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Job Seeker Trends

Research Brief

Longitudinal trending of career pursuits among the career intent, tech intent and skills intent

January 2026 release

Key Points

31% Estimated percent of the US labor market reporting actively pursuing a new job or career change during the past three months. This figure is slightly higher than the long-term mean rate of 29%. The uptick likely reflects elements of the "K-shaped" economy whereby segments of job seekers are optimistic about employer hiring and their career change prospects heading into the year, while others are feeling the opposite and may have increased their job seeking activity out of fear and the desire for greater job security.

55 Average rating score of the state of the job market, same as the score recorded January 2025. Net negative responses continue to exceed net positive responses (43% vs. 24%). The remaining 33% of job seekers rate the state of the job market as average. Non-job seekers (those content with their current employment) report net positive sentiment with the state of the labor market (44% vs. 35%).

#4 Average rank of consideration among job seekers in pursuing a career in a technology field, also known as the Tech Intent. The average rate spans ten waves of the Job Seeker tracking survey over five years. For the January 2026 wave, consideration for pursuing a career in technology tied for third with the healthcare / medical job category.

47% Percent of non-job seekers categorized as the Skills Intent – those most committed to further building their skills for career maintenance or career advancement. Another 28% fall into the Skills Curious segment.

#1 Job seeker rank of earning a technical industry-recognized certification as the top strategy when pursuing a career in technology. The second ranked strategy entails training in an in-demand technical skill, which often precedes earning an industry-recognized certification.

87% Rating of importance (net) of digital fluency skills in today's workforce.

#1 Job seeker rank of AI as the top skill they plan to learn and develop.

38% Percent of job seekers that believe AI will be both a positive and a threat to jobs and wages. In comparison, equal percentages (21%) rate AI a positive or a threat to jobs and wages.

Job Seeking Continues at a Robust Rate

31%

Approximately 31% of the US labor market report pursuing a new job or career change during the past three months, a slight increase over the long-term mean rate of 29%. As noted in the key points summary, there are likely a combination of factors at play in explaining the slight uptick in active job seekers.

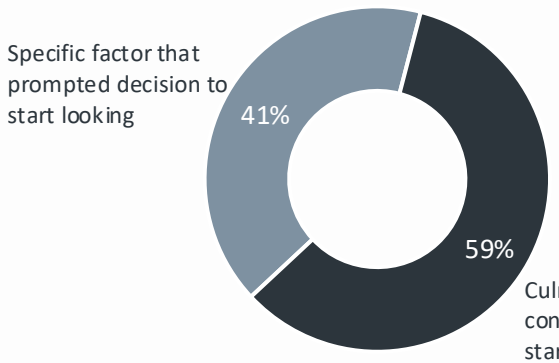
Job seeking incidence profile:

63% +3 points	Age 18-34
53% +2 points	Age 35-44
45% -1 point	Age 45-64
24% no change	Age 65+

53m

Thirty-one percent translates to approximately 53 million active job seekers, inclusive of those currently employed and those out of work.

Prompt that initiated job seeking



Currently, less than half of job seekers cite **AI as a threat to job security** as a driver for pursuing new employment opportunities (18% significant + 22% slight factor). Job seekers more likely to cite it as a significant factor compared to their counterparts include those with $100k+ income, hold a post-grad degree, or are 35-44 years old.

Top factors contributing to job seekers pursuing new employment opportunities

1. Financial situation changed — Correlated with income, with higher rates among the <$50K and $50K-$100K segments
2. Values or life priorities changed
3. Stuck in a rut and wanting something new
4. Burnout or stress — Slightly higher rate among 18-34 age segment
5. Stuck in a rut and wanting something new

See Methodology for survey and sample details

5 in 10

Non-job seekers report contentment or satisfaction with their current job

Among the 50% of the labor market that is not actively pursuing a new job or career change, 51% indicate the reason is contentment or satisfaction with their current job. CompTIA designates this segment the **Career Content**.

The remaining 49% falls into the passive category known as the **Career Curious**. This segment is fluid and may shift into active job seeking mode when an opportunity presents itself.

Top factors holding the Career Curious back from active job seeking:

1. Waiting for right opportunity
2. Timing not right
3. Balancing job, family etc.
4. Need more work experience, skills, training to improve odds of success
5. Paused looking; plan to resume

See Appendix for data segmentations

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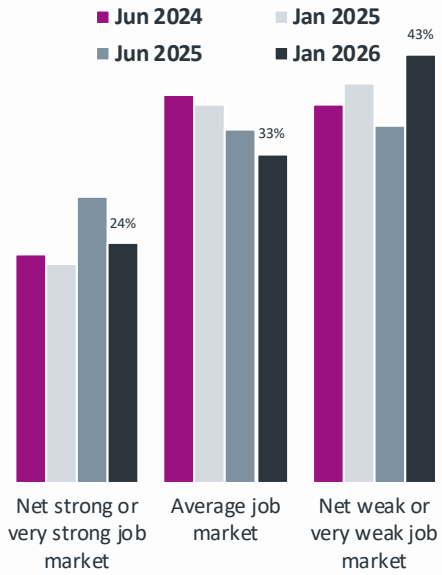
Job seeker perceptions of the health of the labor market



