

Generation

AGE-PROOFING AI

ENABLING AN INTERGENERATIONAL
WORKFORCE TO BENEFIT FROM AI



OCTOBER 2024

*With grant support from Google.org
and The SCAN Foundation*



AGE-PROOFING AI

Enabling an intergenerational workforce to benefit from AI

With the AI revolution fully underway, we are all eager to understand what the future holds for the workforce. It seems like new surveys and research on labor trends appear every day, each with a different perspective. Much has been written about AI-driven productivity gains, and now, as businesses seek to capitalize on that opportunity, attention is turning to which workers and roles can benefit the most. This naturally raises questions about one of the fastest-growing age groups in the labor force: older and midcareer workers. How will they navigate these changes?

New Generation research in the US and Europe offers insights about how workers over the age of 45 might fare. With grant support from [Google.org](https://www.google.org) and [The SCAN Foundation](https://www.thescanfoundation.org), we commissioned [YouGov](https://www.yougov.com) to survey two audiences – people age 45+ who work in entry- and mid-level roles, and hiring managers who evaluate candidates for these roles – across a range of industries and company sizes. We surveyed 2,610 employees and 1,488 employers in France, Ireland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States during May and June 2024. The survey explored the rollout and use of AI tools – specifically generative AI tools, or those capable of generating content such as text, images, video, audio, or speech.

OUR SURVEY AUDIENCES

People age 45+ who work in entry- and mid-level roles

2,610 EMPLOYEES

Hiring managers who evaluate candidates for these roles

1,488 EMPLOYERS

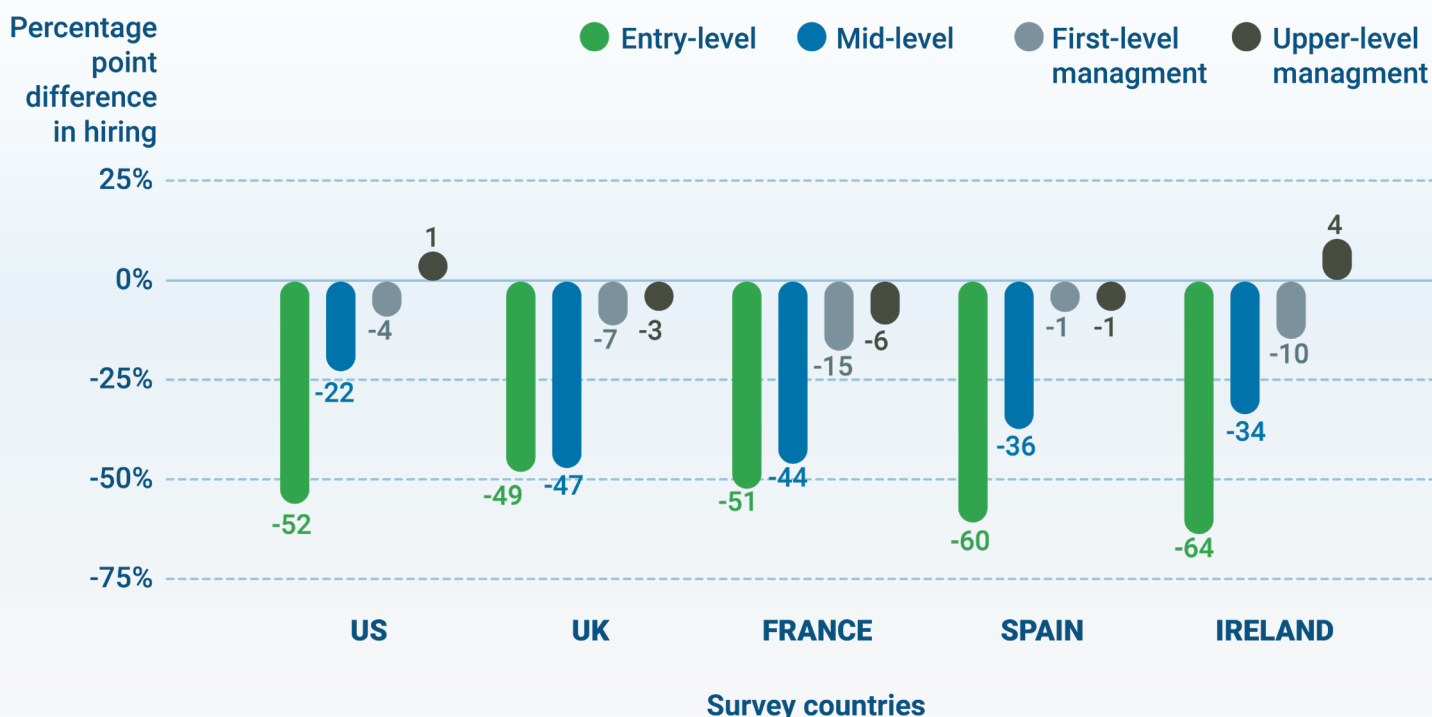
The insights that emerged provide a new perspective on the midcareer and older worker experience with AI in these countries. Three things stand out:

1. EMPLOYERS PREDICT A SHARP DROP IN HIRING, A LIKELY AMPLIFIER OF AGE BIAS


Our survey found that US and European employers anticipate declines ranging from 22% to 64% over the next 12 months in their entry-level and mid-level hiring (Figure 1). This trend was consistent across sectors and company size. Entry- and mid-level roles have been increasingly pursued by older workers in [the US](#) and Europe – whether they are people making career switches due to prior roles becoming obsolete, [people who need to keep working into traditional “retirement” years](#) to maintain financial security, or simply individuals who have made their careers in entry- or mid-level roles.

FIGURE 1 Hiring managers expect entry-level and mid-level roles to experience sharp hiring decline

Anticipated hiring changes from previous 12 months to next 12 months by job level across survey countries



Note: US n= 564, UK n= 232, France n= 301, Spain n= 302, Ireland n= 89



This finding – that entry-level and mid-level hiring is shrinking – is consistent with what we see in market data as well. According to [TalentNeuron](#), a global source of labor data, entry-level tech roles, for example, across the same countries we surveyed have declined 27% since early 2022.

