

# understanding talent scarcity: AI & equity.



  
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partner for talent.

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# executive summary.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) brings the promise of greater productivity and efficiency — but only if its benefits are distributed equitably. While demand for AI skills is skyrocketing, an AI skills gap is also taking hold, with a stark divide in access to AI training and opportunities emerging. This report explores the equity gap across gender, generations and persons with disabilities. Closing this gap, by providing equitable AI access and skilling, can ultimately help to address the issue of talent scarcity.

Talent scarcity is a defining challenge of our age, impacting global labor markets profoundly.

Since peaking in 2008, the percentage of working-age people (15 to 64) in OECD countries has been in a steady decline.

In our first [understanding talent scarcity](#) report, published in 2023, we explored how this trend, combined with falling fertility rates and low unemployment rates are creating significant talent shortages around the world.

In parallel to this, we are witnessing one of the most profound transformations to the way we work. AI is developing at unprecedented speed and has the potential to broaden labor markets and boost both efficiency and productivity.

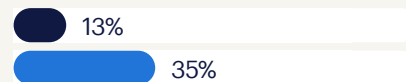
It also provides an opportunity to alleviate the challenges caused by talent scarcity. However, if organizations fail to provide equitable access and skilling opportunities for talent across all demographics, it could hinder progress instead.

To understand AI's impact so far, we surveyed 12,000 talent around the world and analyzed data from over three million job profiles.

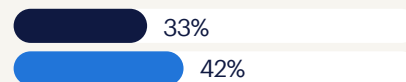
Through this data, we have explored the impact of AI on the equity gap across gender, generations and persons with disabilities. The findings reveal how investments and access to AI can address talent scarcity by including talent who are currently being left behind.

## the growing impact of AI

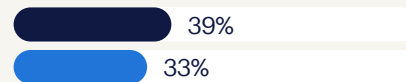
percentage of talent that have been offered training on AI



percentage of talent currently using AI in their work



percentage of talent expressing concern around AI



● 2023

● 2024

## AI changes the world of work

In January 2024, the IMF found almost [40% of global employment is now exposed to AI](#), with some jobs being replaced and others augmented.

AI is also creating entirely new jobs and boosting demand for AI skills.

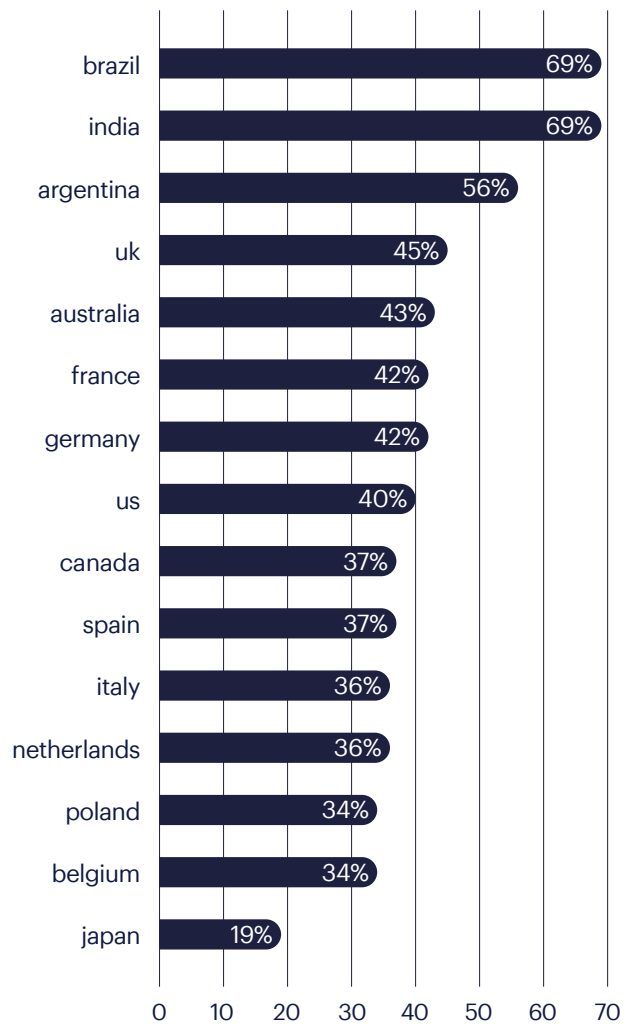
Our research shows that job listings looking for talent with AI skills have skyrocketed, growing over fivefold between 2023 and 2024, indicating a rapid expansion in demand.

Almost 75% of companies surveyed by the [World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2023](#) are expected to adopt the technology, projecting that specialist AI and Machine Learning roles will top the list of fast-growing jobs up to 2027.