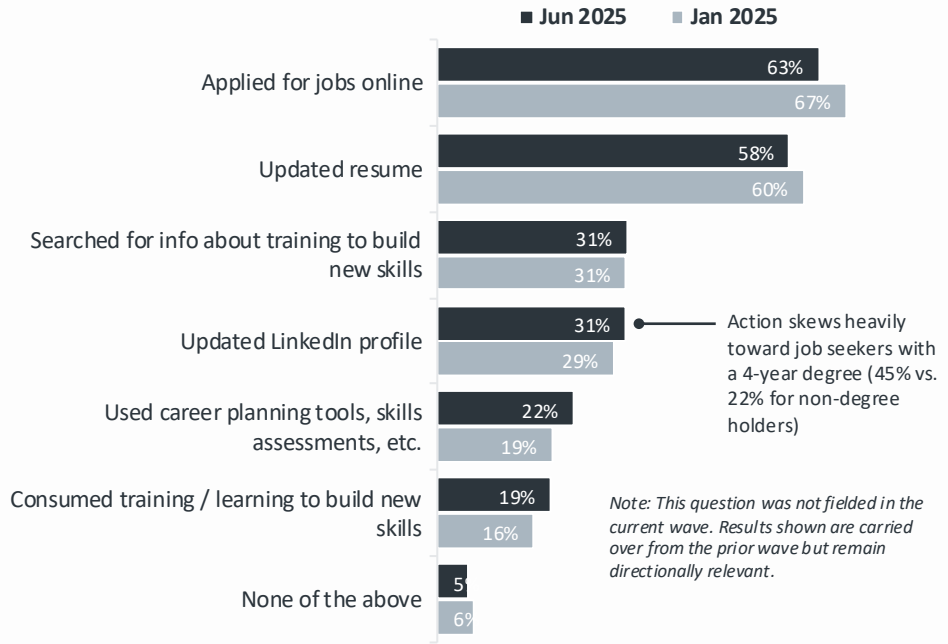
When translating job seeker ratings of the state of the job market to a score, the calculation yields a weighted average of 55; identical to the score of January 2025.

Net positive feelings of a strong job market remain lower than net negative feelings (24% vs. 43%), with the middle segment of 33% rating the jobs market average.

Male job seekers hold slightly more positive views than female job seekers (average score of 58 vs. 51), as do Millennials vs. Gen X (57 vs. 53)

Actions taken by job seekers in pursuing career opportunities

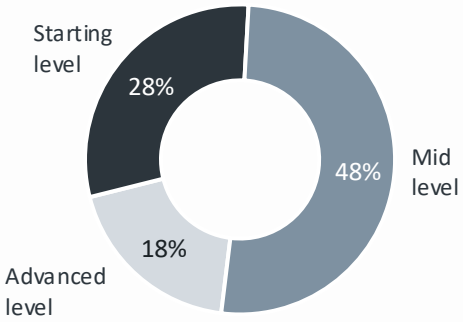
More so than other cohorts, the data indicates Gen Z applied to jobs online at a lower rate (62% current period vs. 70% prior period), while increasing the rate of searching for information around training to build new skills (37% current period vs. 29% period). This may reflect a degree of frustration in applying for countless jobs without success; shifting to a strategy of boosting skills to improve chances.



Note: This question was not fielded in the current wave. Results shown are carried over from the prior wave but remain directionally relevant.

Action taken	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X
Updated resume	57%	58%	59%
Updated LinkedIn profile	26%	32%	33%
Searched for information about training and building skills	37%	34%	24%
Used career planning, skills assessments, career coach etc.	27%	26%	15%

Desired job level of job seekers



Data on par with prior survey wave | unsure responses not shown

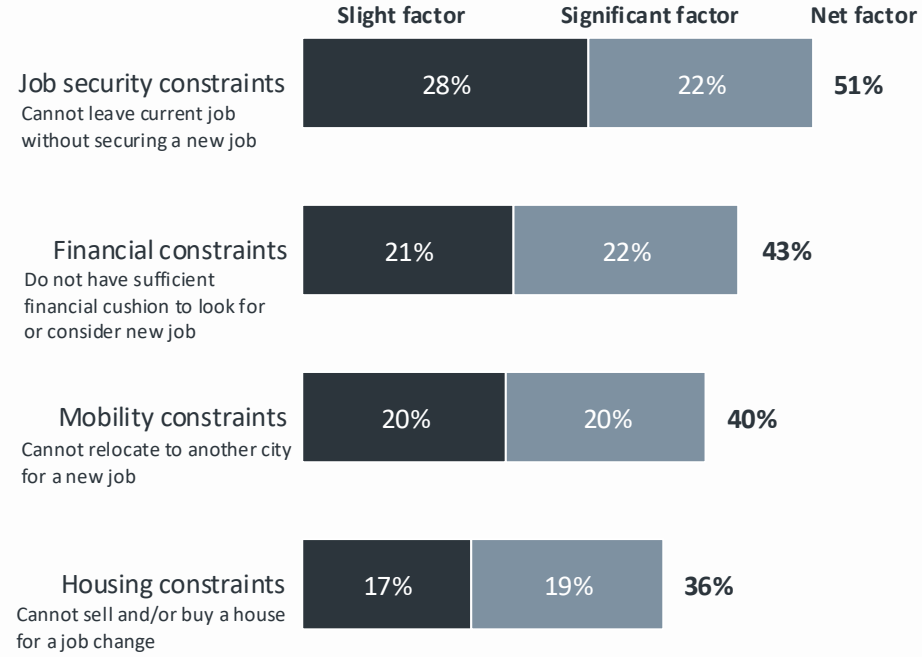
Top reported job seeking challenges

1. Time to apply for jobs, fill out applications, interviews
2. Mental fatigue and stress of lengthy job searches
3. Balancing job searches with the demands of work or family
4. Figuring out where/how to start job search strategy; information overload
5. Too many rounds of interviews
6. Automated or AI-powered application systems that screen out candidates

Time consistently ranks as the top challenge among job seekers. Of course, this factor is present in other challenges cited, such as too many rounds of interviews.

Life factors constrain many potential job seekers

Reported constraints among non-active job seekers



Younger demographics report higher rates of mobility constraints. On the one hand, this may run counter to societal perceptions of young people having more flexibility to pick up and move. On the other, the significant run up in both housing and rental costs make it exceedingly difficult to relocate, especially if the move is from a lower cost town to a higher cost city.

Job seeking constraints	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X
Financial constraints	48%	46%	46%
Mobility constrains	49%	41%	40%
Housing / rental constraints	45%	40%	33%

Job Seekers Consider a Diverse Mix of Career Fields

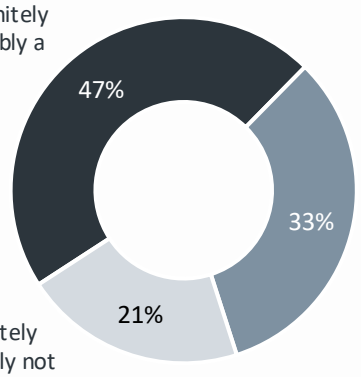
The count of career options gaining in consideration (7) was offset by those dropping in consideration (8), with 3 in the neutral no change category. Consideration for a healthcare or medical career returned to the top 5, while consideration for a career in a manufacturing field slipped to the 6th slot. Consideration for a technology job role was unchanged in the 4th slot, although down as a percentage compared to the June 2025 rate.