Other interviews we conducted outside the YouGov survey with [~100 employers](#) in late 2023 and early 2024, indicate that the reduced hiring is due to multiple factors: uncertainty about the future impact of AI on the volume of workers required in a role, shifts in corporate strategic priorities, and an increasingly cautious approach to the next phase of the economic cycle.

One clear risk from this anticipated hiring slowdown is that in a competitive labor market, pre-existing age biases may become even more challenging for older workers seeking employment. In previous Generation research from [2021](#) and [2023](#), employers expressed a consistent preference for younger hires. Asked to rate candidate strengths in 2021, employers overwhelmingly said younger candidates are more application-ready, have experience that is more relevant, and are a better fit with company culture relative to those in age 45+ age brackets. Similarly, in 2023, 47% of hiring managers said they would hire a candidate age 30-44 while only 13% said the same about candidates age 55+.

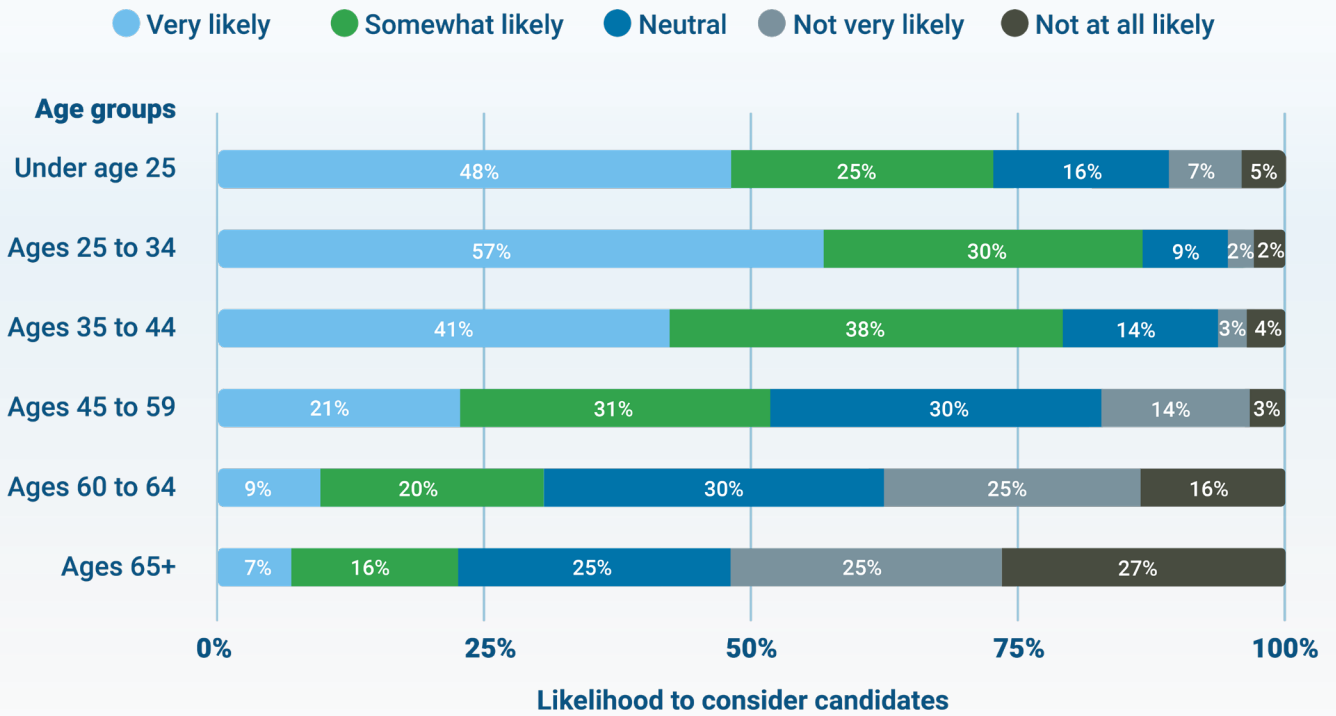
That hiring bias persisted, it's worth noting, despite the fact that when we asked these same hiring managers about the job performance of midcareer and older workers whom they already employ, these negative perceptions were disproven. Employers reported that the midcareer and older workers they had hired consistently matched or exceeded the performance of younger colleagues, with 89% stating that midcareer and older workers performed as well if not better than younger peers.

In our new YouGov survey, hiring managers in both the US and Europe again told us they prefer younger candidates, expressing the belief we have seen before, that as they age, workers become less open to technology and new tools. That preference for younger candidates intensifies when considering roles that regularly use AI tools. In the US, 32% of employers said they would “likely” consider candidates over age 60 for such roles versus 90% who would likely consider candidates under age 35. Europe was very similar – with 33% likely to consider older candidates and 86% likely to consider the younger group (Figures 2 & 3).

FIGURE 2

US hiring managers prefer younger candidates for roles that regularly use AI tools

US hiring managers' likelihood to consider candidates for roles that regularly use AI tools by age group