Reflecting this, the number of talent listing AI in their skill sets has grown hugely. Young talent starting out in their careers in particular are driving AI skills acquisition at unprecedented rates, with growth figures of over 292% year-on-year.

However, AI skills do not seem to be distributed equally around the world yet, as our research shows a wide disparity in AI uptake across different markets.

## percentage of talent currently using AI in their role across different markets



year-on-year growth in talent with less than 1 year of work experience listing AI skills on their profile.

## AI as a solution

In the face of labor market challenges, improving skilling opportunities for all could be a real lifeline for organizations globally. Providing fair and equitable access to training and development for all workers can allow businesses to fill skill gaps.

AI can play a huge part in this. As well as offering productivity gains, it has the power to be a great leveler. It is already being used to build other new technologies that improve access to work for marginalized groups, such as voice command applications that help users with mobility issues type and navigate websites without a keyboard or mouse.

Innovations such as these may already be having an impact, as persons with disabilities, for example, are more optimistic about AI and its potential to improve equity.

However, the technology could widen other divides. Employers need to do much more to improve AI access and skilling opportunities for women and older demographics.

Throughout this report, we have explored the differing experiences of talent across gender, generations and disabilities, as well as the broader risks and opportunities AI can bring when it comes to equity. Our analysis has allowed us to identify steps organizations can take to ensure it has a positive impact, reducing talent scarcity in the future.

“Talent scarcity is a significant global challenge, and so equitable access to skilling, resources and opportunities needs to be a fundamental part of addressing this. However, when it comes to AI, demand continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, and so does the AI equity gap it is creating. Unless we recognize and take active steps to address this, the pool of workers who are prepared for the future of work will be too small — creating even more shortages across industries.”

Sander van 't Noordende,  
CEO, Randstad





# AI and gender equity.



# AI and gender equity.

There are clear shortcomings when it comes to gender equity and AI opportunities at work. Our research finds that while 71% of men say they have AI skills, only 29% of women report having the same abilities — indicating a 42 percentage point gender gap.

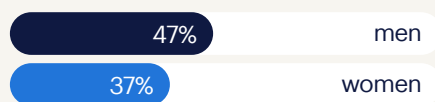
The global data suggests employers need to do much more to bridge this gap. Women are less likely to have been offered opportunities to upskill on AI, and are also less confident the training they've received has readied them to use the technology in their careers.

## men dominate AI usage in the workplace

percentage of men and women reporting having AI skills



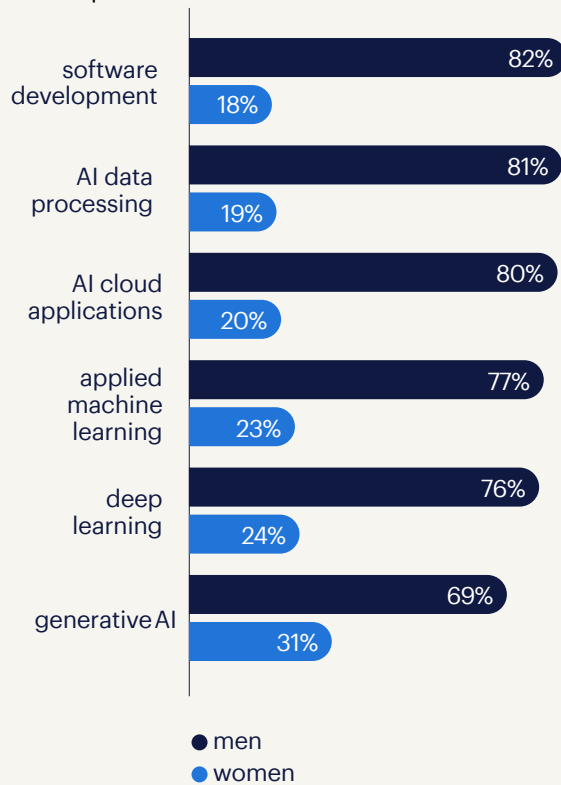
percentage of men and women that have used AI to problem-solve at work



