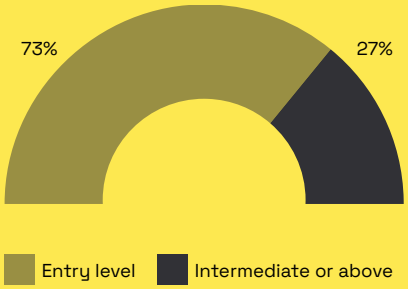
AI at Work

A Global Early-Career Perspective

2026

A survey of Generation alumni on how AI is showing up in their jobs

About three-quarters of respondents are entry-level



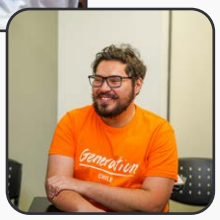




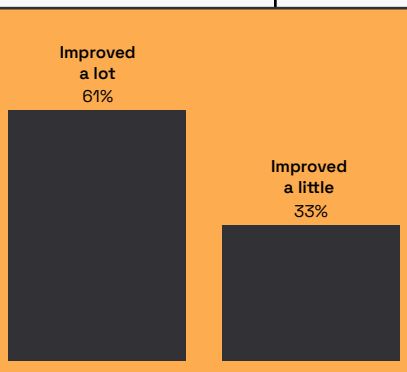








69% of employed Generation alumni are using AI in their jobs



Most alumni say AI has improved their ability to do their job

~14,000 alumni responses

Generation

salesforce

Executive summary

How is AI changing frontline work? How widespread is its adoption? What is the day-to-day impact on employees? While debate persists about whether AI may yet spark a long-term "jobs apocalypse," increasingly such practical questions have become top of mind.

In 2025, we sought initial answers by surveying Generation alumni who had graduated in the previous two years. This cast a spotlight on a huge population of early AI adopters too often missing from the conversation. Most AI research focuses narrowly on white-collar professionals in wealthy economies. But our Generation community offers something different: our alumni hail from 17 countries with very different income levels, and work in roles ranging from software engineering to customer service to skilled trades. They skew young (75% are under 30) and the vast majority (90%) enter our program unemployed. About a quarter hold a university degree; the rest have technical or vocational training, a high school education, or less.

This year we strove to deepen the value and statistical reliability of our insights by broadening our lens. We increased respondents from approximately 5,500 in 2025 to 14,000 in 2026 by including three different Generation populations: alumni in their first year out, alumni taking our AI upskilling courses, and alumni who are two to six years post program. Three-quarters of this population are in entry-level roles, with the remainder in more senior positions. We have weighted the data to reflect the relative share of graduates across country and sectors so results reflect a broad set of experiences across lower-middle, upper-middle, and high-income countries as well as both tech and non-tech sectors.

Despite these methodological differences, key themes persist in both perspectives. The rise and rise of AI remains not just a rich world workforce story. Our global alumni continue to embrace this new technology: 69% use it regularly at work (rising to 90% in tech roles) and most of those who do so are self-directed and self-taught – echoing what we saw in 2025. The vast majority say it makes their work more enjoyable and makes them more efficient. Levels of mistrust are low: just 3% of alumni not using AI say distrust is their main reason, down from 10% in our 2025 report.

Employers are also continuing to miss an opportunity to accelerate AI's impact by failing to integrate training or even provide tools in many cases. And much more work, we find, still needs to be done to identify value-creating business use cases.

One finding from this year's report was especially striking. Within each sector, women and men use AI at similar rates: 89% of women and 90% of men in tech, 48% and 45% in non-tech roles, and 14% and 8% in skilled trades.

The significance of two other insights is less definitive but no less interesting. First, while workers everywhere agree that AI has improved productivity, 94% of lower-middle-income alumni report that AI has also increased their job enjoyment, vs. 68% in high-income countries. Does this enthusiasm gap reflect the thrill of early access to an exciting new technology that may fade over time, big differences in national optimism levels, or something deeper?

> "
>
> **I believe AI is the future across all industries, and integrating it into our daily routines is crucial. By automating repetitive tasks, AI frees up time for employees to focus on more critical and strategic work.**
>
> **Pooja, Australia**

Second, we picked up an intriguing early signal about the link between early adoption and career progression. Among alumni two to five years post-graduation who use AI at work, 90% report productivity or efficiency growth. But just 47% said they had seen this lead to opportunities to engage in higher-value work, while 57% reported productivity gains without a corresponding shift toward higher-value work, or a decrease in their responsibility or decision-making. It may be that learning how to use AI is simply becoming career table stakes. What seems certain is that both employers and workers will need to think harder about the ways that AI adoption might reshape career paths and spur advancement.

