

embrAl sme project

Improving conditions and policies for SMEs to embrace AI

**6th Interregional Thematic Workshop & Site Visit:
“Legal & Ethical Issues in AI for SMEs”**10th – 11th February

Galway, Ireland

This international study visit forms part of the Interreg Europe embrAl sme project. It brings together policymakers, regulators, AI agencies, Digital Innovation Hubs, research organisations, academics, and SME intermediaries to focus on how legal and ethical aspects of AI — including the EU AI Act — are implemented in practice, with a strong emphasis on real-world application rather than legal theory.

This study visit is designed as a working session for policy learning and exchange, with an emphasis on practical implementation, peer learning, and transferability across regions.

Delegates & Organisations in Attendance

- Federal Chancellery Austria
- Austria Wirtschaftsservice (aws)
- AI Factory Austria
- Women in AI (Austria)
- Paiper.one (Austria)
- ITA – Aragón Institute of Technology / Aragón EDIH (Spain)
- AESIA – Spanish Agency for the Supervision of Artificial Intelligence
- IAON – Ibercaja (Spain)
- Business Tampere (Finland)
- Baltic Institute of Finland
- VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland
- Gofore (Finland)
- Business Development Institute of Madeira (Portugal)
- University of Madeira (Portugal)
- Ministry of Digital Transformation – Slovenia
- Institute for Artificial Intelligence Research and Development of Serbia
- itag (Ireland)
- Western Development Commission (Ireland)
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Ireland)
- Data2Sustain EDIH (Ireland)
- CeADAR (Ireland)
- University of Galway (Ireland)
- Trinzo (Ireland)

If you have any questions, please contact:

- David Bermingham, dbermingham@itag.ie
- Aoife Malone, aoifemalone@wdc.ie

Monday 09th February 2026

DAY 0 / Evening

8:00pm

Partner & Stakeholder Welcome Dinner

Location: [Mc Neills](#)

Downstairs in the [Hardiman Hotel Galway](#) (H91 NFD2)

Tuesday 10th February 2026

Location:

[Hardiman Hotel Galway](#) (H91 NFD2)

DAY 1 / Morning

8:45 – 9:15

Registration and welcome coffee

9:15 – 9:45

Opening of the conference

- Welcome address from Sharon Walsh (itag Chair)
- Ian Brannigan (WDC)
- Mike Conroy (EDIH Data2Sustain)

9:45 – 10:00

Introduction to embrAlsme project

Clemens Zeiler - AWS, embrAlsme Project Lead

10:00 - 12:00

The EU AI Act: a journey into its aspirations and limitations.

Guest Speaker: Gabriele Mazzini, former European Commission (Lead Author, EU AI Act)

A first-hand perspective on the EU AI Act from its original designer, exploring the motivations behind the framework, the key choices made during its development, and its intended impact. The session focuses on helping participants understand the scope, rationale, and limitations of the Act, without going into legal technicalities.

12:00- 12:30

Transfer for Lunch

12:30- 13:00

Pre-lunch coastal stroll: a relaxed short walk along the Salthill Promenade, taking in Galway Bay, the Atlantic air and the iconic diving tower and natural swimming area before lunch at Blackrock Cottage.

13:00- 14:00

Lunch – [Blackrock Cottage Salthill](#)

14:00- 14:30

Return transfer to Hardiman Hotel

DAY 1 / Afternoon

National Implementation & Practical Governance of the EU AI Act

The afternoon session begins with a national-level perspective on the implementation of the EU AI Act in Ireland, followed by a focused panel discussion on how regulatory and ethical requirements translate into real-world AI governance for SMEs and public-sector organisations

14:30- 15:10	<p>AI - Good for Business</p> <p>Speaker: Declan McCormack: Principal, AI and Digital Regulation Unit (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment)</p> <p>Irish Government lead on AI Act national implementation and Ireland’s representative on the EU AI Board.</p>
15:10- 15:40	<p>Building the Foundations of Resilient AI Ecosystems</p> <p>Speaker: Julia Palma, EU Programme Manager, (CeADAR)</p> <p>Moving beyond the hype, this session explores how robust regulatory frameworks, like the AI Act, serve as essential infrastructure for resilient innovation. Drawing on lessons from other sectors and CeADAR's expertise in helping companies and public administration adopt AI, we will examine how regulatory sandboxes and evidence-based policies can dismantle the false dichotomy between regulation and innovation to build a sustainable, value-based AI ecosystem.</p>
15:40- 16:30	<p>Panel Discussion: From Regulation to Reality — Governing AI in Practice for SMEs</p> <p>A cross-disciplinary panel combining regulatory, academic, SME, and public-sector perspectives, exploring how AI Act obligations, risk classification, and ethical principles translate into day-to-day governance decisions when AI systems are built, procured, or deployed.</p> <p>Moderator: Mike Conroy, Data2Sustain EDIH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declan McCormack (<i>Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment</i>) • Julia Palma (<i>CeADAR</i>) • Gabriele Bolek-Fügl (<i>Paiper.one</i>) • Heike Felzmann - Associate Professor in Ethics (<i>University of Galway</i>) • Conor Flynn – Head of Innovation (<i>Trinzo</i>)
16:30- 17:00	<p>Panel Wrap-Up & Key Takeaways</p>
18:15	<p>Cultural Activity – Meet in Hardiman Hotel Lobby</p>
19:30	<p>Partner & Stakeholder Dinner</p> <p>Kirwans Lane Restaurant, Galway The Seafood Bar @ Kirwan's Lane Seafood Bar and Restaurant in Galway City, Ireland</p>