Consideration for career field	Jun 2021	Jan 2022	Jun 2022	Jan 2023	Jun 2023	Jan 2024	Jun 2024	Jan 2025	Jun 2025	Jan 2026	Mean Rate	Jan 2026 change vs. mean
Sales, Marketing, Retail, Real Estate or Related	22%	22%	23%	28%	22%	24%	25%	22%	23%	28%	24%	↑
Hospitality, Food, Travel and Tourism	26%	20%	23%	21%	21%	19%	20%	20%	22%	21%	21%	–
Healthcare or Medical	18%	20%	21%	19%	20%	17%	17%	19%	16%	19%	19%	–
Tech, IT, Cybersecurity, Data, Software, AI or IT Proj. Mgt.	13%	20%	17%	17%	15%	17%	16%	16%	22%	19%	17%	↑
Business, Financial, Accounting, Analyst or Operations	14%	18%	18%	18%	13%	16%	17%	16%	17%	18%	16%	↑
Manufacturing or Production	16%	13%	16%	16%	12%	15%	14%	17%	18%	17%	15%	↑
Construction, Skilled Trades, Operators, or Architects	13%	11%	11%	13%	9%	12%	10%	15%	17%	15%	13%	↑
Personal and Professional Care, Service, or Child Care	16%	14%	12%	12%	12%	11%	11%	13%	13%	14%	13%	↑
Transportation, Drivers, or Material Moving	14%	9%	12%	10%	11%	10%	11%	12%	14%	12%	12%	–
Installation, Maintenance, Mechanics, or Repair	10%	6%	6%	8%	6%	7%	7%	11%	9%	11%	8%	↑
Education, Teaching, or Instruction	11%	14%	12%	12%	12%	13%	13%	13%	10%	11%	12%	↓
Arts, Design, Entertainment or Sports	13%	9%	10%	11%	11%	11%	10%	9%	12%	10%	11%	↓
Engineering or Technicians	7%	6%	8%	8%	5%	6%	7%	7%	8%	10%	7%	↑
Comm., Multimedia, Journalism or Social Media	8%	11%	10%	11%	9%	10%	10%	9%	11%	9%	10%	↓
Community, Social Service, Psychology or Non-profit	11%	11%	10%	9%	10%	11%	10%	8%	9%	8%	10%	↓
Legal, Criminal Justice, Law Enf. or Armed Forces	6%	5%	6%	6%	5%	6%	6%	4%	6%	6%	6%	–
Life, Physical, or Social Science	5%	7%	7%	7%	6%	6%	6%	5%	6%	6%	6%	–
Farming, Fishing, or Forestry	6%	5%	5%	5%	4%	5%	4%	4%	6%	6%	5%	↑

Overcoming Confidence Gap Barriers

Confidence gap[1] remains a barrier to a tech career for many job seekers

[1]Belief that working in technology is not possible due to real or perceived barriers that discourage some candidates.



Note: This question was not fielded in the current wave. Results shown are carried over from the prior wave yet remain relevant.

Examples of confidence gap concerns

32%
Concern over starting too far behind

23%
Concern over not having a 4-yr degree

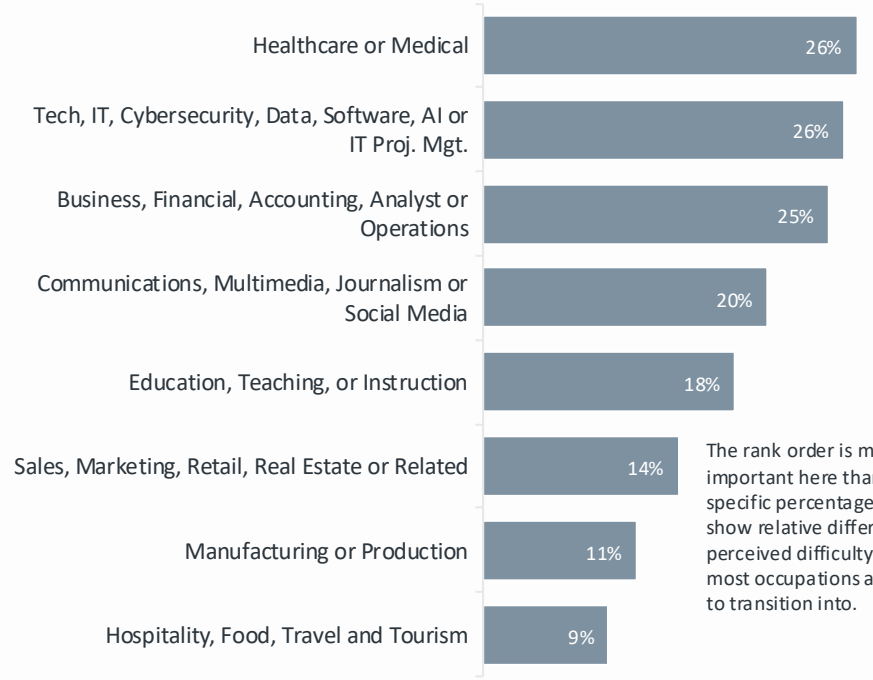
Reported challenges and perceived barriers to pursuing a tech job

Jun 2025	Jan 2026	
28%	27%	Not interested in field of technology
23%	27%	Believe training takes too long
28%	26%	Believe tech jobs don't pay enough
22%	24%	Believe training too expensive
23%	24%	Believe not enough tech jobs in my region
21%	22%	Believe insufficient math or science skills a barrier to working in tech

While factors are generally similar across segments, some differences emerge. For example, women job seekers are more likely than men to select the 'insufficient math or science skills' and 'not interested in tech' options.

Job seeker assessment of perceived difficulty of transitioning into career fields

Top reported challenges of pursuing a new job | Net difficult displayed | many occupations rated as 'about in the middle' in difficulty



The rank order is more important here than the specific percentages. Results show relative differences in perceived difficulty, not that most occupations are 'easy' to transition into.