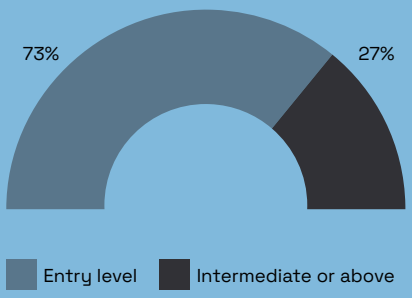
Future surveys, we hope, will keep improving our understanding of these dynamic shifts in the workplace landscape. For now, we are pleased to share our latest report detailing how many Generation alumni are using AI, how they're using it, and what difference it is making in how they do their jobs and how they feel about them.

Who we heard from

Respondents in this report constitute a uniquely global audience of largely entry-level workers from among Generation alumni. The data draws on three Generation survey instruments: post-program employment tracking (surveys of alumni in their first year out, 39% of responses), AI-upskilling program intake forms (surveys of alumni applying to our AI courses, 28%), and annual alumni surveys (surveys of alumni two to six years post-program, 32%), described in more detail in the Methodology. Approximately three-quarters of these workers are in entry-level roles, with the remainder in more senior positions **(Figure 1)**. They also skew young: 75% are under 30 (37% aged 18 to 24 and 38% aged 25 to 29) and 25% are 30 or older (12% aged 30 to 34 and 13% aged 35 and over).

Figure 1

About three-quarters of respondents are entry-level



Estimated from the share of responses from each survey instrument and the estimated share of entry-level employees within each.

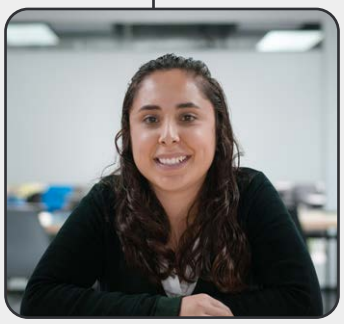


75%
of survey respondents are under 30



25%
of survey respondents are 30 or older



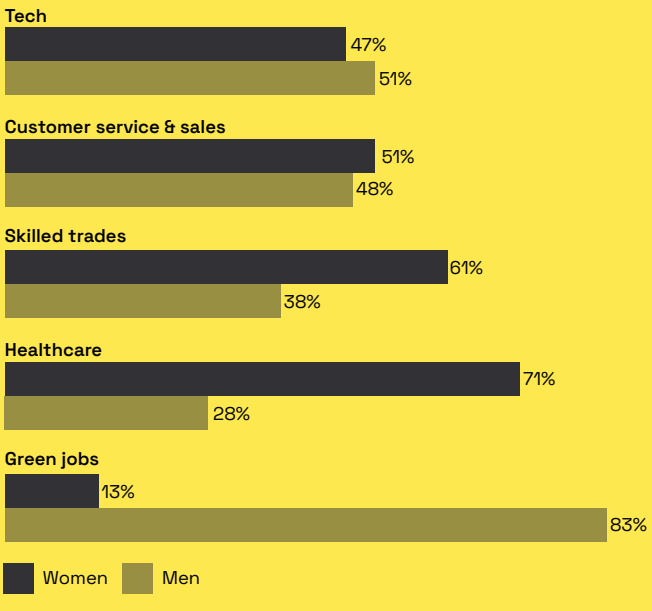


Respondents are evenly split by gender (49% men, 49% women, 2% prefer not to say or self-describe) and span four regions: South Asia & Africa (43%), the Americas (24%), Europe (22%), and Asia-Pacific (11%). By country income level, about 43% are in lower-middle-income countries, 37% in high-income countries, and 20% in upper-middle-income countries.[1] They work across five sectors: tech, customer service & sales, skilled trades, healthcare, and green jobs. The gender mix varies by sector: women are the majority in healthcare (71%) and skilled trades (61%), men are the large majority in green jobs (83%), and tech and customer service & sales are close to balanced **(Figure 2)**.

The raw survey data has a higher representation from tech sector graduates and from upper- and lower-middle-income countries relative to the true share in Generation's alumni. To ensure that the results are representative of all our graduates, the data has been weighted based on the relative share of graduates across countries and program sector (see **Methodology**).

Figure 2

The gender mix varies by sector



Women and men shown as a share of respondents in each sector; remaining shares prefer not to say or self-describe. Green jobs and healthcare are small groups.