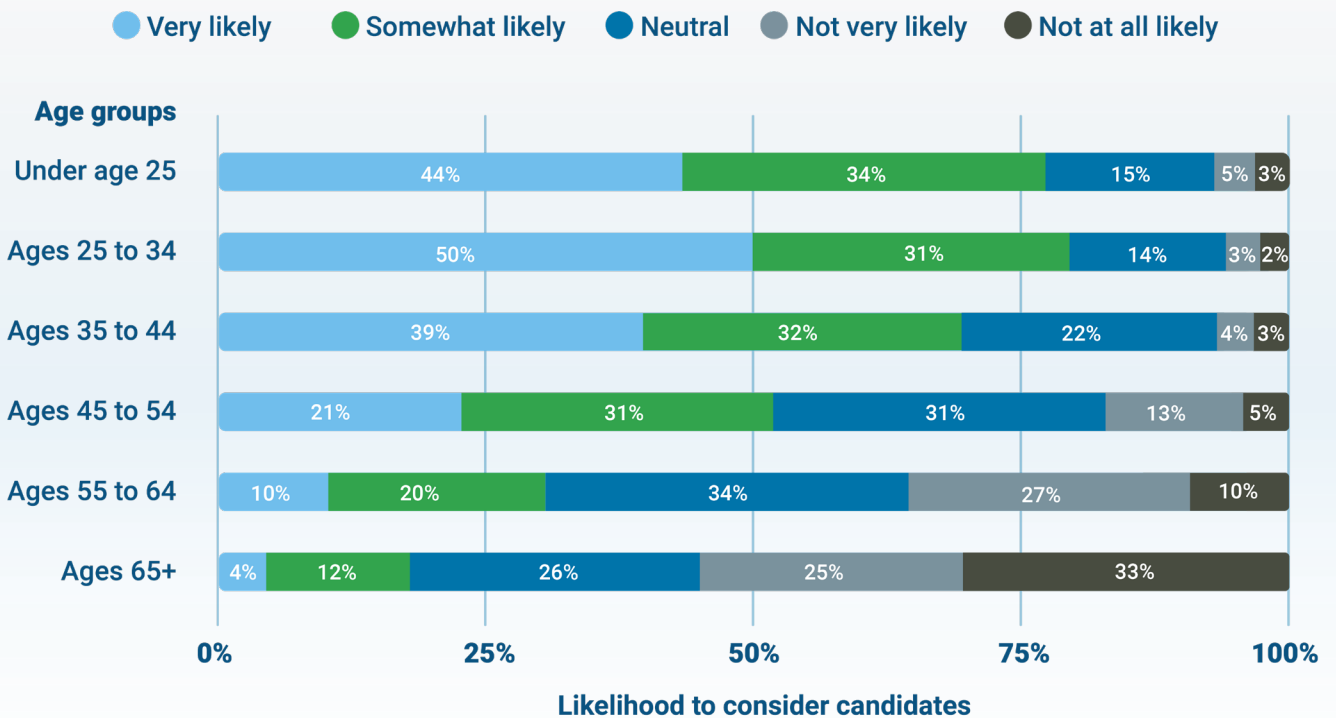


Note: n=399. Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding. Our age brackets in Europe were 45-54, 55-64, and 65+ while in the US they were 45-59, 60-64, and 65+.

FIGURE 3

European hiring managers also prefer younger candidates for roles that regularly use AI tools

European hiring managers' likelihood to consider candidates for roles that regularly use AI tools by age group



Note: n=552. Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding. Our age brackets in Europe were 45-54, 55-64, and 65+ while in the US they were 45-59, 60-64, and 65+.

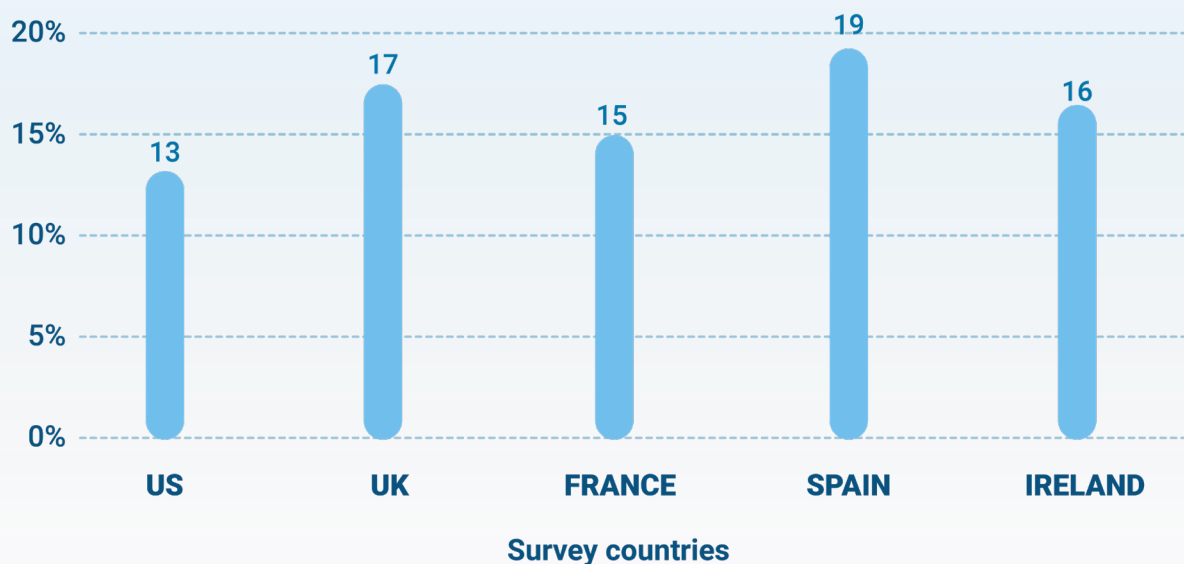
2. THE LOW LEVELS OF AI USE AMONG MIDCAREER AND OLDER WORKERS TODAY MAY WELL BE UNDERSTATING THE GROWTH POTENTIAL

On the surface, it might appear employers' age biases are well-founded. On average, just 15% of workers age 45+ across both Europe and the US reported that they are currently using AI in the workplace – ranging from 13% in the United States to 19% in Spain (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4 Few midcareer and older employees report using AI tools at work