Note: the occupation categories presented in the accompanying chart span many job levels and job types. Job seeker ratings of the difficulty of transitioning into new career fields should be interpreted as directional guidance to inform where additional support may be needed to enable talent mobility.

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Job seeker approaches to pursuing a career in technology

#1 Earning a technical industry-recognized certification [50%]

#2 Training in an in-demand technical skill [46%]

#3 Encouragement / nudge from mentor or career coach [37%]

#4 Guidance from someone working in tech [37%]

#5 Training in a business, leadership or soft skill [36%]

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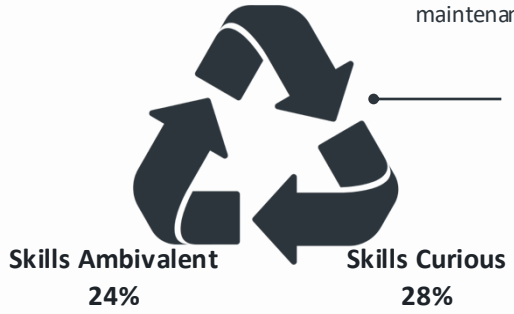
Profiling the Skills Intent



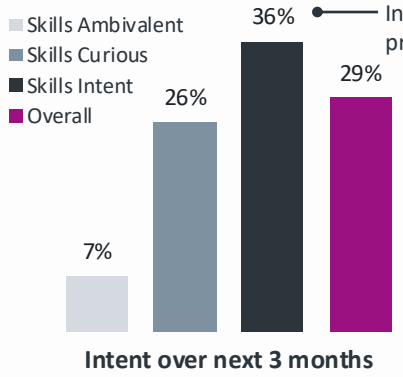
Skills development rating of very important to career advancement and/or career maintenance

Adjusted rates as a % of the overall labor market:

% Skills Intent
% Skills Curious
% Skills Ambivalent

Intent to train to develop skills over next 3 months

Among non-job seekers | training for skills development may entail formal paid learning or informal free learning content



Increase of +2 points vs. prior survey wave

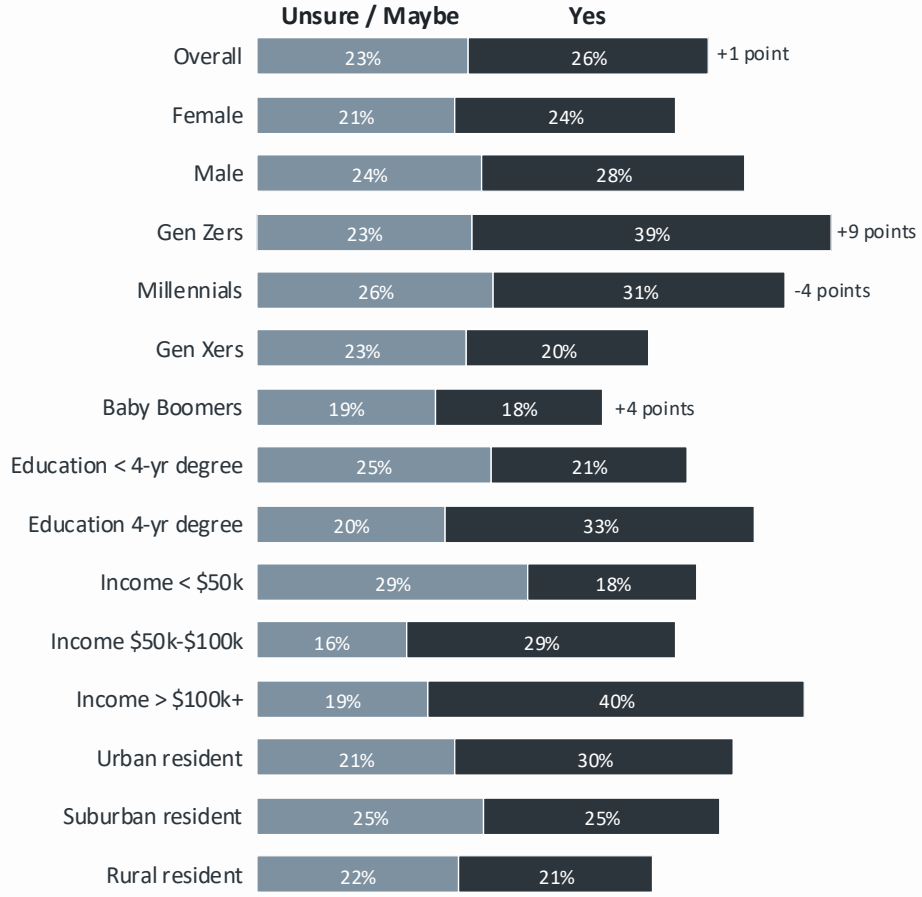
Expectation for who will drive skills development training

67% Mostly driven by self
15% Mostly driven by employer
15% About an even split

The Skills Intent segment reports a slightly higher rate of proactive self-driven training vs. the Skills Ambivalent relying more on the employer to drive the decision.

