NEWMIND PARTNERS

NEWMIND RESEARCH · BENCHMARK REPORT 10

AI READINESS BENCHMARK 2026

How many firms use AI according to official statistics, why so few see value, what holds them back, what the EU AI Act now requires, what a pilot is worth, and the playbooks and worksheets to get ready.

Edition 1
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Page numbers refer to the full report.

CHAPTER 01

About this edition

This is Edition 1 of the NEWMIND AI Readiness Benchmark. It is a desk-research edition: it contains no survey data. It is built on official statistics, official legal texts, academic and public research, and vendors' and consultancies' own published research, each fetched, saved and checked for this edition.

What this edition contains

- **Adoption**: AI use by businesses from the US Census Bureau[1], Statistics Canada[2], the UK Office for National Statistics[3] and Eurostat[4], by size, sector, country and purpose, and why surveys of large firms report much higher figures.
- **Value**: what is published on value from AI, project failure and abandonment, productivity and costs, with vendor and consultancy figures tagged.
- **Readiness**: a six-dimension readiness model, then data, skills, talent, sourcing, barriers, governance and the operating model.
- **Regulation**: the EU AI Act timeline as amended in 2026[5,6], fines, AI literacy, scope, and US and international policy.
- **A transparent model**: what an AI team costs, what saved time is worth and when a pilot pays back, from US wage statistics[7], labelled 'Market research model · based on published benchmarks'.
- **10 playbooks**: choose the first use case, get the data ready, build AI literacy and skills, run a pilot that can fail fast, move from pilot to production, buy, adapt or build, a minimum governance kit, prepare for the EU AI Act, test AI agents safely, measure value the finance team accepts.
- **Self-assessment toolkit**: a KPI sheet, a readiness scoring worksheet, scenario tables, a cost reference and 11 blank worksheets (use case shortlist, data readiness check, skills and training plan, pilot plan and go or no-go rule, production readiness, vendor and route comparison, ai system inventory, eu ai act obligations, agent test log, value tracker, 90-day plan).

What it does not contain yet

No original survey data. Edition 1 is desk research. A later edition is planned to add a survey of firms, with readiness scores and measured results that firms do not publish.

Who it is for

Chief executives, COOs, CIOs and CTOs, heads of data and transformation, and the finance and legal leads who sign off AI projects.

You will recognise these signals

- Several AI tools are in use, but no one can list them all
- Pilots start often and rarely reach daily work
- No one can say what an AI project has saved or earned
- The board asks about the EU AI Act and no one owns the answer

What to measure

- AI use by team and process, with the tools behind it
- Pilots started, scaled and stopped in the last 12 months
- Hours saved or value gained per use case, against a baseline
- Data quality on the processes AI would touch
- Staff trained to use AI, by role

How to read the numbers

- **Official figures** carry a numbered source and their population: which firms, which country, which period. Surveys ask different questions, so figures from different countries are shown side by side, never averaged.
- **Vendor and consultancy figures** are tagged 'vendor claim' or 'consultancy claim'. They are not independently verified and are never used as model inputs.
- **Models** are transparent: every formula and input is printed so you can replace it with your own data.
- **Dates**: legal dates come only from the official texts and are stated against October 2026.
- **Currency**: US dollars throughout. Figures published in other currencies are labelled with their code.

From benchmark to your numbers

A NEWMIND feasibility audit measures your own organisation in 2–3 weeks and delivers:

- Your readiness score on each dimension, against the published figures
- A ranked list of use cases with the value at stake
- The data, skills and governance gaps to close first
- An inventory of your AI systems against the AI Act timeline

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CHAPTER 02

Executive summary

Official statistics put AI use at about one business in five, rising fast and concentrated in large firms. Value lags use: few organisations report a measurable result, and many projects stop before they reach daily work. The published evidence points to the same few levers: a use case with a baseline, data fit for it, skills in the teams that use it, and governance that meets the EU AI Act.

17% to 20%

US businesses in the Census Bureau's survey using AI, December 2025 to May 2026 [1]

20.0%

Of EU enterprises with 10 or more persons employed, excluding the financial sector using any AI technology, 2025 [4]

70.3%

Of EU enterprises with 10 or more persons employed that had considered using AI but did not use it, citing a lack of relevant expertise, 2025 [8]

Ten findings

01 About one business in five uses AI

Between December 2025 and May 2026, AI use among US businesses in the Census Bureau's survey hovered between 17% and 20% [1]. In 2025, 20.0% of EU enterprises with 10 or more persons employed, excluding the financial sector used at least one AI technology [4].

02 Use is rising fast

In Canada, 12.2% of businesses reported having used AI to produce goods or deliver services over the 12 months preceding the survey in the second quarter of 2025, up from 6.1% a year earlier [2]. Self-reported use among UK businesses with 10 or more employees increased from around 12% to around 35% since late 2023 [3].

03 Size is the widest divide

In the EU in 2025, 55.0% of enterprises with 250 or more persons employed used AI, more than three times the 17.0% of those with 10 to 49, excluding the financial sector [4]. Small firms are where most of the gap, and most of the opportunity, lies. NEWMIND analysis.

