



# The AI Act

## Focus: SMEs and start-ups

*The AI Act defines binding requirements for risk-related AI applications and increases transparency and safety in the use of AI technology. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups benefit from exemptions from and simplifications to the requirements.*

### 1. Priority access free of charge to AI regulatory sandboxes

Member States will provide SMEs and start-ups that have a registered office or branch in the EU and that fulfil the selection criteria with priority access free of charge to an AI regulatory sandbox. The national authorities may recover any exceptional costs to a reasonable extent.

The Bundesnetzagentur plans to establish and operate at least one AI regulatory sandbox within the meaning of the AI Act by 2 August 2026.

### 2. Simplified conformity assessment

The notified bodies will make sure that there are no unnecessary burdens for providers of AI systems in the conformity assessment of AI systems. They will take into account the provider's size, sector and structure and the complexity of the AI system. This aims to minimise administrative burdens and costs for microenterprises and small enterprises. The fees for conformity assessment will be reduced proportionately to the enterprises' size, the market size and other relevant indicators.

### 3. Simplified technical documentation and quality management for high-risk AI systems

Providers must draw up technical documentation before a high-risk AI system is placed on the market or put into service. SMEs and start-ups can draw up a simplified form of this documentation.

### 4. Reasonable fines and penalties

The interests of SMEs and start-ups and their economic viability will be taken into account in the event of infringements of the rules of the AI Act. Fines for SMEs and start-ups will be based on the lower of the relevant percentages or amounts.

**Microenterprises and SMEs** are defined in Commission [Recommendation 2003/361/EG](#).

**Microenterprises** are enterprises which employ fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed €2mn.

**Small enterprises** are enterprises which employ fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed €10mn.

**Medium-sized enterprises** are enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and whose annual turnover does not exceed €50mn or annual balance sheet total does not exceed €43mn.

# AI Service Desk

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The AI Service Desk is an independent contact point providing information about the AI Act. We support companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups, and other organisations in implementing the AI Act.

## What we offer:

- ✓ **AI compliance compass:** An online tool to assess whether your AI system comes under the AI Act and, if so, in which risk level. The tool is a starting point, not a binding assessment.  
→ [bundesnetzagentur.de/ki-ck](https://bundesnetzagentur.de/ki-ck) (in German)
- ✓ **Guidance on AI literacy:** The AI Act requires providers and deployers of AI systems to ensure that any persons operating and using AI systems on their behalf have a sufficient level of AI literacy; this requirement became applicable at the beginning of February 2025. Information about how you can comply with this requirement can be found in our guidance note on AI literacy:  
→ [bundesnetzagentur.de/ki-kompetenz](https://bundesnetzagentur.de/ki-kompetenz) (in German)
- ✓ **Information about the innovation-friendly rules of the AI Act:** These rules include awareness-raising and training activities on the application of the AI Act, the establishment of AI regulatory sandboxes and the testing of high-risk AI systems in real world conditions outside AI regulatory sandboxes.
- ✓ **Events and latest news:** Information about the latest publications, consultations and events about AI and the AI Act.
- ✓ **Compact information about supplementary European guidelines, legislation and codes of practice:** These supplement the rules and provide detailed information about certain aspects of the AI Act such as the definition of AI systems or prohibited AI practices.
- ✓ **Information about AI regulatory sandboxes:** The sandboxes provide a controlled environment that facilitates the development, training, testing and validation of innovative AI systems. The learning outcomes from regulatory sandboxes are made available to all AI innovators.

Full range of information at:



[bundesnetzagentur.de/ki](https://bundesnetzagentur.de/ki)