Wednesday 11 th February 2026	
<p>Location: Portershed – Innovation Hub (10 mins walk from Hardiman Hotel) (Portershed, Bowling Green, Galway, H91 HE9E)</p>	
DAY 2 / Morning	
8:45 – 9:15	Registration and welcome coffee
9:15 – 10:45	<p>Peer Review on Good Practices (15 min presentations per GP, followed by Q&A and debate/feedback)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can We Be Better Problem Solvers Enabled by AI? (Sanni Pöntinen, Finland) • Paiper.one (Gabriele Bolek-Fügl, Austria) • Eirmersive (Niamh Costello, Ireland) • IAON - Joint initiative for ethical AI use (Fernando de Santos & Sergio Mayo Macías, Spain)
10:45-11:15	Coffee Break - Walk to join AI Summit (Hardiman Hotel)
11:15-12:00	<p>Responsible Innovation in AI (Presented by Women in AI)</p> <p>Four 10-minute lightning talks from invited experts listed below, followed by a 40-minute panel discussion with all speakers, to provide a high-level, multi-country perspective on supporting innovation in AI through the toolbox offered by the AI Act and set up the practical workshops in the afternoon.</p> <p>Introduction to Speakers: Karen Conway, Fidelity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making Standards work for AI (Austria): Valerie Hafez (<i>Policy Officer Federal Chancellery, Austria</i>) • Developing Codes of Conduct for AI (Ireland): Dr Malika Bendechache (<i>University of Galway</i>) • From Pilot to Trust: Real-World Testing of Responsible AI (Finland): Kristiina Härkönen (<i>Head of Sustainability at Gofore</i>) • Societal impact of AI adoption (Spain): Fernando de Santos Loriente (<i>Coordinador de IAON en Ibercaja</i>)

12:00 – 12:30	Panel Discussion with Q&A Moderator: Karen Conway, Fidelity (Panelists from the Lightning talks)
12:30 – 13:15	Short Presentations on Emerging Trends in AI
13:15 – 14:00	Lunch & Return to Portershed
DAY 2 / Afternoon	Workshop Sessions (Legal & Ethical Practice)
14:00 – 15:00	Workshop (1/2) Identifying Common Legal & Ethical AI Challenges Across Countries (Bottom-Up) Purpose: Build a shared understanding of the real legal, ethical, and governance challenges faced by SMEs and public authorities across partner regions, based on stakeholder input gathered in advance Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review stakeholder inputs collected via the pre-work MS form, synthesised by each partner into a small number of plain-language challenges • Surface and cluster the main legal, ethical, and governance challenges raised by SMEs, intermediaries, and public authorities across regions • Identify existing regional policy instruments, supports, and governance mechanisms. • Prioritise the challenges with the greatest impact on SME AI adoption, based on frequency and perceived severity in the stakeholder inputs
15:00-15:15	Coffee Break
15:15-16:15	Workshop (2/2): Exploring Policy and Support Responses to Common Legal and Ethical AI Challenges Purpose: To explore appropriate policy and support responses to the prioritised challenges and identify realistic next steps, without attempting to design full solutions. Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore relevant policy and support responses (e.g. guidance, capacity-building, coordination mechanisms, pilots, or monitoring) • Identify which existing instruments could be adapted or strengthened • Assess transferability across countries, including key enablers and constraints
16:15 - 17:00	Presentation of Workshop Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each group presents a short summary of the common challenges identified, the response approaches explored, and key considerations for transferability across countries.
17:00	End of Meeting
18:30	Evening – Dinner & Networking Oyster Shucking Experience: A hosted oyster shucking experience with a local cocktail, followed by local music Galway Food Tour