percentage of men and women provided with AI access by their employer



women are severely underrepresented in specialist AI skills



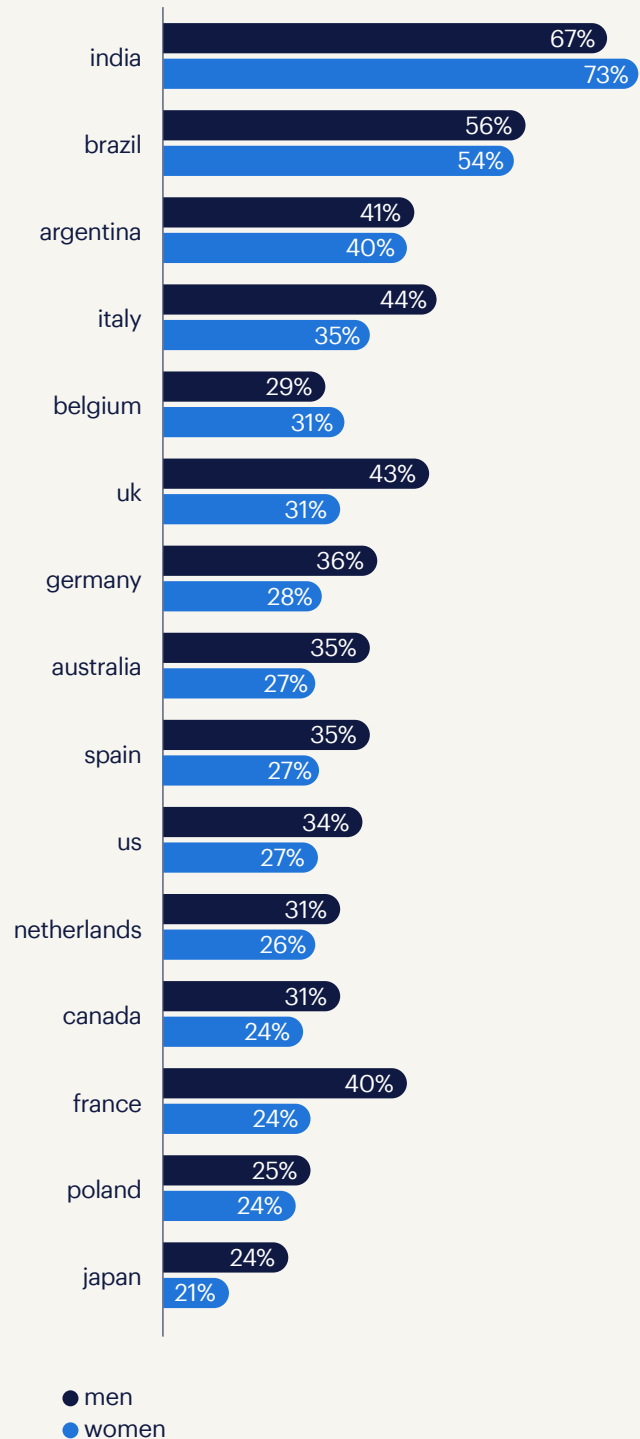
This trend continues when looking at actually using AI at work. Just over a third of women say they have been provided with AI access by their employer (35%) compared with two-fifths of men (41%).

Individually, though, some markets are deviating from this trajectory. In India, for example, women are more likely to have been offered more opportunities to upskill on and use AI than men.

While this market is one of many facing a decline in the working-age population, stagnation is far less severe than in many mature markets. When coupled with the joint highest uptake of using AI at work overall, could this put India on a path to combat talent scarcity more effectively than other markets?

### global perspective

percentage of talent offered opportunities by employers to upskill in AI







## access to AI could open up new talent pools

With our findings showing significant gender disparity in AI access and skilling, it's perhaps unsurprising that women are also slightly less optimistic that AI will make their jobs easier.

Overall, the data tells us significant effort is needed to reduce the AI opportunity gap and improve optimism and confidence among women. Doing so could help to address talent scarcity and boost global growth.

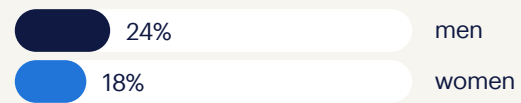
There's still a way to go to close the workforce participation gender gap. The World Economic Forum's [Global Gender Gap Report 2024](#) found the Economic Participation and Opportunity gap has only closed by 60.5%.

But closing economic gender gaps could unlock a ["gender dividend" of \\$172 trillion for the global economy](#), the World Bank found in 2020.

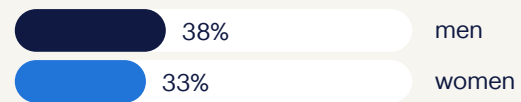
Ensuring women are empowered to use AI effectively will be vital in the face of talent scarcity.

## women report less access and opportunities for AI skilling at work

percentage of men and women that would leave a role if not provided with AI skilling opportunities



percentage of men and women offered AI skilling opportunities by their employer



percentage of men and women that believe the training received has adequately prepared them to utilize AI at



- men
- women

## the gender gap is narrowing for younger generations

While it is clear more needs to be done to provide all women with better AI skilling and access to opportunities, there is positive news.