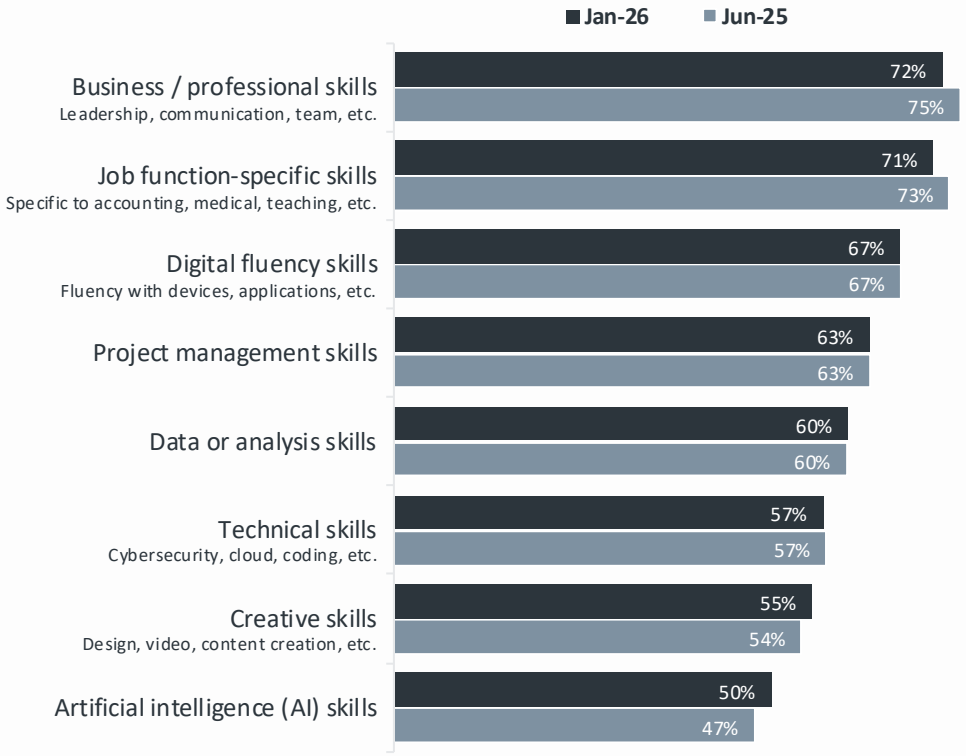
Training intent profiling segmentation

Among non-job seekers | training for skills development may entail formal paid learning or informal free learning content



The Skills Intent recognize a mix of skills in career maintenance and/or advancement

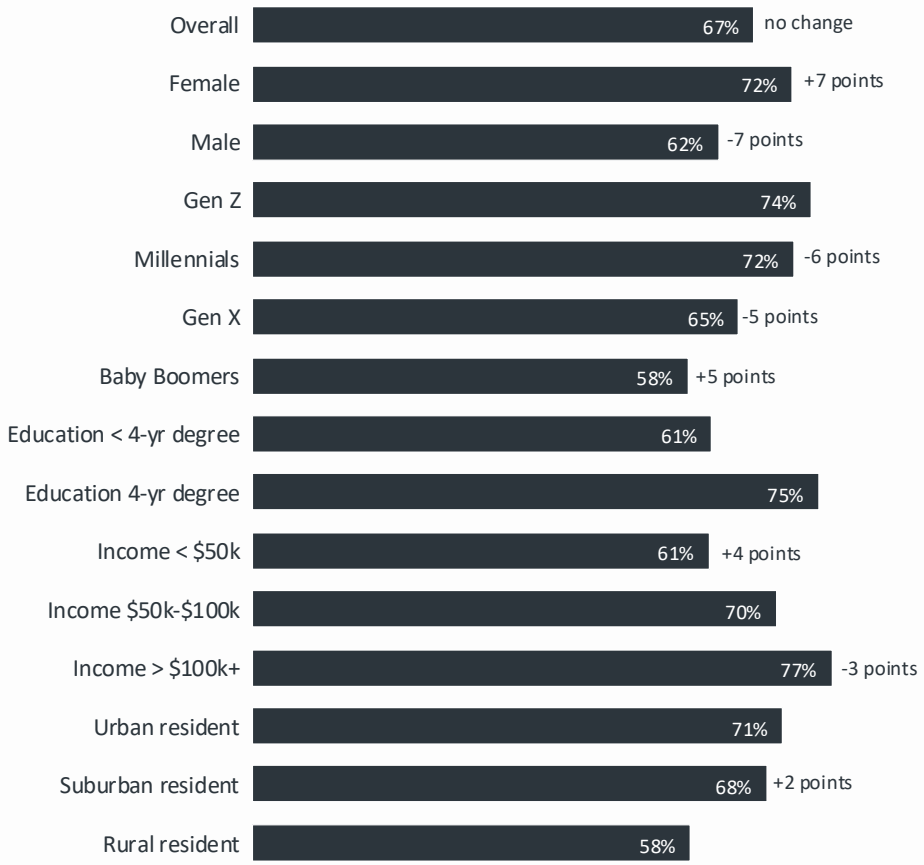
Net rating of very important + somewhat important



Note: the Skills intent segment spans the breadth of occupation categories, some of which, are technical fields and some are not. The relatively high rating of digital fluency skills speaks to the degree to which digital skills underpin so many occupation categories across the labor market.

Digital fluency skill intent segmentation

Skills Intent segmentation of those rating digital fluency skills as important (net) to their career maintenance or advancement



87%

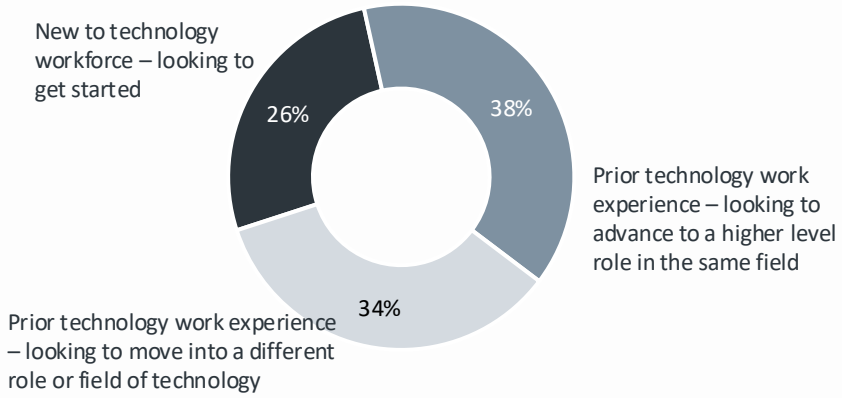
Job seeker rating of the importance (net) of digital fluency skills in today's workforce

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI) fundamentals
2. Applications fundamentals, e.g. Microsoft Office, Salesforce, etc.
3. Technology fundamentals, e.g. terminology, concepts, uses etc.
4. Data/Analytics fundamentals
5. Cybersecurity fundamentals

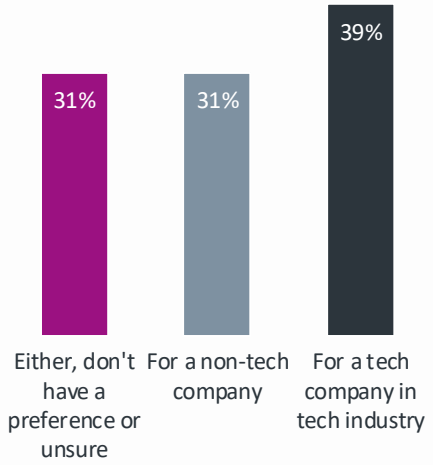
Note: these responses are among the job seeker segment – the 31% of the labor market actively seeking a new position. The rank order did not change from the prior survey wave.

