

EU AI Act vs ISO 42001.

One is enforceable EU law. One is a voluntary international standard. Here is what compliance and risk leaders need to know about both — and why confusing them creates real exposure.



EU AI Act

Regulation (EU) 2024/1689

THE LAW



ISO/IEC 42001

Published 2023

THE STANDARD

	EU AI ACT	ISO/IEC 42001
What it is	Enforceable EU law.	Voluntary international standard.
Who created it	The European Union; enforced by national competent authorities and the European AI Office.	ISO & IEC standards bodies; audited by accredited certification bodies.
Legal force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Binding across the EU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ None on its own
Who it applies to	Any organisation placing AI systems on the EU market — regardless of where they are headquartered.	Any organisation, anywhere, that chooses to implement an AI management system.
Mandatory?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes — if in scope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No — optional
Risk levels	Fixed tiers: prohibited, high-risk (Annex III), limited risk, minimal risk.	Organisation-defined risk criteria, set as part of the AI management system.
Bans any AI uses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes — Article 5 prohibited list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No outright bans
AI policy required?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes — required for providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes — required under Clause 5
— SHARED GROUND		

How you prove it

Conformity assessment plus technical documentation (Article 11, Annex IV) for high-risk systems; CE marking where applicable.

Accredited third-party certification audit against ISO/IEC 42001 requirements.

Getting it wrong

- Up to €35M or 7% of global turnover

No regulatory fine — but failed procurement reviews and lost enterprise deals.

Does one satisfy the other?

- ISO 42001 does not confer EU AI Act compliance
- EU AI Act compliance does not require ISO 42001

Status in 2026

In force. High-risk AI (Annex III) obligations apply from 2 August 2026. Prohibited AI rules applied from 2 February 2025.

Published 2023. Adoption growing — particularly in financial services and enterprise technology.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The EU AI Act is the law. ISO 42001 is the foundation you lay to prove you take it — and AI governance — seriously.

[See how SureCloud supports AI governance →](#)