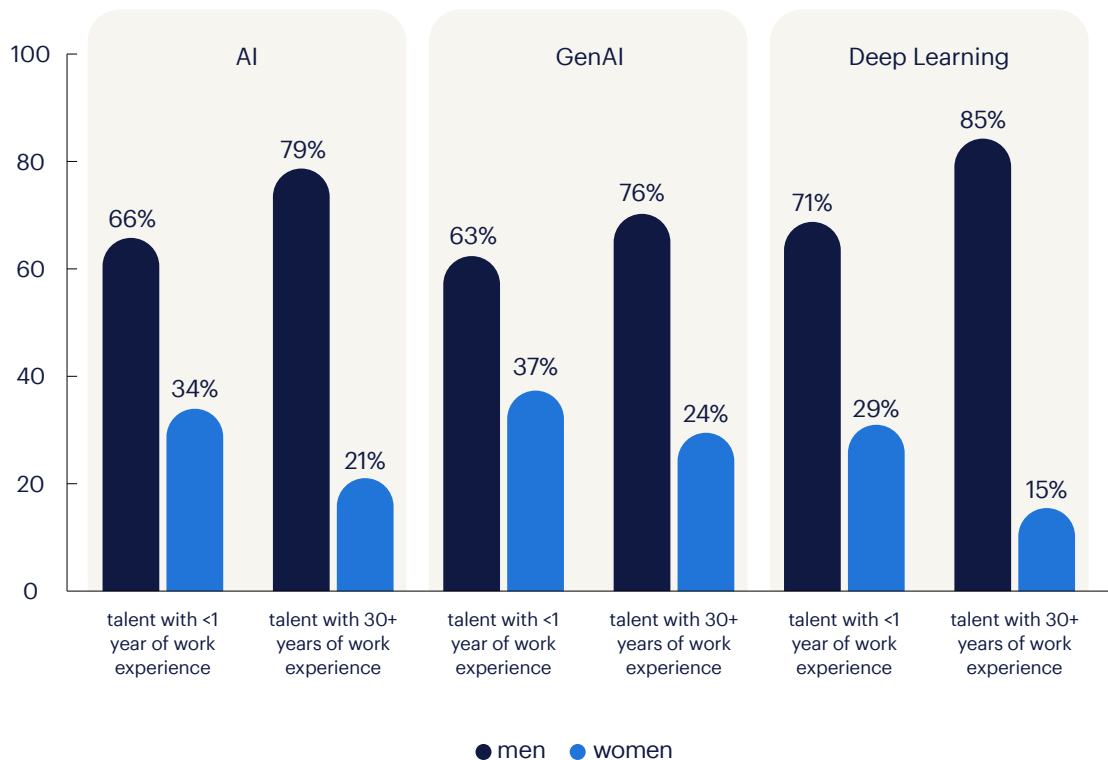
The gender gap appears to be closing, with the number of women with AI skills improving among younger workers. Women who have been working for around 30 years account for only 21% of talent with AI skills. However, when looking at those with less than a year of work experience, this rises to 34%.

When looking at other skills, younger women are also better represented. Generative AI (GenAI) is a more diverse space, especially among new entrants. Women make up 37% of talent with less than a year of work experience who list GenAI skills on their profile.

Similarly, when looking at talent who list Deep Learning skills, women with less than a year of experience are almost twice as represented than women in later stages of their careers. They take up a 29% share of profiles, compared with 15% of women with around 30 years of experience.

In a world where demand for many specialized skills is growing, this closing gender gap could be of great importance in the face of talent scarcity. In order to prevent this gap widening again in future, organizations must ensure that women starting their careers are given ongoing access to technology and receive training as they progress.

## AI skills by gender breakdown across experience levels





# AI and generational equity.

# AI and generational equity.

When looking at generational demographics, the picture becomes more nuanced. More experienced talent are not receiving the same AI opportunities as their younger colleagues. However, they are also less concerned about its impact.

Older workers are also less optimistic about the benefits of AI in the workplace. This perhaps stems from perceptions of whether or not the technology can make work easier, with 63% of Gen Z believing this is the case compared with 34% of Baby Boomers.