[1] Country income level follows the **World Bank's income classification** for the 2025–26 fiscal year. Among our respondents: High income: Australia, Chile, France, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Upper-middle income: Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Thailand. Lower-middle income: Ghana, India, and Kenya.

What we heard: Five key insights

Adoption is strong, though most AI users remain self-directed and self-taught.

69% of employed Generation alumni are using AI at work, reaching 90% in tech, and 86% of AI users engage with it at least once a week. 63% use AI independently rather than because of an employer mandate, and ChatGPT remains the tool of choice by a wide margin.

AI is helping our alumni to work more efficiently, while enjoying it more.

94% say the technology has improved their ability to do their job; 80% say it has also increased their enjoyment of work. That welcome combination was particularly evident among workers in lower-middle-income countries.

Even so, productivity gains don't always translate into career advancement.

While 90% saw clear productivity growth from using AI, 57% report no corresponding shift toward higher-value work and in some cases even a decrease in responsibility. The disconnect between greater efficiency and upward career trajectory was especially pronounced outside tech.

Within each sector, usage splits evenly between men and women.

Adoption is much higher in tech (90%) than in other sectors, but within each sector women and men use AI at similar rates: 89% of women and 90% of men in tech, 48% and 45% in non-tech roles, and 14% and 8% in skilled trades.

Employers could be doing much more to accelerate AI adoption.

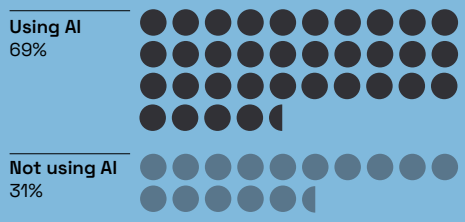
For workers not yet using AI, the barriers are practical. Only 3% name distrust of the technology as their main reason. The most common reasons are not seeing a benefit for their work (26%), not knowing how to apply AI to their job (18%), and no access to training (15%).

Adoption is strong, though most AI users remain self-directed and self-taught

The majority of surveyed Generation alumni are using AI at work: 69% across all sectors **(Figure 3)**. Adoption is highest in tech, where 90% of alumni use AI and use is close to universal, compared with 46% in customer service, green jobs, and healthcare, and 14% in skilled trades, where hands-on physical work has not been heavily disrupted by AI tools **(Figure 4)**. Among those workers who are using it, most are frequent users: 86% engage with it at least once a week, and 44% use it every day **(Figure 5)**.

Figure 3

The majority of alumni are using AI

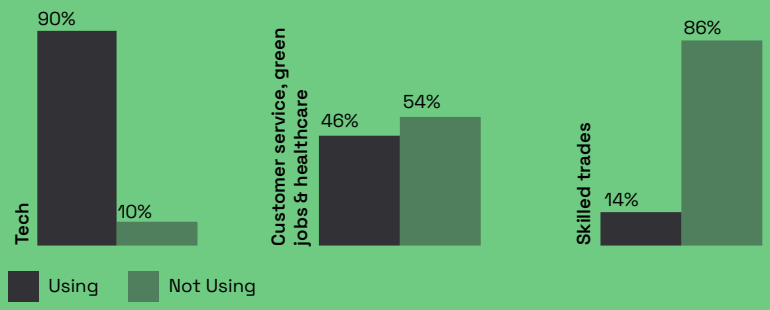


n = 13,956

> “We use AI daily and extensively. It’s become central to how our company operates — we’ve built internal systems for our company entirely with AI assistance.
>
> Jason, Hong Kong

Figure 4

AI use is near-universal in tech and lowest in skilled trades



Tech n = 10,384
Customer service, green jobs & healthcare n=2,549 | Skilled trades n=1,023

Figure 5

Among AI users, nearly half use it every day, and most use it at least once a week



n = 11,549. 86% engage at least once a week.

Rather than waiting for direction from employers, a clear majority of alumni are self-directed: 63% use AI independently to support their work, rising to 73% in non-tech sectors **(Figure 6)**.

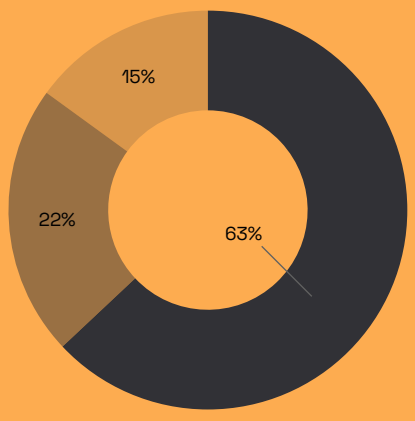
ChatGPT is the most used tool (66%), followed by Gemini (34%) and Microsoft Copilot (28%) **(Figure 7)**. GitHub Copilot and Claude are each used by 10% of alumni, and we see an increase in mentions of these two tools compared to our 2025 survey, likely owing to increasing enterprise AI adoption.