AI tools usage at work by survey country

Percent of age 45+ employees using AI tools at work



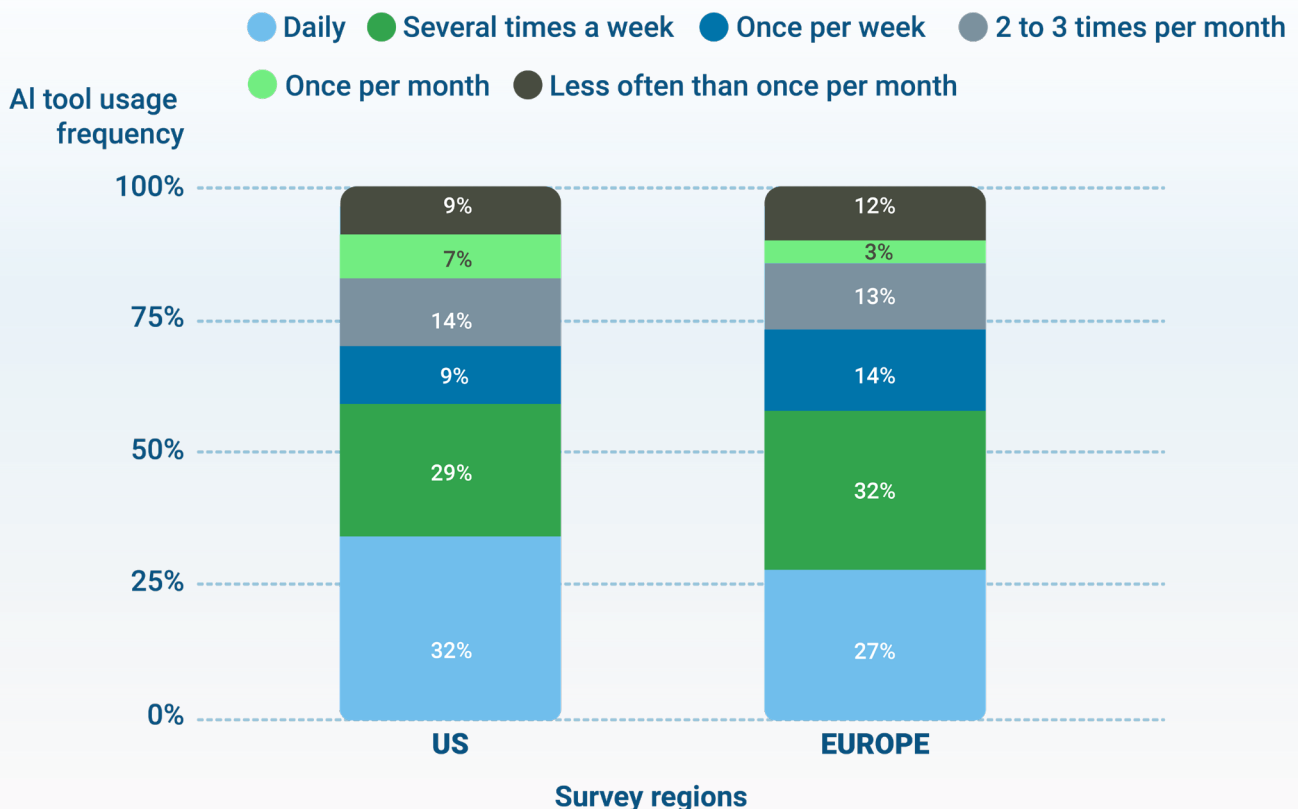
Note: US n= 1077, UK n= 441, France n= 505, Spain n= 501, Ireland n= 86

But consider that older workers may not need to rely on AI tools as heavily because they are less likely to use them to backfill an experience gap. A 2023 [National Bureau of Economic Research](#) study by MIT Sloan and Stanford academics that examined a large call center found that it was novice workers who enjoyed the biggest productivity gains from using AI tools – an increase of 34% – which helped them more quickly catch up to the skill level of those with years of experience. This study found that AI tools had “minimal impact on experienced and highly skilled workers” with regards to productivity boost.

Most importantly, just because many older workers don't currently use AI doesn't mean they can't. In fact, our survey found that among midcareer and older workers who have adopted AI tools, the majority are self-taught and "power users" (Figures 5 & 6). As a "power user," these older workers turn to AI tools multiple times a week, if not daily. More than half of midcareer and older workers in the US and two-thirds in Europe who are using AI regularly reported that it is improving their work quality and pace, with nearly half of workers across all markets adding that it allows them to do more advanced or higher-level work, and about a third saying it helps them make better decisions. Thirty-five percent (35%) in the US and 58% in Europe even said AI makes their jobs more enjoyable (Figure 7).

FIGURE 5 Midcareer and older workers who are using AI do so frequently

Frequency of AI tool use at work by survey regions

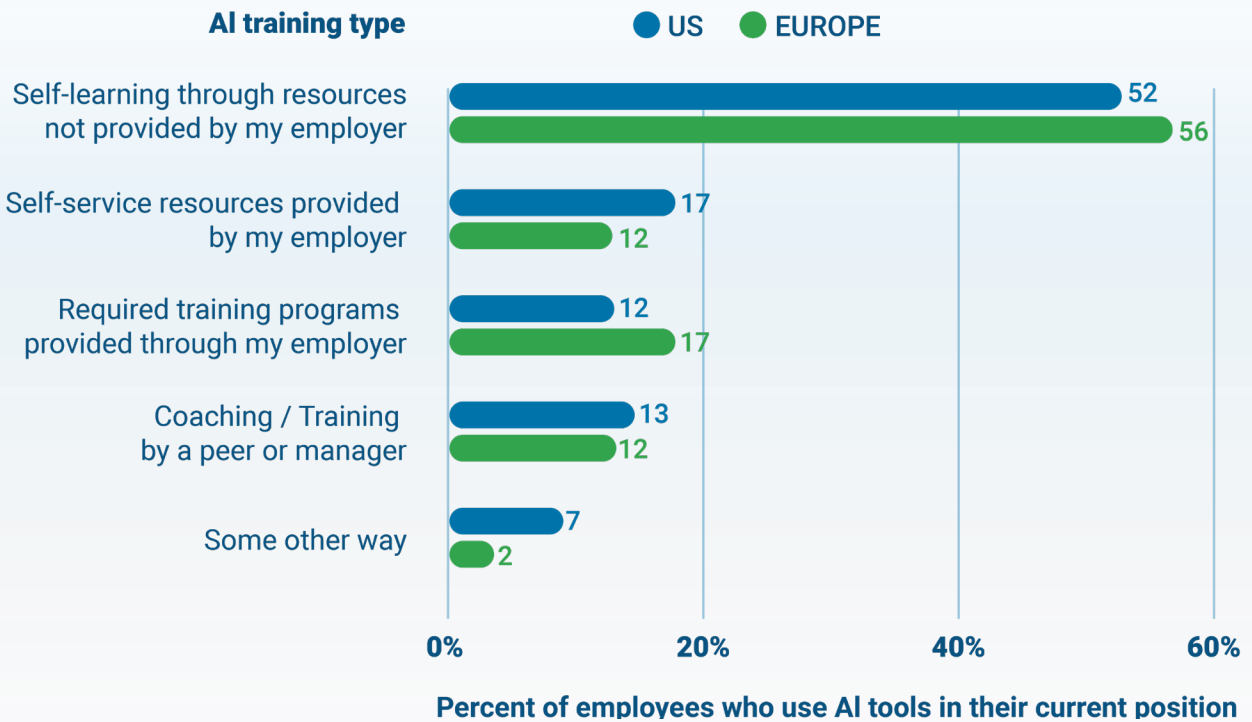


Note: US n= 144, Europe n= 258. Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding