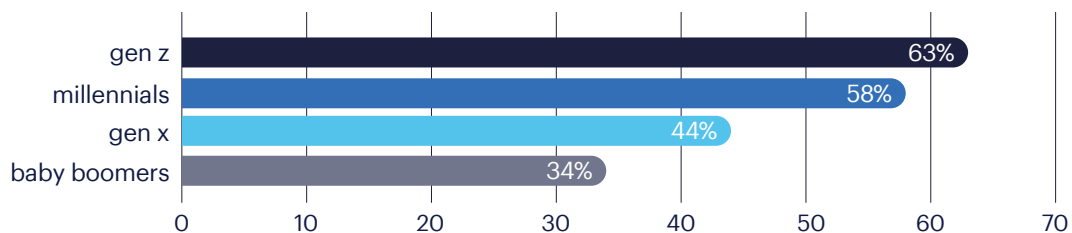
But could this be down to exposure? Less than a quarter (23%) of Baby Boomers have been

offered the chance to use AI at work, compared with 31% of Gen X, 45% of Millennials, and 47% of Gen Z. Similarly, only 22% of Baby Boomers have been offered training, compared with 45% of Gen Z.

Job mobility is also higher among younger workers with AI skills, as those with 1-5 years of work experience had a 33% job change rate last year, indicating a high demand and faster movement in the job market. This indicates younger talent are not only adopting AI at a higher rate but also benefiting from a more dynamic job market, further exacerbating the gap with their older colleagues.

## job mobility is higher among younger workers

percentage of different generations believing AI will make their job easier.



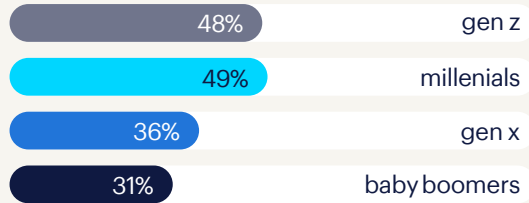
percentage of talent with AI skills moving jobs across different years of work experience.



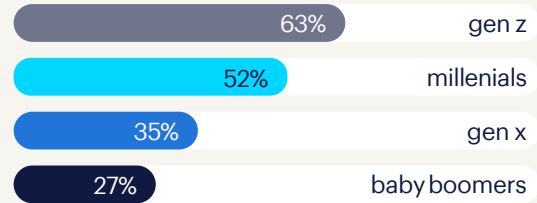
For the purposes of this report, the generations cover these age ranges: Gen Z (born 1997-2012), Millennials (1981-1996), Gen X (1965-1980) and Baby Boomers (1946-1964)



### percentage of different generations using AI



### percentage of different generations seeking AI learning opportunities outside the workplace



Baby Boomers are also less worried about the impact of AI on their jobs: 26% said they had concerns compared with 29% of Gen X, 36% of Millennials and 40% of Gen Z. While this may be explained by the fact they are closer to the end of their careers, finding ways to bridge these gaps with older talent will be particularly important in markets facing the challenge of an aging workforce.

Organizations operating in markets with higher percentages of aging talent may need to rely on older colleagues working longer in order to overcome scarcity.

Taking steps to encourage AI skilling among this generation could help them to keep their skills relevant.

### navigating divided opinions on AI

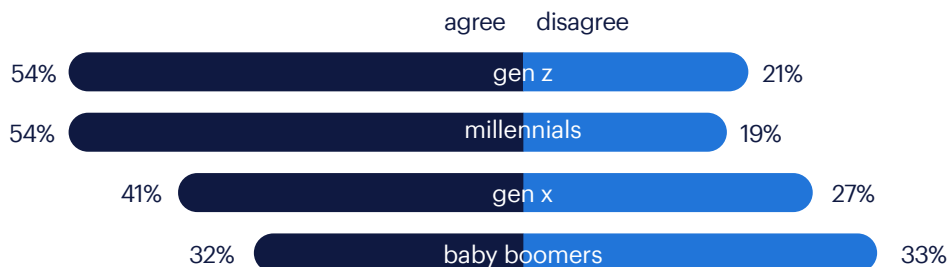
There are significant differences in opinion around whether employers are taking full advantage of the technology.

When asked if they believe their employer could use AI more in their workplace, Baby Boomers in particular are divided in their opinion. However, even among younger generations — where over half of Gen Z and Millennials feel the technology should be used more — around a fifth disagreed.

For employers, these findings underline the importance of understanding how talent are experiencing AI on an individual basis.

### younger talent see more opportunities for AI usage in the workplace

I believe my employer could use AI more in my workplace.

