education 2019/20:UbU20

White Paper on Artificial Intelligence

Summary

The Committee on Education has examined the Commission's White Paper on Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Committee considers that AI technology has considerable potential as regards developing both welfare and competitiveness, but that AI also involves risks and that new and coordinated measures are required in the field. The Committee therefore welcomes the Commission's White Paper on Artificial Intelligence and the important discussion that is now being initiated on the future European approach to AI.

In the White Paper, the Commission proposes that an ecosystem of excellence is developed in order to support the development of AI within the EU. The Committee agrees with the Commission that it is necessary to mobilise resources and identify the measures needed for the EU to be able to strengthen its capacity in the field of AI. At the same time, the Committee wishes to stress that it is crucial that AI research is prioritised at the EU level. This concerns support to both basic and applied research and targeted measures to promote excellence. Here, the Committee wishes to emphasise two things; partly that it is important to ensure that the entire chain from research to market is taken into consideration, for example, by enabling cooperation between the business sector and academia, and at the same time, that it is important that the measures are not solely focused on commercialising AI applications. The results of AI research also have great potential to be applied in the public sector, and support to research for public benefit should be promoted. Furthermore, AI for the best of society is not only about technology, it is also necessary to support cross-sectoral AI research. Bearing this in mind, the Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission proposes initiatives within the framework of the Digital Europe Programme and Horizon Europe.

The Committee further considers that available data are of fundamental importance and that it is vital to secure the ongoing efforts to produce open, high quality data in the EU. Progress regarding data processing in the form of increased calculation capacity and storage capacity is of decisive importance for research, on and development of, AI solutions. In order to unleash the full potential of AI, it is important to take into account the fact that it places demands on digital infrastructure, both specific computer infrastructure (e.g. high-performance computers) and that the infrastructures in general are able to handle large volumes of data.

The Committee further wishes to highlight the challenges connected with competence shortages, and underlines the importance of ensuring that there is sufficient competence to exploit the full potential of AI. In the opinion of the Committee, this partly involves promoting various competence-raising measures, in particular further education, and partly attracting and retaining world-leading researchers. Measures to strengthen excellence and attract and retain skilled researchers are, in the opinion of the Committee, a precondition for developing the best AI systems.

However, necessary competence-raising measures do not only involve measures to strengthen the competence to develop AI. It is also crucial that more people are given the opportunity to learn to use AI in both the public and private sectors. This is a necessary component if we are to exploit the fully potential of AI applications. Therefore, many different professional categories in different sectors require knowledge about AI. Higher education institutions should be encouraged to offer more courses in the field of AI.

Furthermore, the increasingly digitised economy places new demands on opportunities for further and higher education of people already in work. The Committee notes that as the technology develops, new job opportunities will be created at the same time as other jobs may change. Bearing this in mind, it is of great importance that the need for life-long learning and opportunities for retraining during working life are an integrated part of the EU's approach to AI. This should be taken into account in various forms of adult education as regards both course offerings and contents. In the opinion of the Committee, it is, in this context, important to also make use of other education providers besides universities and university colleges. It is important to draw benefit from all knowledge, also outside the world of universities and university colleges.

In view of the above, the Committee welcomes the fact that the Commission notes that the European AI strategy will need to be underpinned by a strong focus on skills to fill competence shortages. The Committee especially looks forward to reading the reinforced Skills Agenda and the updated Digital Education Action Plan.

In the White Paper, the Commission highlights the cornerstones of a future EU regulatory framework for AI with the purpose of creating an ecosystem of trust. The Committee agrees with the Commission's assessment that building a well-founded public trust in the technology is crucial for the future of AI technology, and it welcomes the Commission's approach.

The Committee wishes to point out that AI, like all technology, is there to help people, and not vice versa. At the same time, AI involves certain specific risks. AI can have unwanted effects and be used in a way that violates individuals and groups. The Committee notes that AI is already used today in such a way by various international actors with a certain technological advantage. There is also a risk that an overconfidence in technology may lead to unforeseen consequences. From this perspective, a deficient regulatory framework does not only mean that the EU is at risk of falling behind because too few people are using AI solutions, it also entails a potential threat to our fundamental rights. It is therefore of fundamental importance that a future regulatory framework takes into account the ethical aspects of AI technology and that legislation at both the Swedish and the European levels is adequate to ensure that the risks associated with AI are minimised. In this context, the Committee would also like to point out the importance of ensuring that a gender and rights perspective is integrated into continued efforts.

The Committee considers that it is important with a proportional regulatory framework that does not hamper the development of AI but, at the same time balances the risks and that safeguards the functioning of the internal market in connection with the introduction of new rules. The size of the internal market gives the EU ample opportunity to influence developments by defining common standards. It is furthermore of great importance that a long-term perspective for a

future AI regulatory framework is adopted, partly in order to enable long-term planning of various activities and sectors and partly with regard to the development and dissemination of AI technology. The Committee therefore welcomes the fact that the Commission, in the White Paper, highlights that the regulatory framework should leave scope for continued developments. In this context, the Committee also wishes to highlight the importance of focusing on common standards within the EU, and not necessarily on common solutions. The Committee therefore welcomes the fact that the Commission, in the White Paper, adopts a balanced approach to the opportunities and risks presented by AI, and that the Commission recommends a development of AI that is human-centred, ethical and sustainable and that respects fundamental rights and values.

The Committee furthermore wishes to highlight the matter of the risks of and with technology and data monopolies, in order to avoid a situation where data that can be used for the public best is limited to just a few actors. This applies in particular to matters connected with ownership rights of data, which need to be clear in order to ensure that information that is collected is not misused. The Committee therefore welcomes a continued discussion on transparency of AI systems.

As the technology develops, an increasing number of sectors and services will use AI systems. In view of these developments, it is important to ensure that AI functions reliably, is robust and can withstand attacks.

The Committee also notes that the development and use of AI for military purposes is not dealt with in the White Paper, but notes, nonetheless, that AI systems can be used for military purposes. The Committee on Education also wishes to highlight the fact that in its statement (2019/20:UU4y), the Committee on Foreign Affairs maintains that within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Sweden is pushing for an effective international ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems which are incompatible with the requirements of international law.

Furthermore, there are foreign and security policy aspects associated with AI which need to be taken seriously, and international developments should be taken into account in this context. The Committee therefore welcomes the fact that the EU is holding talks with like-minded countries and global actors, and recognises ongoing work with AI in multilateral international organisations such as the UN, Council of Europe, OECD, WTO, UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The Committee also wishes to put forward that in future work with AI, it is important to take into account the member states' competence within policy areas where it is relevant. In the opinion of the Committee, measures will be needed at both the national and the European level within the field of AI.

On the whole, the Committee welcomes the Commission's White Paper on Artificial Intelligence and its contribution to the ongoing discussion on how the EU can best benefit from AI. In the opinion of the Committee, it is clear that AI is here to stay and will play an increasingly important role to both the lives of individuals and economic development in the future. The Committee thus considers, like the Commission, that AI is a strategic technology that offers many benefits for society, provided that it is ethical, sustainable and respects fundamental rights and values AI can offer great efficiency gains, strengthen the EU's competitiveness and contribute with solutions to various societal problems. The Committee also sees that AI can contribute to the fight against climate change

and other global challenges. If handled correctly – with regard to the risks also connected with AI – AI has significant potential social benefit.

The examined document

White Paper on Artificial Intelligence – An EU strategy for Excellence and Trust (COM(2020) 65).