FIGURE 6

The majority of midcareer and older workers using AI are self-taught

AI training type by survey regions

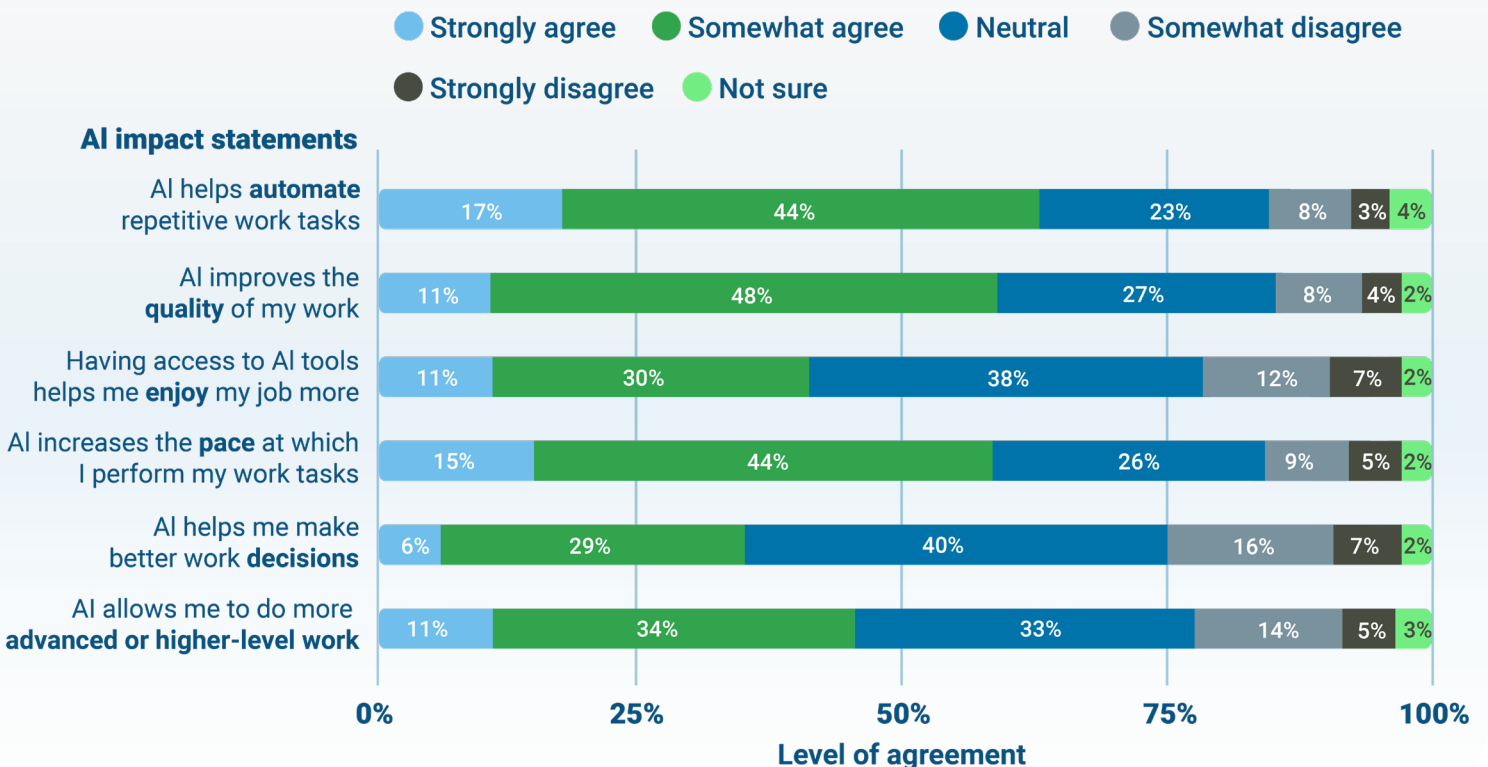


Note: US n= 144, Europe n= 258

FIGURE 7

Age 45+ workers using AI in the workplace perceive multiple benefits

Perceptions of impact of AI on work



Note: n= 402. Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding

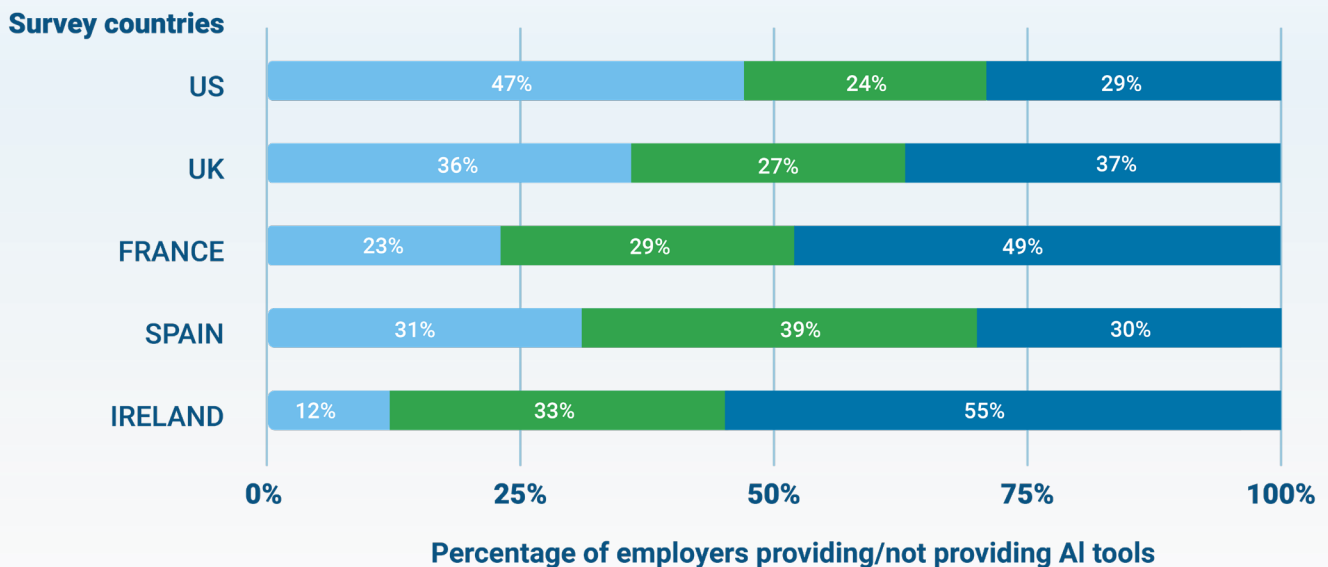
3. EMPLOYERS HAVE NOT YET CRACKED THE CODE ON WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO GET THE MOST OUT OF AI, ESPECIALLY FROM EXPERIENCED WORKERS

Encouraged by early signs of improvements in productivity and job satisfaction, employers across all industries are deploying AI solutions at a rapid pace. Nearly half of US hiring managers surveyed (47%) reported that their companies have started providing AI tools, and that an additional 24% plan to do so in the next 12 months. While Europe’s transition is slower, change is underway there as well, with 29% of employers saying they currently provide AI tools and 31% planning to in the next year (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8 Employers are rolling out AI tools in the workplace, though Europe lags the US pace

Employer AI tool usage by survey country