Employer mandates appear to be the main route by which these enterprise-oriented tools reach alumni: usage of Microsoft Copilot, GitHub Copilot, and Claude jumps from 46% among alumni using AI independently to 64% among those whose employers require specific tools.

> “I integrate several AI tools, including ChatGPT, NotebookLM, and Gemini, into my daily activities. ChatGPT acts as my personal assistant, guiding me through brainstorming and handling repetitive tasks.
>
> **Faisa, UK**

Figure 6

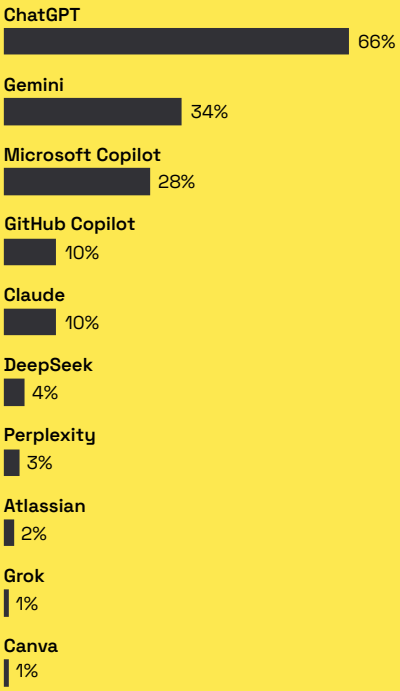
Most alumni are self-taught, using AI on their own



n = 7,329. In non-tech sectors, independent use rises to 73%.

Figure 7

ChatGPT is the tool of choice



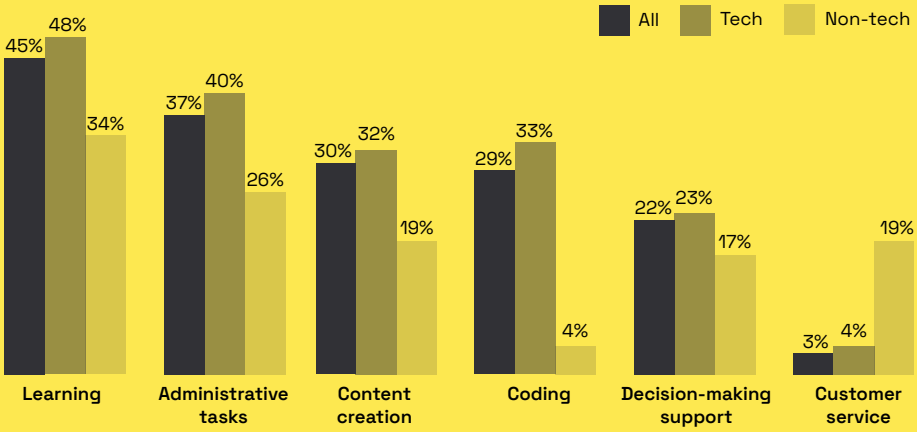
n = 8,276. Respondents could select more than one tool.

Learning and administrative work top the list of use cases

Our alumni are putting AI to work in varied ways, and 51% use it for more than one purpose **(Figure 8)**. Learning (researching topics or upskilling) is the single most common use case, followed by administrative tasks and content creation. Coding is a major use case in tech but understandably rare outside it, while customer service tasks are a far more common use for those in non-tech roles.

Figure 8

Learning and administrative work top the list of use cases



n = 7,329. Respondents could select more than one use.





> “Data and AI is quite literally paying my bills. I use generative AI tools daily, either to help streamline communications, create content, or as a coding buddy.
>
> Jonathan, Singapore

Within each sector, usage splits evenly between men and women

Large aggregate gender gaps in AI use are largely a function of workforce composition. Women are more highly represented in skilled trades, making up 61% of respondents in that sector compared with 49% of respondents overall **(Figure 2)**, driven in part by programs like our sewing machine operator training. Skilled trades is also the sector where overall AI adoption is the lowest **(Figure 4)**. Looking sector by sector tells a more accurate story **(Figure 9)**. In tech, 89% of women and 90% of men report using AI. The gap is similarly narrow in non-tech roles (48% women vs. 45% men) and skilled trades (14% women vs. 8% men), with women in skilled trades slightly more likely than men to have adopted AI.