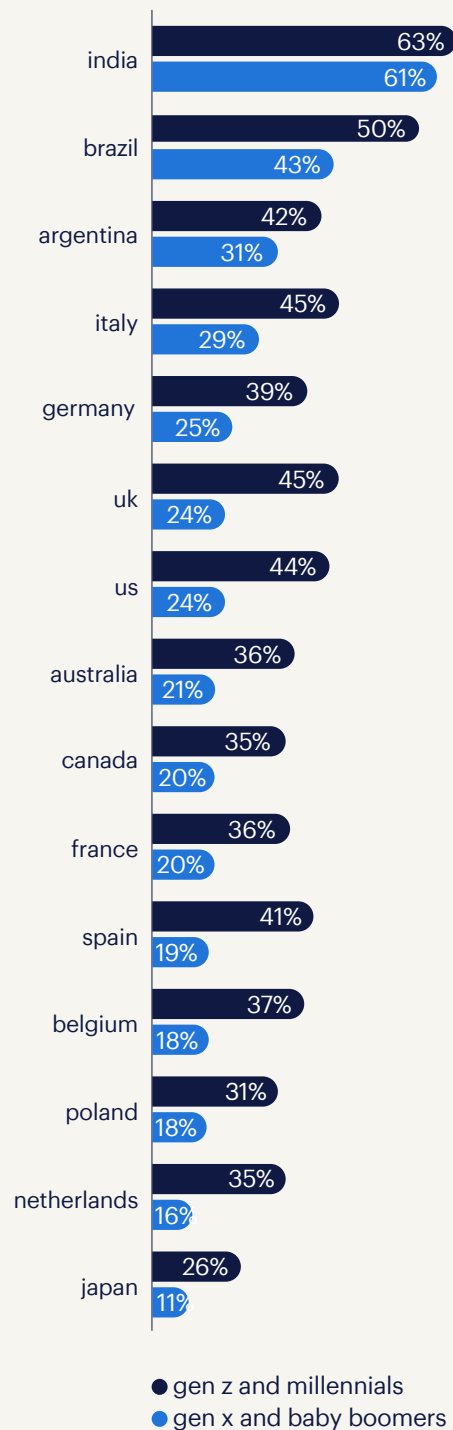


## global perspective

Globally, Baby Boomers and Gen X talent are less confident in their AI skills than Gen Z and Millennials. However, there are narrower gaps between older and younger workers in some markets.

When asked if the training provided by their employer had equipped them with all the necessary skills to effectively utilize AI in the workplace, Gen X and Baby Boomer talent in India, Brazil and Argentina were more confident than their peers around the world — and closer to their Gen Z and Millennial colleagues.

## percentage of talent who believe their employer has provided them with the necessary skills to use AI at work





# AI and disability equity.

# AI and disability equity.

While it's clear some demographics have yet to experience AI as positively as others at work, talent with disabilities appear to have some real success stories.

Across the board, persons with disabilities are slightly more optimistic about the technology, though they are also more likely to call for their employers to offer more when it comes to training and implementation.

Reflecting global averages, men with disabilities are slightly more optimistic than women, but some markets are deviating from this global trend. In Brazil, for example, women with disabilities are far more optimistic that the technology can help them in their role than men.

Globally, around two-fifths of talent with disabilities (41%) have used the technology to communicate with a colleague who does not speak their language, significantly more than a third of talent without disabilities who have done so. They are also marginally more

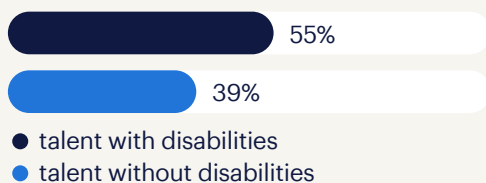
optimistic about its capability to improve the workplace, such as its potential to reduce bias in recruitment and provide personalized learning and development programmes (48% vs. 46%).

This trend continues elsewhere. Talent with disabilities appear to be strong adopters of the technology. More than half have used it to problem-solve at work — significantly more than colleagues without disabilities.

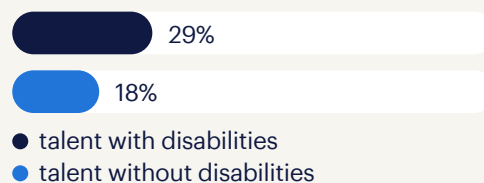
However, employers that do not offer enough skilling opportunities for talent with disabilities face the possibility of an exodus. Almost a third say they would leave their job if their employer failed to provide AI skilling opportunities compared with around a fifth of talent without disabilities.

With strong adoption of the technology among talent with disabilities comes a real risk that organizations could lose some of their most advanced users of AI. Providing ongoing development opportunities will be an important factor in retention strategies.

## talent with disabilities use AI more to problem solve at work



## talent with disabilities more likely to leave their jobs if not offered AI skilling





## younger talent with disabilities don't believe their employer is doing enough

Despite some encouraging stories within the data, there are concerning generational disparities in the skilling opportunities offered to talent with disabilities.