- My company currently provides AI tools for employees
- My company does not provide AI tools for employees, but plans to in the next 12 months
- My company does not provide nor plan to provide AI tools within the next 12 months



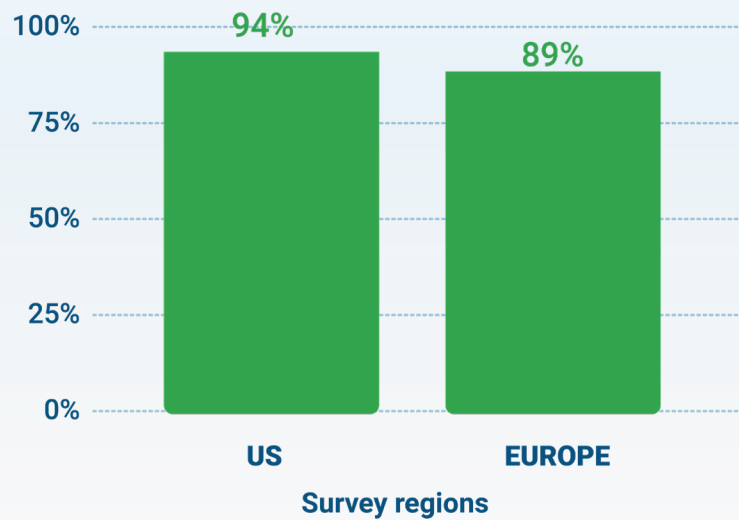
Note: US n= 564, UK n= 232, France n= 301, Spain n= 302, Ireland n= 89.
Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding

And almost all employers who have rolled out AI tools said they are providing some sort of training support to their workers – 94% in the US and 89% in the European countries surveyed (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9 **Almost all employers across countries are providing some form of training support**

Employers providing AI training support by survey regions

Percentage of employers providing AI training support



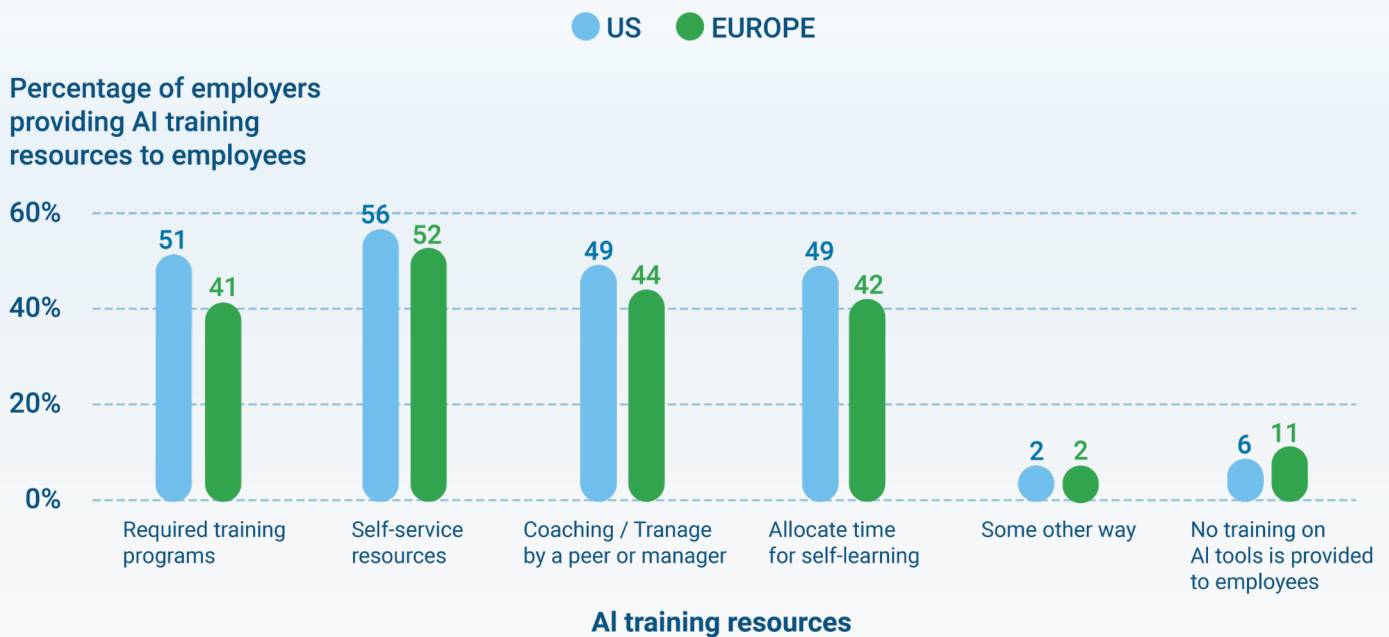
Note: US n= 265, Europe n=257

But that support takes different forms. Roughly half (49%) of employers in our survey said that they provide formal training (51% in US and 41% in Europe), similar numbers offer peer or manager coaching, and then slightly more offer self-serve resources (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10