Data on the prior page is among the non-job seekers. Differing priorities between job seekers and non-job seekers helps to explain differences in skills development ratings. For example, job seekers rate AI skills development a higher priority than non-job seekers.

Profile of job seekers already working in a technology field



Job seeker preference for working within tech

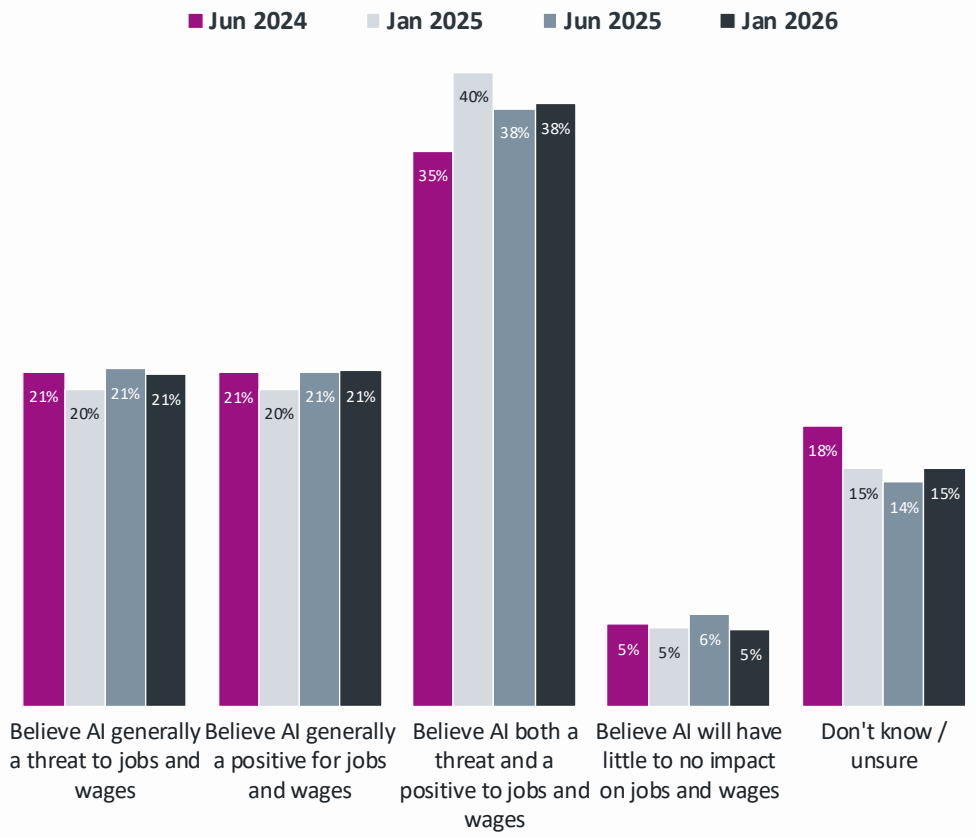


According to CompTIA's State of the Tech Workforce, an estimated 40% of tech jobs are with tech companies in the tech industry. A majority of tech jobs span all other sectors across the economy, such as a cybersecurity analyst working for a financial company or a cloud engineer working for a healthcare provider.

Note: This question was not fielded in the current wave. Results shown are carried over from the prior wave yet remain relevant.

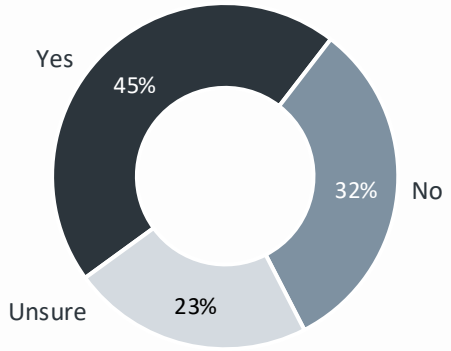
Job Seeker perceptions of AI's impact on jobs and wages

Job seeker perceptions of the impact of AI on the jobs market and wages have tracked consistently over the past three survey waves. Males and those in the Millennial age cohort report slightly higher rates of positive views toward AI.



Reported incidence of firsthand knowledge of staffing reductions or freezes of entry level workers due to AI

Forty-five percent of job seekers report hearing of or experiencing firsthand situations of employers reducing staffing or enacting staffing freezes of entry-level workers (1-3 years experience) due to AI.



Confluence of factors at play

36%	Employers are in position to be choosier and opt for more experienced workers
29%	Economic factors / companies simply are not hiring
25%	Artificial Intelligence (AI) either directly or indirectly affecting hiring
10%	Don't know/unsure

While job seekers see AI as a factor in sluggish hiring, they believe the economy and employer decisions play a larger role.

4 in 10

Job seekers factoring AI into career pursuit decisions

A growing segment of job seekers (37%) is trying to anticipate how AI may affect careers, notably the threat of fewer employment opportunities.

Another 26% report planning to start factoring AI into their calculation for deciding on career change pursuits. Not surprisingly, a sizable segment of job seekers (37%) report uncertainty in how or if to factor AI into their career pursuits.