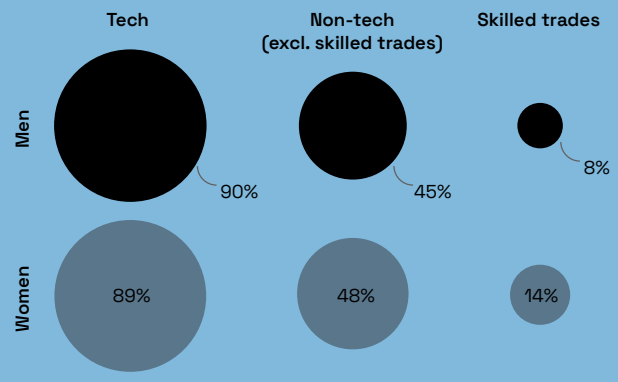
Technology's uptake of AI is truly global

A different cut of the same tech-sector alumni shown in **Figure 9**, this time split by country income level rather than by gender, shows that usage within the tech sector is strong and fairly consistent across geographies **(Figure 10)**.



Figure 9

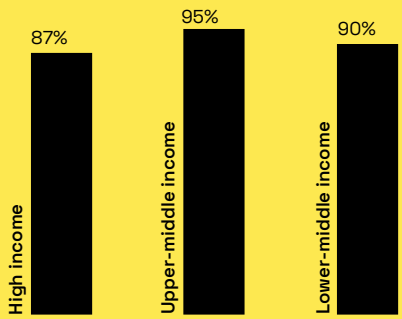
Within each sector, usage splits evenly between men and women



n = 13,648. Men = 6,847 | Women = 6,801

Figure 10

Tech-sector usage is strong across country income levels



AI is helping our alumni to work more efficiently, while enjoying it more

Feedback on AI's impact is overwhelmingly positive. 94% of AI users say it has improved their ability to do their job, including 61% who say it has improved "a lot" **(Figure 11)**. Perhaps less expected: 80% also say AI has increased how much they enjoy their job, with 47% reporting a significant increase **(Figure 12)**.

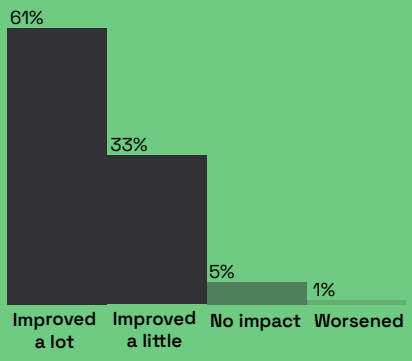
This overall positive impact on job performance and enjoyment holds consistently across sectors and genders.



> "AI has made a big difference in both time and confidence — I'm less worried about going down the wrong path.
>
> **Ekaterina, US**

Figure 11

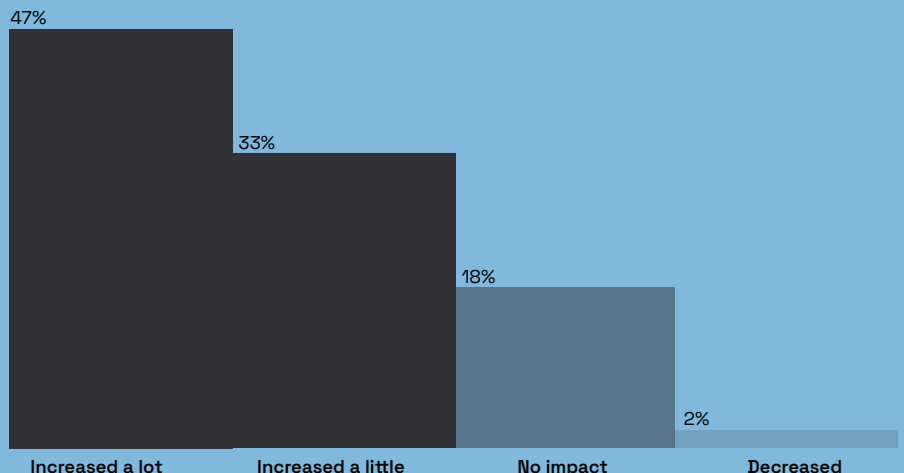
Most alumni say AI has improved their ability to do their job



