

Major steps towards realising a bold vision for European Excellence in AI

The Confederation of Laboratories of Artificial Intelligence Research in Europe (CLAIRE), Europe's grassroots organisation of scientists and experts in Artificial Intelligence, announces the opening of administrative offices across Europe.

Last year Europe took major steps towards ensuring excellence in artificial intelligence (AI) on a global scale. Several European governments announced national AI strategies, 24 governments signed an agreement of increased investment and collaboration, and the European Commission launched a strategy aiming at reaching 20 billion Euros per year in investment on AI research and innovation.

In addition, Europe's AI experts have shown strong determination and collective leadership in establishing the Confederation of Laboratories of AI Research in Europe (CLAIRE). Only nine months after CLAIRE was launched as a grassroots initiative, it has become a large, pan-European organisation, comprising over 250 AI research groups and institutes that jointly represent over 7500 AI experts and support staff. CLAIRE pursues a bold and ambitious vision for European excellence in AI that calls for leveraging all areas of AI, mobilising the substantial talent pool across all of Europe, and focusing on AI technology that keeps the human in the centre. In this, CLAIRE's vision is fully aligned with the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission.

– Now, CLAIRE is taking another major step by opening administrative offices across Europe, to strengthen its organisation, to engage national governments, and to make sure the voices of Europe's AI experts get heard, says Holger Hoos of Leiden University, one of the three initiators of CLAIRE.

– With this move, CLAIRE is becoming a driving force in Europe's ambition to establish global leadership in human-centred AI, adds Morten Irgens, Vice-rector of Research at Oslo Metropolitan University.

The announcement of five offices, located in The Hague (the Netherlands), Oslo (Norway), Prague (Czech Republic), Rome (Italy) and Saarbrücken (Germany), was made at CLAIRE's second European AI strategy symposium, where 100 selected AI experts discussed the next steps to be taken towards realising a bold European vision on AI. Among the topics discussed at the event were concrete next steps to strengthen industry-university collaboration and criteria as well as a process for selecting the site for Europe's central AI

research and innovation hub. The symposium was held in Rome, with the support of the National Resource Council of Italy, the Italian AI Society and the European Space Agency.

– There is an urgent need for Europe's governments to form bold and effective long-term strategies around AI, while stepping up investment into education and basic research towards a strong impact of AI for European industry as well as societies, says Philipp Slusallek of the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence. The future of Europe is at stake.

Europe in the global competition

Europe is one of three contenders for global leadership in artificial intelligence. According to a recent study by Elsevier, Europe has an extraordinary pool of talent and institutes, fostering AI research in Europe and beyond; it is also home to the largest share of the top 100 AI research institutions worldwide, and the talent coming out of these centres has increasingly entrepreneurial ambitions.

However, the United States and China are investing enormously in research, innovation and development in Artificial Intelligence. In 2017, private investment alone was seven times higher in the U.S. than in Europe, according to the European Commission. China has launched an ambitious plan aimed at achieving dominance in all areas of AI within a few years.

This causes major concerns for Europe, as AI is not only expected to have large economic impact, but also to fundamentally change the way we live and work. Without swift and substantial support, Europe's research institutions, industries and talent pool will face increasing difficulty to compete globally. Currently, much of European AI talent ends up in industry and universities outside of Europe. Reasons for this disturbing trend include not only substantial differences in salaries, but also a dearth of ambitious and exciting AI projects, insufficient research infrastructure, bureaucratic overhead, and lack of critical mass. To stay relevant in the global competition for excellence and impact in AI, Europe urgently needs to change this.

CLAIRE

Launched in June 2018, CLAIRE's mission is to bring about this change, by mobilising the European AI community and its stakeholders, and by guiding European and national decision makers in their efforts and investments towards ensuring European excellence in human-centred AI. CLAIRE's vision is supported by over 2700 individual AI experts and stakeholders, as well as by a large number of Europe's leading organisations in AI research, including DFKI (Germany), the largest AI research institute in the world, as well as three of

Europe's largest research organizations with a major focus on AI; Fondazione Bruno Kessler (Italy), Inria (France) and TNO (Netherlands).

Already, CLAIRE has received official letters of support from several European governments; it is also supported by all internationally active national AI associations in Europe, the European AI Association (EurAI), and the world's premier organisation of AI researchers, the Association for Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI).

To realise its vision, CLAIRE has recently formed a pan-European network of more than 250 AI research groups and institutes with over 7500 employees.

– Artificial intelligence has the potential to change the world, more so than almost any other technology, says Mitja Luštrek, Chair of the Slovenian Artificial Intelligence Society. To realise this potential, we need better planning, organisation and funding. To do it in a way that benefits the humanity, a public initiative such as CLAIRE is our best bet.”