Employers are rolling out a range of AI training resources for employees

AI training resources by survey regions



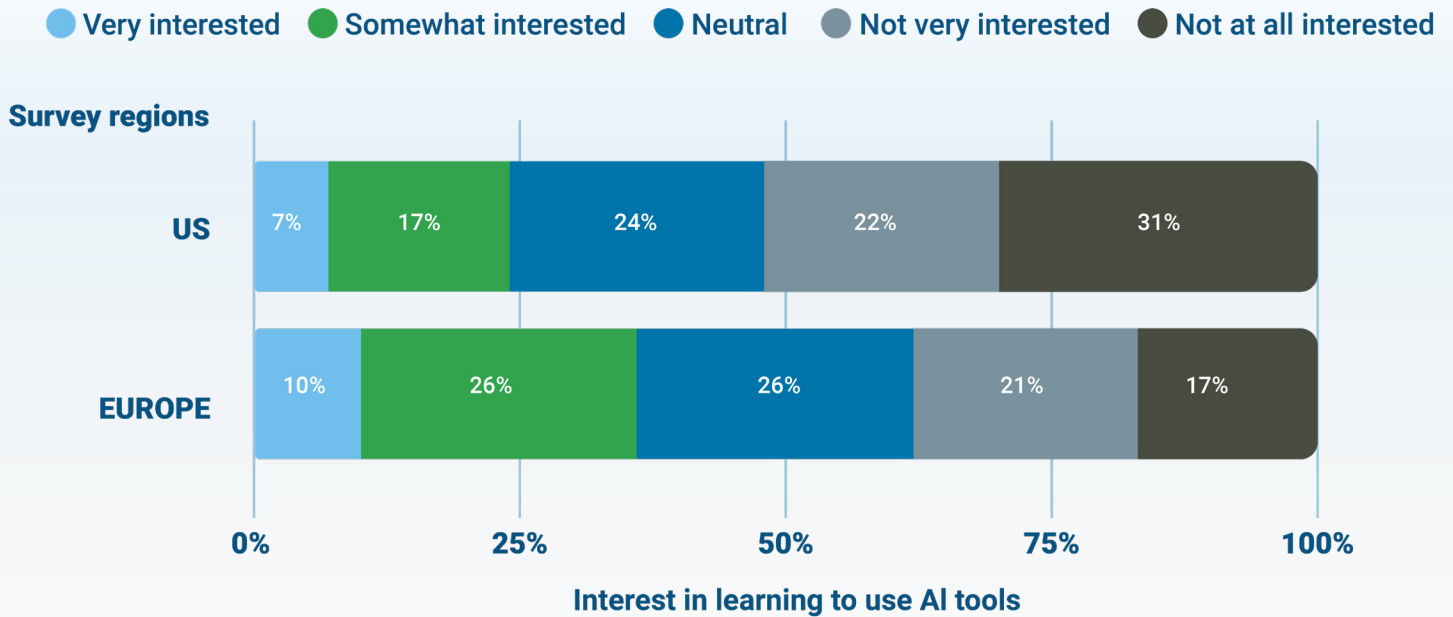
Note: US n= 265, Europe n= 257

Even as change is underway, the vast majority of surveyed midcareer and older workers are still on the fence about the value of AI tools in the workplace today. While 24% of non-users who are age 45 and over in the US and 36% in Europe expressed interest in learning to use AI tools, another quarter were neutral or unsure (Figure 11). Most troubling, nearly a third of the non-users in the US and 17% in Europe declared they are not interested in AI at all, an attitude which, if it persists, may put this group at a higher risk of forced early retirement – and employers at risk of losing important institutional know-how.

FIGURE 11

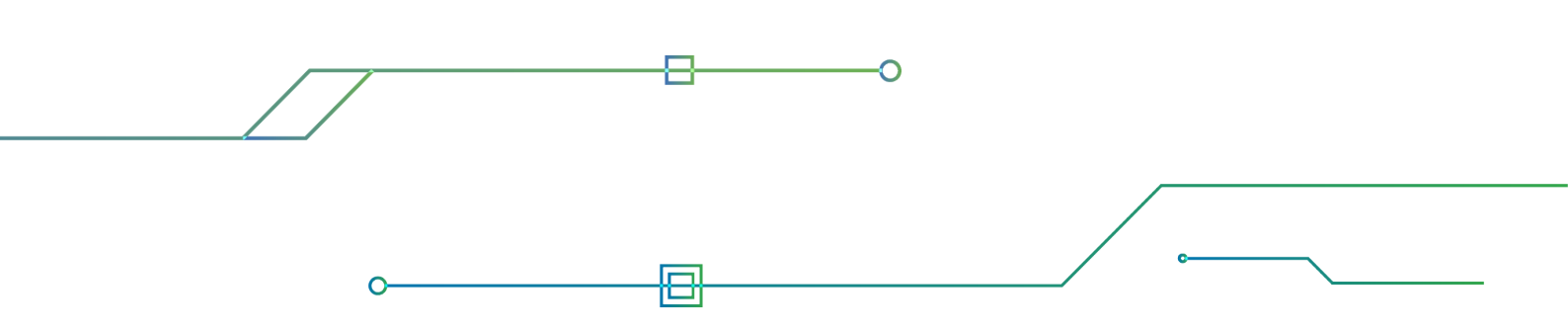
Interest in learning to use AI tools at work is higher in Europe compared to the US, though overall interest remains low

Non-user interest in learning to use AI tools by survey regions



Note: US n= 933, Europe n= 1275. Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding.

