

Increasing trust in and adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are necessary ingredients for economic growth and the fuel for future innovations that can benefit society as a whole. In this complex context which stimulates and promotes the use and dissemination of AI technologies, also Italy has developed its AI national strategy as part of the Coordinated Plan launched by the European Commission in December 2018. Over the period until now, the Italian government has stressed the importance of discussing the specific approach that the country should adopt to fully benefit from the advantages of AI while mitigating the risks that are often associated with its use. As prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic pointed out in his report: "Artificial Intelligence is essentially a dual-use technology and its mighty implications, either positive or negative, will be increasingly hard to anticipate, frame, and restrain, let alone mitigate and regulate" (*The answer to AI is intergovernmental Multilateralism*, New Europe, Brussels, March 2020).

Therefore, a national strategy is more than ever essential because AI can represent the starting point for a new edge filled with economic, social and cultural prosperity for Italy. To date, the country has been struggling to keep up with the other major European economies either from the point of view of the industrial production or companies competitiveness.

To make the matter worse, the Italian economy does not seem to be heading towards an important sustainable development yet, which represents a long-standing issue for its society: the growing poverty and the inequality go hand in hand with an increasing gap between North and South and a strong need for investments in infrastructures and social and environmental policies. Insight of this, Italy leverages the development of AI and related digital technologies to earn a golden opportunity in inaugurating a new social, economic and environmental "spring".



The official document picturing the national strategy - performed by an experts team at ministry of Economic Development - consists of three parts: the first one shows an analytical overview upon the global market, with a focus on the European and national framework in terms of AI; the second part itemises the paramount principles of the strategy which inspired the experts in formulating the proposals: humanism (human beings at the centre), reliability and sustainability; the third and last part examines the policy to be adopted and sets out the proposals for the implementation, monitoring and communication of the Italian strategy.

In detail, the work of the experts has drawn up 82 proposals (also called “recommendations”) which take into account the peculiarities of the Italian system and tend to reconcile the international competitiveness with sustainable development, in compliance with the European guidelines for a reliable, resilient and anthropocentric AI. These proposals/recommendations have, specifically, the purpose of “allowing Italy to start a phase of economic, social and environmental renaissance, marked by a focus on sustainability and by the digital transformation of the institutional and socio-economic business of the country”.

Below, an excerpt of the most significant proposals - in my opinion - contained in the Italian AI strategic plan.

Recommendation 3

In line with the European trends, the primacy of the human being over AI technology is affirmed and must be understood as a support to humans and not a substitute for them.

Recommendation 5

The Italian strategy puts its focus on embedded AI (as known also as “edge AI”), or those artificial intelligence systems that are present directly on the device (embedded, precisely). In the broadest terms, Embedded Intelligence is the definition of a self-referential process in which a specific system or program has the ability to analyse and refine its operations on its own.

Recommendation 10

It promotes the institution of a central body for the coordination of European initiatives and the definition of a national pattern for AI technologies development.

Recommendations from 11 to 16

Italy must invest in digital education by promoting up-to-date and qualified classes of teachers and learners on the subject of digital technologies, inaugurating new national degree courses on AI and up-skilling and re-skilling the workforce. This latter will allow an increasing number of people a job opportunity in this new technological field.

Recommendations 23 and 27

These proposals encourage information campaigns – both in Italian and English language – in order to make the national population aware of the main characteristics, opportunities and risks determined by the use of AI. In support of these recommendations, the Government will create a national platform – accessible to all citizens – as a permanent consultation/information tool on AI issues.

Recommendation 29

Italy should adopt the Trustworthy AI Impact Assessment (TAIA), currently studied at European level, as a risk assessment tool. The “actors” – those ones who use AI technologies – will perform a real risk assessment by identifying, first, the risks deriving from their

activity and then indicating the strategies adopted to mitigate negative impacts.

Recommendation 38

The experts have highlighted the advantages through the creation of an Italian Institute for Artificial Intelligence (IIIA) for the research and the transfer of AI applications to companies and the Public Administration.

Recommendations 47-48

These recommendations are aimed at enhancing public tools (such as development contracts and innovation agreements) to support investments and strengthen public and private support for venture capital.

Recommendations from 55 to 68

It is a group of recommendations with a focus on data, on the optimization of their collection and subsequent management.

Recommendations from 69 to 75



These proposals are dedicated to sustainable AI, in full alignment with the European guidelines. The Government will work on a regulation which will ensure sustainable development in support of the energy sector, disabled people and disadvantaged ranks. Another noteworthy purpose is the national prestige that Italy will straighten in the international competitiveness in terms of AI. Not by chance, several countries are making significant investments in AI, especially for military purposes, and it undoubtedly shows up how each of them is strong-willed to achieve leadership in the AI field.

The document ends with an annexe that points out the investment planned to implement the AI strategy. It counts 888 million for the first five years, in addition to another 605 million (121 per year) from private contributions.

“The disclosure of this ambitious strategic plan suggests an unprecedented and responsible use of Artificial Intelligence, lighting the way for a leap towards new levels of efficiency and sustainability for Italian businesses,” said Mirella Liuzzi, Undersecretary at Ministry of Economic Development. “The goal - she added - “is to gather the benefits that AI can bring

to the country, with an approach that includes technology and sustainable development and always puts the individual and his context at the centre”.

However, in order to put into effect the above-mentioned proposals and the overall efforts made, it is essential to better coordinate all the AI stakeholders, to distribute funding fairly and avoid waste of money.

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