n = 7,053

Figure 12

AI has increased enjoyment of work



n = 7,012

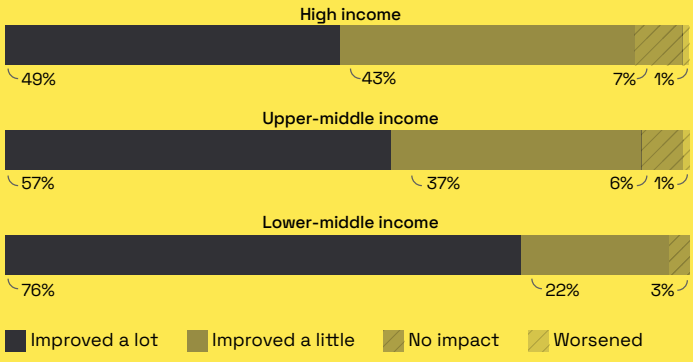
Positive sentiment is strongest in lower- and upper-middle-income countries

Alumni living in all country income groups broadly agree that AI has improved their ability to do their job **(Figure 13)**: combining "a lot" and "a little," 92% of alumni living in high-income countries say so, compared with 97% in lower-middle-income countries. The more meaningful gap is in job enjoyment **(Figure 14)**: alumni in lower-middle-income countries report far more positive sentiment overall (94% saying AI increased their enjoyment, vs. 68% in high-income countries), where "no impact" is about five times as common among alumni in high-income countries (29% vs. 6%).



Figure 13

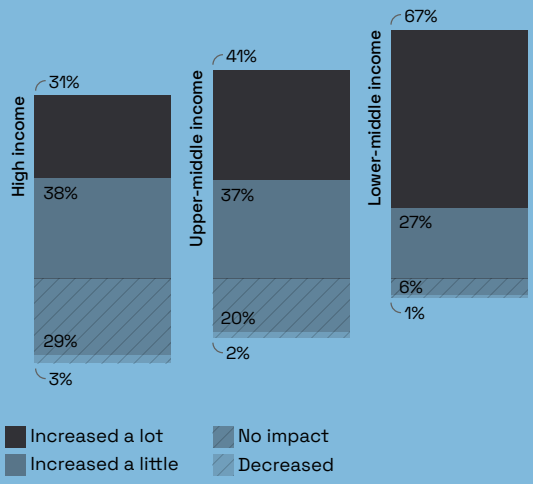
Alumni living in all country income groups say AI has improved their ability to do their job



Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 14

Alumni in lower-middle-income countries report the biggest boost in job enjoyment



Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

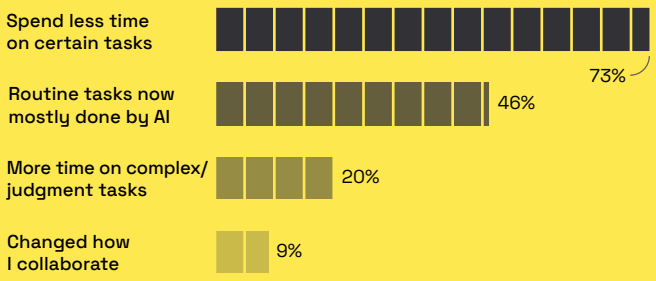
Even so, productivity gains don't always translate into career advancement

Among alumni two to five years post-graduation who use AI at work, 90%[2] report productivity growth or automation of tasks **(Figure 15)**. But the picture is more mixed when it comes to career progression: 47% report a shift to higher-value work **(Figure 16)**, while 57%[3] report either productivity gains without a corresponding shift toward higher-value work, or a decrease in their responsibility or decision-making.

This pattern is most common outside tech: 68% of non-tech alumni (excluding skilled trades) report productivity gains without a shift toward higher-value work, or decreased responsibility, compared with 46% in tech. It is also more pronounced for women in non-tech roles, where 73% report this pattern versus 66% of men, a gap that disappears within tech.

Figure 15

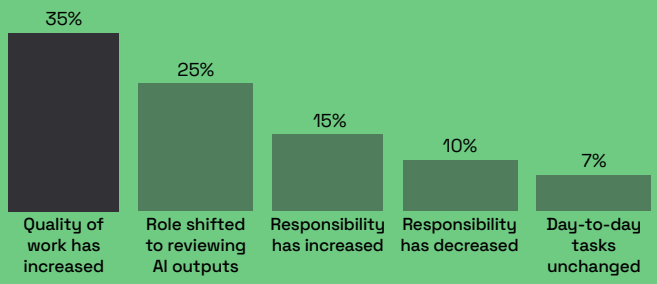
Most alumni report productivity growth or automation of tasks using AI



n = 2,413. Respondents could select more than one option.