The ambivalence we see from workers in our survey is consistent with recent research released jointly by academics at Harvard Business School, the Wharton School, Warwick Business School, and MIT Sloan that [found](#) it isn't obvious to experienced workers how AI can fit into their work. And a [recent survey](#) by Upwork showed that employees across ages and roles were unsure how to use AI in their roles – nearly half (47%) of employees using AI say they have no idea how to achieve the productivity gains their employers expect and 77% say these tools have actually decreased their productivity and added to their workload. This gap points to a need for employers to marry experience with skills to unlock the full benefit of AI – by finding use cases that incorporate AI into specific roles and experience levels.

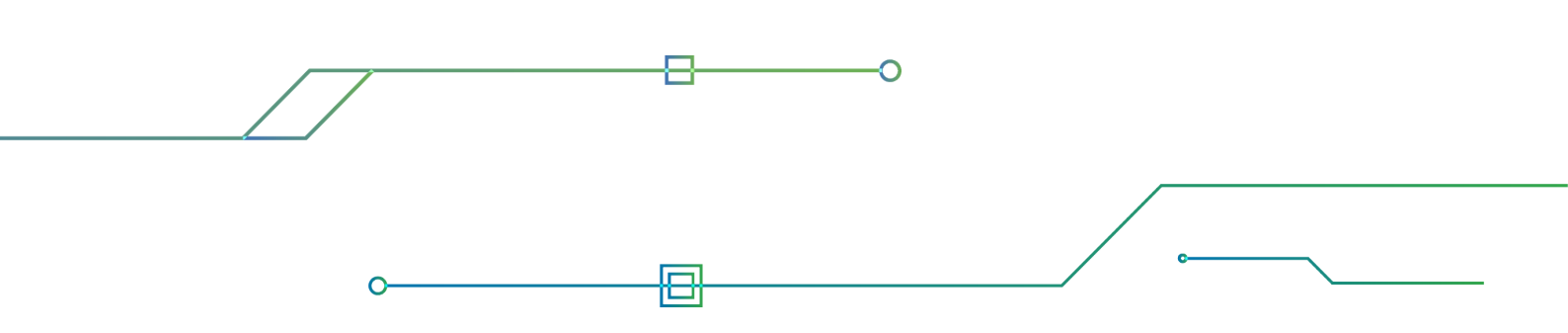


Thus far, the greatest beneficiaries of AI workplace tools, and therefore the most eager users, have been novice workers. The three insights from our research point to clear calls to action: To make the most of AI in the workplace, employers must do more to make the most of their experienced workers. Workforce programs need to be retooled to serve different profiles. And for their part, midcareer and older workers must do more to experiment with how AI tools can enhance their workplace effectiveness.

For companies, this requires intentionally developing use cases that combine work experience, such as customer relationships or institutional knowledge, with AI workplace tools. One good starting point would be to identify those midcareer and older workers who have already taught themselves how to use AI workplace tools and are finding value in deploying them in their daily tasks. By spotlighting these employees and incentivizing them to share and mentor their peers on how to do the same, employers can simultaneously motivate experienced workers and register productivity gains. Further, with a view to helping employees of all ages make the most of AI, employers can obtain rich insights by comparing and contrasting how workers with different experience levels write different prompts, deploy judgment to interpreting AI outcomes, and drive higher productivity.

For workforce programs, focused on preparing and placing midcareer and older workers into employment, coping effectively with the rise of AI requires building out an important new capability. They need to integrate AI skills into their programs, while keeping the rapidly-changing content relevant. These programs will also need to target midcareer and older workers who need to reskill to get a job or to switch careers, as well as those who need to upskill within role.

For their part, midcareer and older workers need to guard against falling back on experience alone as the best way to stay employable. Experience is a critical factor in using AI well, but it needs to be coupled with technical skills. Last year's joint [research project](#) between Generation and the OECD



showed that employers and workers have different views on the value of work experience. Employers were almost equally likely to interview someone with 5 years of work experience as someone with 25 years of work experience (79% vs. 85%). That research also showed that employers have clear preferences for candidates with recent, relevant training (48% of successful midcareer and older job switchers had training in the past three years vs. only 34% of unemployed peers). But we know that training participation decreases with age, across all education levels, with the research showing more than half of surveyed individuals under age 45 had participated in training in the past year versus only 38% of those over age 45. It will take actively pursuing AI skills and knowledge to ensure that those age 45 and older achieve this winning combination of experience and skills.

Pursued in parallel, these actions can help us find the emerging answers that will give everyone – older workers as well as the managers who supervise them – a greater ability to harness the transformative power of AI and realize its full potential in the workplace.



METHODOLOGY

Generation commissioned YouGov to conduct a research study among two primary audiences:

- 1) Employees aged 45+, job title Director or below, who have started a new position within the past five years (Entry- and Mid-level) and,
- 2) Employers responsible for / involved in the hiring process, having a job title of Manager or higher, and have evaluated Entry- and Mid-level job applicants in the past year.

Data from the United States was collected from May 16, 2024 to May 29, 2024, with a total of 1,077 Employees and 564 Employer surveys. Data was also collected in four European markets – the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, and Spain – from May 29, 2024 to June 13, 2024, with 1,533 employees (441 in the UK, 505 in France, 501 in Spain, and 86 in Ireland) and 924 hiring managers (232 in the UK, 301 in France, 302 in Spain, and 89 in Ireland)).

In all markets, the research was conducted among adults, employed full-time in a company with at least two employees, who met the job title / level / role criteria per audience type. YouGov sampled to ensure sufficient representation by age, education level, geographic region, industry, job title, and company size. Throughout, AI tools were defined as “tools capable of generating content such as text, images, video, audio or speech.”

At the total level, Employee and Employer data, separately and per market, are weighted to the market’s proportion of total full-time employees across all four markets using the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) statistics as of 2022. Individually, the market data are not weighted.

© Generation: You Employed, Inc. 2024

Cover image generated using artificial intelligence, on the Midjourney platform.