Gen Z and Millennial respondents in this group were much more likely than Baby Boomers to report that colleagues without a disability have greater access to AI skilling.

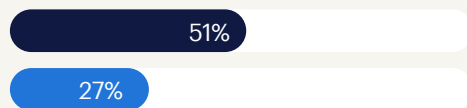
This may be due to higher awareness of the technology's capability among these respondents, but organizations will need to take steps to address this disparity.

When looking at their experience of work more holistically, there are more findings that should raise alarm bells for employers.

Only around a third of Gen Z talent (36%) feel their employer has made reasonable adjustments to accommodate their disability in the workplace compared with 45% of Millennials, 47% of Gen X and 44% of Baby Boomers.

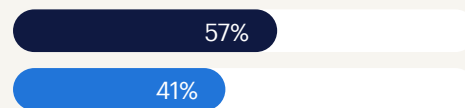
Similarly, more than half of Gen Z and Millennials want greater accessibility support at work, compared with 48% of Gen X and 34% of Baby Boomers.

### talent with disabilities more likely to use AI to write a job application



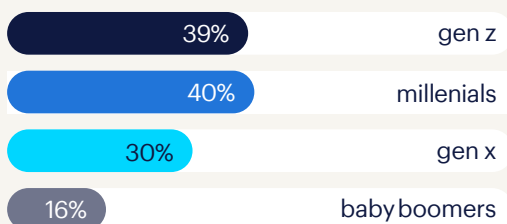
- talent with disabilities
- talent without disabilities