Figure 16

Few alumni report more responsibility, though more report higher quality of work



n = 2,413. Respondents could select more than one option.

[2] 90% reflects the share who reported at least one of the two outcomes in **Figure 15**: spending less time on certain tasks, or having routine tasks automated by AI. The two aren't mutually exclusive, so the total is lower than simply adding 73% + 46%.

[3] 57% combines two groups: respondents who selected at least one productivity option **(Figure 15)** but none of the higher-value options, and respondents who selected decreased responsibility **(Figure 16)**. The higher-value options are more time on complex, judgment-based, or interpersonal tasks **(Figure 15)**, higher quality of work, reviewing and improving AI outputs, and increased responsibility **(Figure 16)**. The 47% is the share who selected at least one of those four.

Employers could be doing much more to accelerate AI adoption

For workers not yet using AI, the barriers are practical, not a matter of trust. About three in ten alumni (31%) are not yet using AI at work. Distrust is rare: only 3% give it as their main reason. Instead, the most common main reasons point to unclear relevance and limited know-how **(Figure 17)**: not seeing a clear benefit for their own work (26%), not knowing how to apply AI to their job (18%), and not having access to training (15%). Together, not knowing how to apply AI, lacking access to training, and lacking time account for 40% of main reasons.

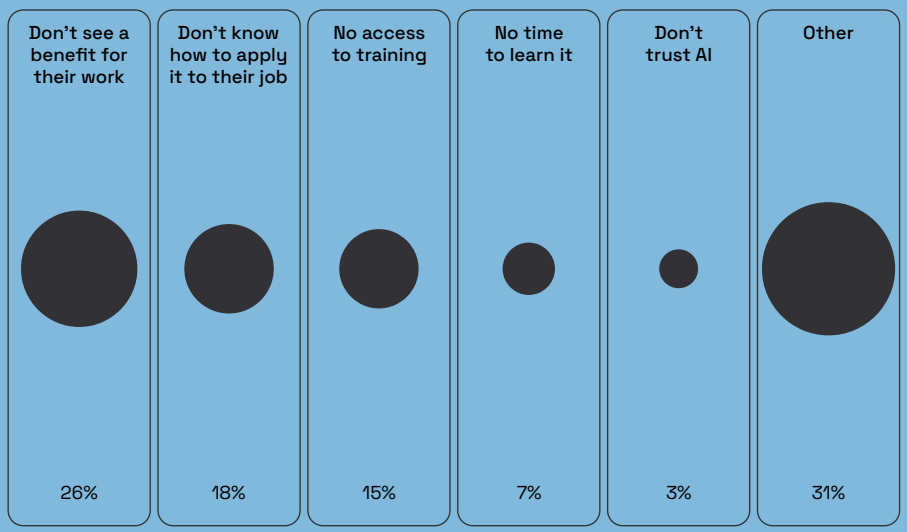
Taken together, these answers point to a clear opportunity for employers and workforce programs: workers aren't resistant to AI, they simply need clearer onboarding and concrete use cases for their specific role.

> “
>
> It has allowed me to complete repetitive tasks faster and to create things more efficiently, as it provides a starting point that sparks inspiration. Using AI enables me to explore more complex topics more quickly.
>
> **Jeisson, Australia**



Figure 17

Those who aren't using AI face practical barriers



n = 2,401. Respondents were asked for their main reason for not using AI.

Generation's AI upskilling

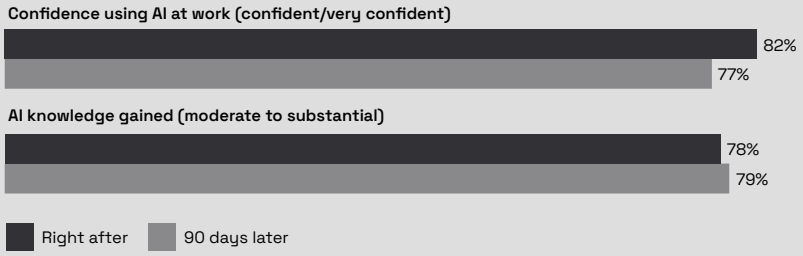
Structured training closes the gap

Generation now offers alumni free, online AI upskilling courses. In 2026 alone, more than 6,000 alumni so far have enrolled in profession-specific or generalist AI courses. We asked alumni to respond to a survey immediately after finishing their course, and then sent an additional follow-up survey about 90 days after completing training.