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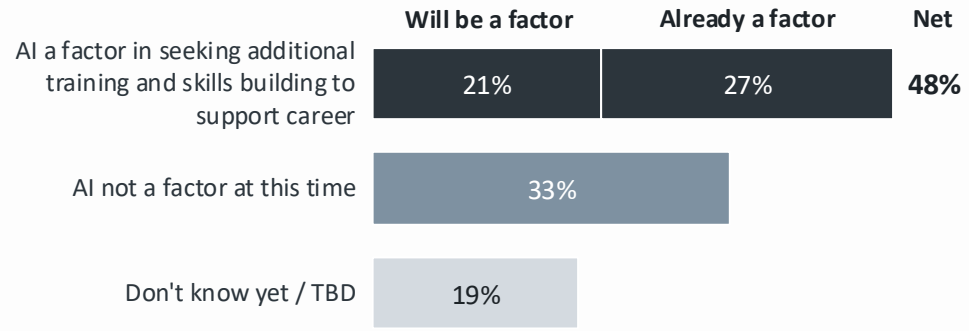
Jobs seekers respond to the opportunity and threat of AI by seeking additional training and skills building

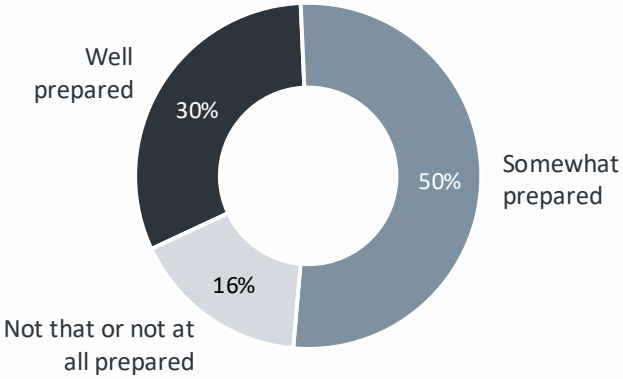
Nearly half of job seekers (48% net) claim AI is already a factor—or soon will be—in their decision to build new skills. And many are acting on it by investing time in AI tools, self-study, courses and AI certification.



AI training, credentials and skills development activities by job seekers	Not yet, but planning to	Yes, have done	NET yes and planning
Invested time in using/learning AI tools, such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, etc.	23%	45%	68%
Developed AI skills on my own from sources such as YouTube, TikTok, etc.	27%	33%	61%
Researched how companies are using AI to learn more about on-the-job applications	32%	27%	59%
Used employer-provided AI tool(s) or training resources to learn more	29%	27%	55%
Taken classes or training courses on AI	35%	19%	53%
Networked with AI practitioners or thought leaders on LinkedIn or other online forums	30%	16%	46%
Earned a certification or other credential in AI	34%	12%	46%

Most job seekers feel at least somewhat prepared to move into a new job, though only 3 in 10 feel well prepared

Those who tend to feel well prepared in terms of skills and experience at higher rates versus their counterparts include men, 4-yr and higher degree graduates, $50k+ (especially $100k+) earners, or those younger than 65 years.



Don't know responses omitted from chart

When it comes to AI on the job, workers most want training, guidance and reassurance

1. Training on how to use AI tools effectively in job role
2. Clear guidance / policies on when and how to use AI tools
3. Reassurance use of AI will not put job at greater risk
4. Time during work to practice and build AI skills
5. Access to company-approved AI tools

See Appendix for data segmentations

Methodology

CompTIA's Job Seeker Trends study was conducted via a quantitative survey fielded online during January 9 -15, 2026. The data was weighted to approximate a target sample of U.S. adults based on gender, educational attainment, age, race, and region. The full survey sample of n=2,296 was evenly segmented between active job seekers and non-seekers. The n=1,000 segmentations have an approximate margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points.

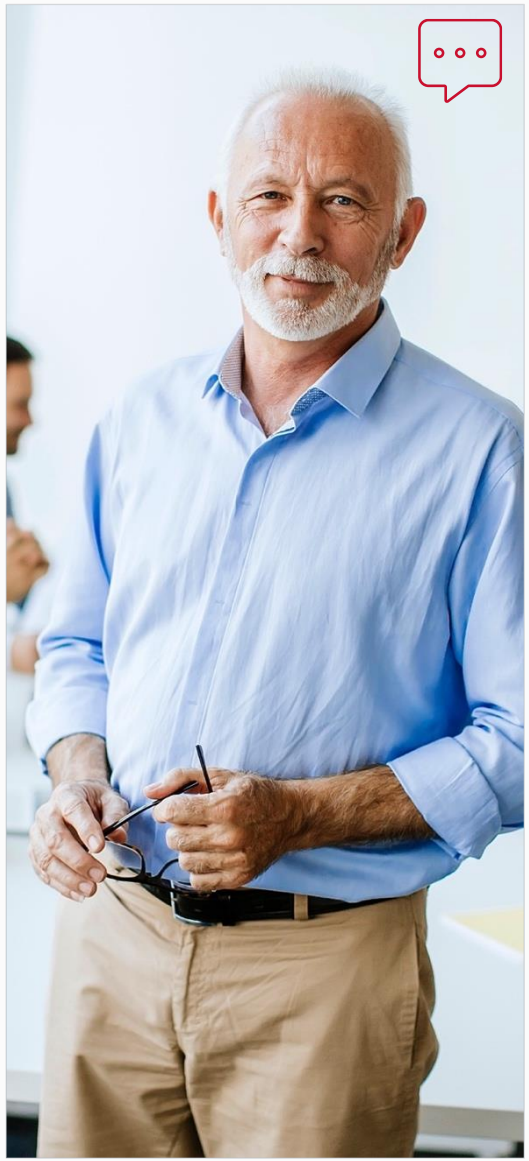
The survey was administrated by the research firm Morning Consult.

Within the context of this study, job seekers are defined as adults who have looked for a new job within their current or most recent career field or explored new jobs in a different career field in the past 3 months. Note: the data suggests some respondents interpreted 'new career' pathway as a new job role within an existing field (e.g. transitioning from an IT support role to a cybersecurity role). Overall, this had little effect on the key themes of the findings.

