Digital Transition and Single Market Observatory activities in 2024
Focus on general-purpose AI, generative AI and foundation models

20 December 2023
This roadmap was updated on the basis of the exchange of views at the DSMO meeting on 18
October and other developments in the field.

Background

The topic of artificial intelligence was identified as one of the future priorities in the State of the Union speech by the President of the Commission in September 2023. She called for the identification of global opportunities and risks that this technology brings, and for cooperation with the civil society in order to set the minimum global standards for safe and ethical use of AI. This call comes in the midst of the final round of trilogue negotiations on the Union´s flagship initiative in the field, the AI Act. It also reflects the importance the rest of the world, including the USA, UK and China, gives to this topic sparked by the success and rise of general-purpose AI with generative capabilities.

General purpose AI is a type of AI that can perform a wide range of tasks across different domains, without requiring much modification or fine-tuning. Typical example of general-purpose AI are generative AI models which are able to generate text, images or videos and are underpinned by the architecture of large-scale models known as foundation models. Their applications such as OpenAI´s ChatGPT/GPT-4 or Google´s Bard/Gemini have recently gained a lot of attention and enjoy widespread uptake among both practitioners as well as the general public. It is clear that further defining and applying the Union´s approach to this modern type of AI and its governance, and promoting it at a global level, is one of biggest opportunities and challenges for our region in the near future.

DSMO is well-placed to take action on the governance of general-purpose AI

The DSMO priority topics in the adopted work programme for the 2023-2025 half term of office are

as follows: 1) deepening knowledge on the requirements and implications of complying with EU legislation on digital technologies by EU industry; 2) analysing the impact of digital technologies on civil society, the labour market and human and democratic values, such as the human-in-command approach to AI.

Based on the above, as proposed and discussed at the DSMO meeting on 18 October 2023, the DSMO will make general-purpose AI and its governance a primary focus of its activities in 2024. The objectives are threefold:

1) to contribute to the practical implementation of the Artificial Intelligence Act and setting up an effective EU governance mechanism of general-purpose AI in which civil society organisations play an important role;

2) to engage in shaping the next steps in the field, e.g. any future actions in relation to general purpose AI, generative AI and foundation models or any other cross-cutting or sector-specific initiative in the area of AI, including in the labour market;

3) to add to the global discussions on the topic of AI governance, in particular on general-purpose AI and foundation models.

The guiding principle for the DSMO's work will remain the human-in-command approach to AI, including the emphasis on the protection of human rights, privacy and consumer protection as well as promoting innovation and uptake of responsible AI in various domains and in everyday lives of citizens. When collecting and analysing data and making recommendations, this principle and its practical application will be taken into account.

Working methods and deliverables

In order to strengthen DSMO´s visibility and contribution to the Union´s decision-making and implementation processes, one primary topic was selected as a target of the activities and work in 2024. DSMO will aim to pursue a cross-cutting approach to the topic and build bridges between various interest groups in order to produce comprehensive and balanced results. At the same time, the goal is to be as practical and on point as possible, including gathering and analysing the data from practice and drawing adequate conclusions. Various working methods available to the DSMO will be employed with a view to producing specific deliverables with an added value, to be shared with the other institutions and stakeholders.

The preparation of an exploratory opinion on general-purpose AI requested from the EESC by the European Commission will take place in 2024. DSMO will aim to play an active role in preparing this opinion, including by making much needed links between the relevant members and providing the

broader context around the topic. A study on generative AI and foundation models will be conducted in 2024 in order to gather the missing data around this type of general-purpose AI, its use, uptake and impact in the EU. DSMO will also aim to contribute to other related opinions, such as the opinion on the upcoming initiative on opening up the EU´s high-performance computers to AI start-ups or the mid-term evaluation of the Digital Europe Programme where AI is one of the priority areas. Targeted meetings and discussions with the representatives of EU institutions and other important and interesting actors in the field and among the DSMO members, including interactive sessions, will take place. Hearings and practical fact-finding missions may also be organised in order to complement other efforts. The topic also presents a great opportunity for further collaboration with other relevant institutions and EESC observatories. Last but not least, following-up on the work in 2024, a comprehensive information report will be drawn up to list all the findings and results of the related DSMO activities and will be shared with the other institutions and stakeholders.

Conclusion

The three main meetings of the observatory in 2024 are planned for 8 February, 18 June and 15 October. The detailed agendas of the meetings will be drawn up and distributed closer to the respective days. The goal will be, however, to focus on general-purpose AI throughout the whole year, taking concrete steps along the way and providing regular updates on the progress of the work as well as opportunities for a discussion and exchange of views.

Various angles to (general-purpose) AI can be considered and explored depending on the developments and relevance, such as the use and impact on the labour market and labour relations, skills, public administration, the creative industry, copyright, deep fakes or use of AI in the sectors of education, justice, health, environment or as regards energy consumption. Activities and deliverables in 2024 will pave the way to the last six months of the DSMO mandate in 2025, when the DSMO activities under the current mandate will be concluded and evaluated and, on the basis of that, a decision will be made as regards the next steps.