Confidence dips slightly with time and distance, a common pattern after skills training, as initial enthusiasm settles once alumni apply the skill in the messier conditions of real work, though 77% still report feeling confident or very confident 90 days out **(Figure A)**. Knowledge gained holds essentially steady. Productivity was asked differently at each point, so the two results are reported separately.[4] Right after training, 83% of respondents expected it to make them quite a bit or a great deal more productive. Ninety days later, 93% of alumni who are employed and using AI at work said AI had improved their ability to do their job, including 67% who said it had improved it a lot.

Figure A

Confidence and knowledge remain high 90 days after AI upskilling



Figures compare two surveys taken at different points in time. Respondents could not be reliably matched across them, so these are not tracked, individual-level before-and-after changes. Both surveys include respondents who are not yet employed. Knowledge figures rounded to the nearest whole point differ by under one point precisely (effectively flat).
Sample sizes: Confidence: n=322 (right after), n=250 (90 days) | Knowledge: n=320 (right after), n=250 (90 days).

[4] End of training: "To what degree do you think that participating in this training will make you more productive in your current or future job role?" (six-point scale from "Not at all" to "A great deal"; 83% chose "Quite a bit" or "A great deal"; n=316, all respondents). 90 days: "Overall, how do you think AI has impacted your ability to do your job?" (six-point scale from "Worsened it a lot" to "Improved it a lot", plus "I don't know"; 93% chose "Improved it a little" or "Improved it a lot"; n=141, alumni who are employed and using AI at work).

Methodology

How this survey was conducted

We collected data on AI usage from employed Generation alumni who graduated within the past five years, drawing on three survey instruments fielded from Q2 2025 through Q2 2026.

Post-program employment tracking surveys capture alumni employment status in their first year after graduation. Intake surveys reach alumni applying to Generation's AI upskilling programs. Annual alumni surveys reach alumni between two and six years out from graduation.

All data collection was quantitative and survey-based, with no qualitative component. In total, we collected approximately 14,000 unique responses (see **Figures 18 and 19** for the gender and regional breakdown). The survey data has been weighted based on the share of graduates across 17 countries and in the tech and non-tech sectors (customer service, skilled trades, green jobs, and healthcare) to ensure that results are representative. A weight factor of (share of population/share of responses) is applied to each individual survey response to ensure that it is weighted up or down based on its representation in the response data. For example, responses from the tech sector are weighted down since their share in the overall population is lower than their share in the responses, whereas responses from lower-middle-income countries are weighted up because of their higher share in the population.

Figure 18

Respondents by gender

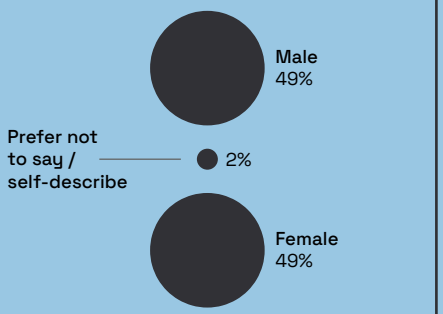
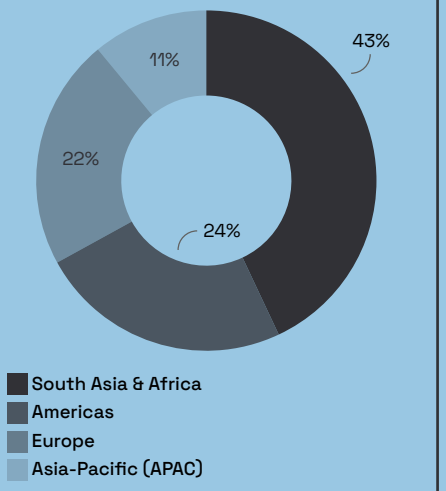


Figure 19

Respondents by region



Acknowledgements

This report was funded by Salesforce. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Generation to advance its mission.

About Generation

Generation is a global nonprofit that believes in the power of employment to change lives. We train and place adults into careers that would otherwise be inaccessible, and we advocate to improve the workforce system for everyone. Generation consists of a global hub and a network of in-country affiliates that spans 17 countries. More than 165,000 graduates have earned more than $2.7 billion in life-changing wages, and we have worked with more than 27,000 employers, implementation partners, and funders. Together, we are committed to creating change that lasts. For more, visit generation.org.

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