### talent with disabilities more likely to seek AI learning opportunities outside the workplace

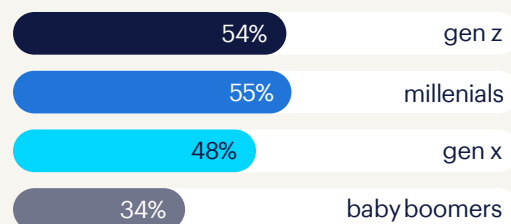


- talent with disabilities
- talent without disabilities

### younger talent with disabilities perceive greater barriers to AI skilling access compared to older peers



### younger talent with disabilities request greater accessibility support

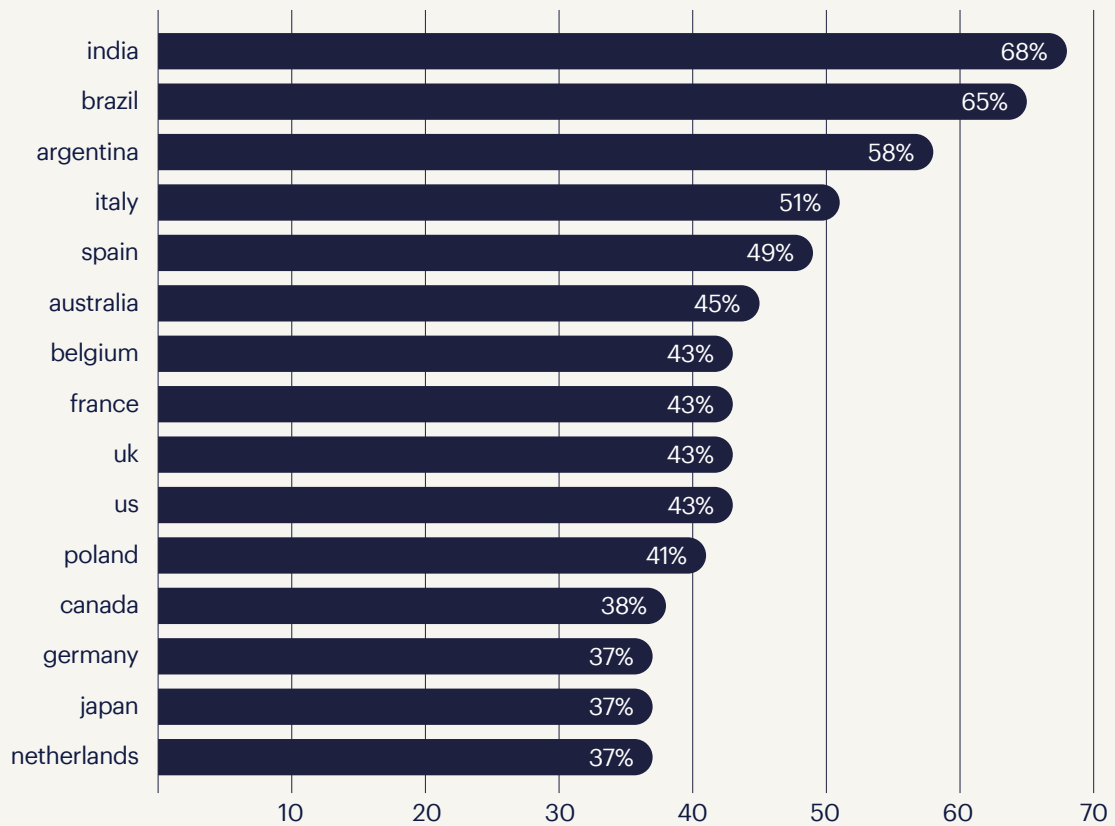




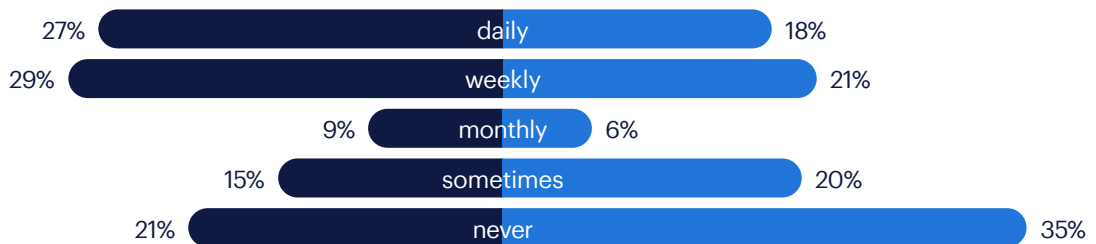
## global perspective

When asked if the adoption of AI and other technologies had improved accessibility in their role, talent with disabilities in India and Brazil are the most likely to have seen things change for the better.

### talent with disabilities across markets who believe AI and other technologies have improved workplace accessibility



### talent with disabilities use AI significantly more at work



- talent with disabilities
- talent without disabilities



# conclusion and recommendations.

# addressing inequities and talent scarcity through AI.

While AI technology is proving capable of bridging gaps for some demographics, such as persons with disabilities, clearly it is not yet being leveraged equitably, with a lack of access negatively affecting women and older demographics.

The findings paint a nuanced picture that will require careful investigation from organizations as they look to provide an equitable experience of AI technology in the workplace.

Taking a personalized approach to understanding how AI has impacted them will allow businesses to address shortcomings and offer training and access to those missing out.

While failure to address shortcomings could see gaps widen and talent scarcity exacerbated, AI has the potential to serve as a powerful tool to address scarcity by simultaneously driving productivity, boosting efficiency and bridging equity gaps.

The question organizations and governments need to address is: how can we ensure the benefits of AI extend to all demographic groups?

We've engaged with experts across Randstad, including AI specialists and peers from the demographics covered in this report, to provide actionable steps employers can take to ensure AI is an advantage, not a barrier, in the fight for equity.

# 4 ways to drive equity in AI adoption.

# 1.

## rethink skilling

AI technology is moving fast, so traditional approaches to learning and development may not keep pace. Organizations must remember that the technology can seem intimidating to people, so it's crucial to provide rapid skilling opportunities. Recognizing, embracing and supporting change will help talent stay ahead of new developments. Showcasing role models or influencers within the organization who represent key demographics can make a big difference in this area.

Communicating personal success stories from skilling programs, as opposed to focusing on data, can also help encourage uptake.

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# 2.

## explore the possibilities and the limitations

Bias is one of the biggest risks of AI. It is inherent both within the technology itself and in how talent use and trust the outputs different tools provide. Organizations need to think critically about how they are applying the technology.

Involving talent and providing forums for people to ask questions at the implementation stage will help prepare your workforce to use AI, while also allowing them to provide human oversight for its use.

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# 3.

## take a personalized approach

Organizations must work hard to understand the barriers to entry for different talent groups. There may be a broad range of reasons why people are not skilling at the rate they need or want to when it comes to AI. The data reveals that having multiple identities makes this issue more complex. Understanding the nuances preventing people from accessing and using the technology will be vital.

Empowering talent to support adoption and apply AI in a way that works for them can help them take ownership and feel more comfortable.

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# 4.

## collaboration is key

Some barriers to entry faced by different groups exist long before people enter the workforce. These hurdles may be tied to educational access, exposure to opportunities, or even biases that limit advancement.

Collaboration between organizations, educational institutions and society more broadly will help ensure that skills gaps between key demographics continue to close. By investing in early education programs, mentorship initiatives and skilling pathways, we can create a more inclusive workforce. Only through these concerted efforts will we truly level the playing field and allow talent to flourish regardless of background.



we invite your  
thoughts and  
comments.

let's start a conversation.

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partner for talent.