Caveats to Keep in Mind:

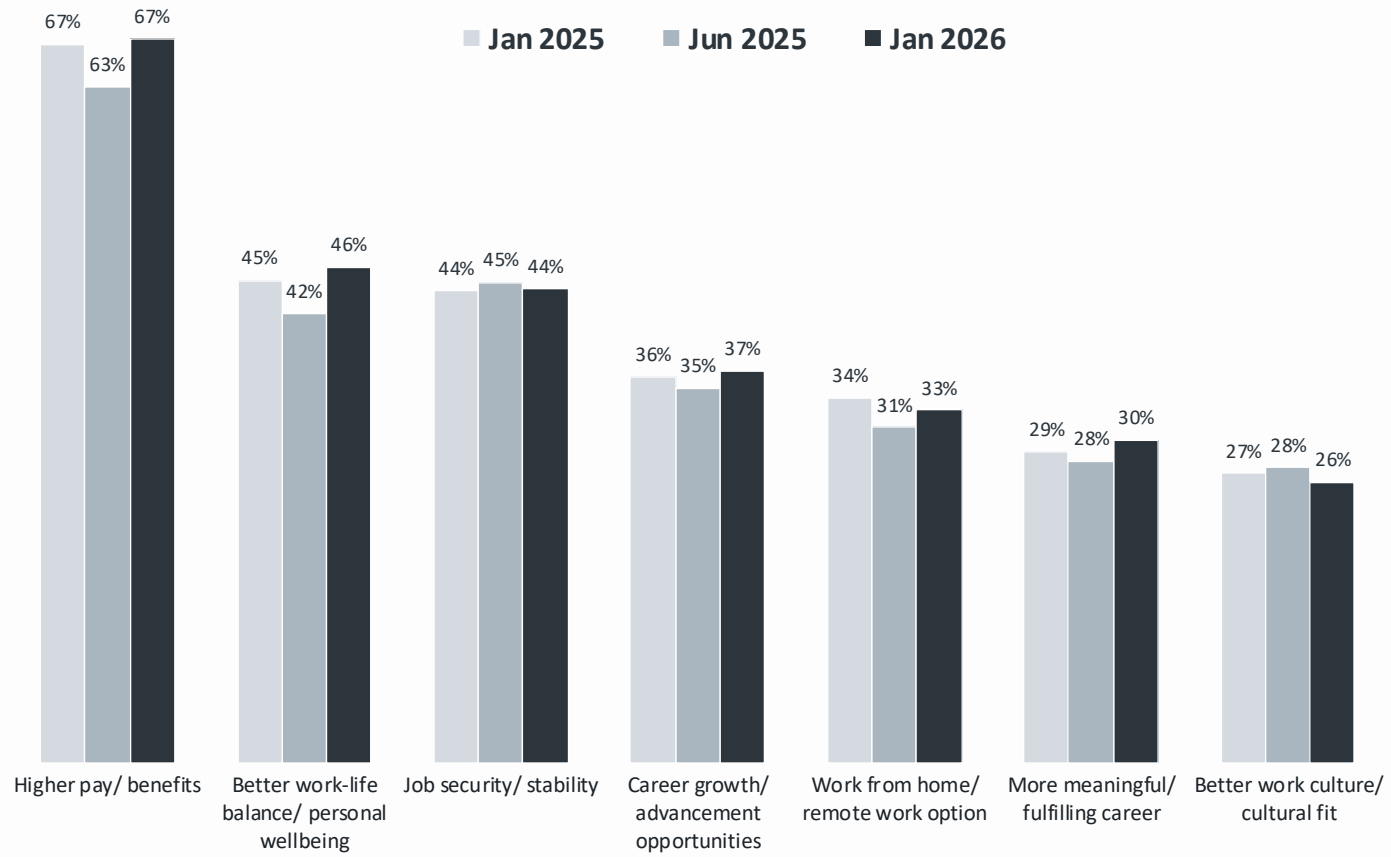
- The intent of this study was to capture a broad-based look at career exploration, allowing for comparisons across occupation categories. The trade-off with this approach is less detail in any one occupation category. Occupations were described at a high level without providing detailed definitions or an extensive list of jobs falling within the category.
- Past CompTIA research indicates certain segments new to the field of information technology (IT) have a number of preconceived notions of what the career field entails. In some cases, job seekers may have an interest in a job role with a significant technology or data or digital component without thinking of it in the context of a traditional "IT" role.
- The reported rates of engaging in training in this study pertain to active job seekers only. The large segment of workers that routinely train to improve their skills or prepare for a certification exam that are not actively looking (although could be planning for career advancement with their existing employer) are not included in the training figures.
- See prior waves of Job Seeker Trends for additional insight on topics such as gig work and the use of talent marketplaces.

CompTIA, Inc. is a member of the market research industry's Insights Association and adheres to its internationally respected Code of Standards. Any questions regarding the study should be directed to CompTIA Research and Market Intelligence staff at research@comptia.org.



Appendix

Factors driving job seekers to pursue new employment opportunities



Deterring factors in considering a job opportunity with new employer

Female	Male	
44%	42%	Job posting with unrealistic requirements for experience, skill or education
41%	43%	New position not sufficiently better than current job, e.g. in work, salary, etc.
44%	38%	Red flags with hiring manager / team you'd be working with
30%	36%	Employer not committed to career growth and advancement opportunities
28%	36%	Employer reputation / cultural fit with your values
27%	22%	Lack of remote work or WFH option / work location

The data is generally consistent across demographic categories with segments rating deterring factors similarly. There were minimal changes in comparing the data to the prior survey wave.

What workers want from employers to use AI in their day-to-day work

Segmentations by gender, generation, general education level and job seeking status

Support that employees most want for using AI tools on the job	Overall	Women	Men	Gen Zers	Mille-nnials	Gen Xers	Baby Boomers	< 4-yr Degree	4-yr Degree	Job Seekers	Non-Job Seekers
Training on how to use AI tools effectively in my job	48%	46%	50%	42%	50%	48%	53%	47%	50%	54%	42%
Clear guidance or policies on when and how I should use AI tools	40%	38%	41%	42%	43%	35%	36%	38%	43%	44%	35%
Reassurance that appropriate use of AI will not put my job at grater risk	35%	35%	35%	40%	38%	30%	30%	36%	34%	40%	29%
Time during work to practice and build AI skills	34%	29%	37%	34%	35%	33%	31%	32%	36%	38%	28%
Access to employer-approved AI tools	32%	26%	37%	37%	34%	29%	28%	29%	35%	36%	29%
None of the above or not applicable	16%	21%	12%	12%	12%	21%	23%	19%	11%	9%	25%