04 Surveys of large firms report far higher use

In McKinsey's 2025 global survey, 88% of respondents reported regular AI use in at least one business function, against 78% a year earlier [9] CONSULTANCY CLAIM. Respondents are people in large organisations, not firms in the economy; chapter 15 reconciles the two views.

05 Use is not value

In the same survey, just 39% of respondents reported EBIT impact at the enterprise level [9] CONSULTANCY CLAIM. In BCG's survey, 74% of companies had yet to show tangible value from their use of AI [10] CONSULTANCY CLAIM.

06 Many projects fail or are cancelled

By some estimates, more than 80% of AI projects fail, twice the rate of failure for IT projects that do not involve AI, according to RAND [11]. Gartner forecasts that over 40% of agentic AI projects will be canceled by the end of 2027 [12] VENDOR CLAIM.

07 Expertise and data are the barriers

Among EU enterprises with 10 or more persons employed that had considered using AI but did not use it, a lack of relevant expertise was the most-cited reason in 2025, at 70.3% [8]. In a Gartner survey, 63% of organisations either did not have or were unsure if they had the right data management practices for AI [13] VENDOR CLAIM.

08 Finance leaders see modest early impact

Of 183 CFOs and senior finance leaders polled by Gartner, 59% reported using AI in their departments, up just slightly from 58% [14] VENDOR CLAIM; 91% reported low or moderate impact initially [14] VENDOR CLAIM.

09 Measured time savings are small but worth pricing

In a US survey of employed respondents, time savings from generative AI equalled 1.4% of total work hours [15]. Priced at the US mean wage for all occupations, that is about $48,800 a year in wages for a firm of 50 staff (NEWMIND model).

10 The EU AI Act now applies, with high-risk duties later

The AI Act has applied since 2 August 2026 [5]. As amended in 2026, obligations for high-risk systems listed in Annex III, such as AI used in hiring or credit decisions, apply from 2 December 2027 [6]. An inventory of AI systems is the first step.

What to do on Monday

1. Fill in the KPI sheet for your organisation (full report, chapter 55).
2. Score your readiness on the six dimensions (full report, chapter 56).
3. List and rank your candidate use cases (full report, chapter 59).
4. Price the time a use case would save with your own staff and wages (full report, chapter 42).
5. Run one pilot with a baseline and a go or no-go rule (full report, chapter 48).

CHAPTER 03

United States: about one business in five

The cleanest view of US business adoption is the Census Bureau's Business Trends and Outlook Survey, a biweekly, nationally representative survey of businesses. Between December 2025 and May 2026, AI use among US businesses in the survey hovered between 17% and 20%, and between 20% and 23% of those businesses expected to be using it in the next six months [1].

17% to 20%
US businesses in the BTOS using AI, December 2025 to May 2026 [1]

37%
US firms with at least 250 employees using AI in their business operations [1]

Under 20%
US firms with four or fewer employees using AI [1]

Size decides most of the gap

Large firms adopt first. 37% of US firms with at least 250 employees reported using AI in their business operations [1]. In the collection period ending 3 May 2026, 32% of firms with 100 to 249 employees said they used AI [1]. At the other end, less than 20% of firms with four or fewer employees reported using AI [1].

US FIRM SIZE	USING AI	WHAT THE SOURCE SAYS
250 employees or more	**37%**	Reported using AI in business operations [1]
100 to 249 employees	**32%**	Period ending 3 May 2026 [1]
Four or fewer employees	**under 20%**	Less than 20% [1]
All businesses in the survey	**17% to 20%**	December 2025 to May 2026 [1]

The Census Bureau reports these as shares of firms in each size band, so a large firm and a one-person business each count once. The share of employees working in a firm that uses AI is higher than the share of firms.

What this means

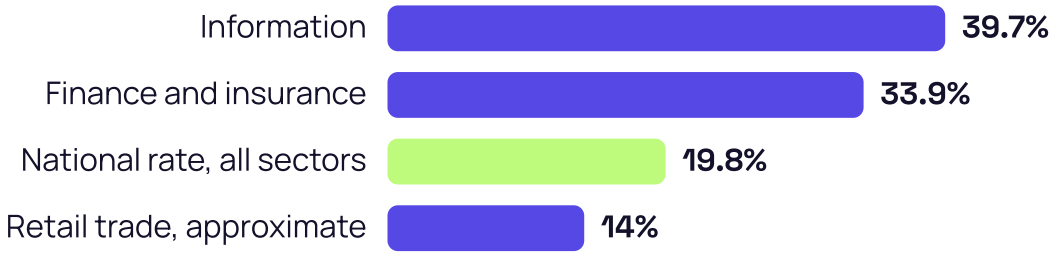
- Four in five US businesses in the survey did not report using AI in the six months to May 2026. A company that has not started is in the majority, not behind a crowd.
- The gap between large and small firms is the strongest pattern in every official series in this report. It returns in chapter 13.
- Expectations run only a few points above use, so the official data show steady growth, not a rush.

CHAPTER 04

United States: the sectors that lead

As of 3 May 2026, AI use among US businesses in the Information sector was 39.7%, and in Finance and Insurance 33.9%, both higher than the national rate of 19.8% [1].

US businesses using AI, by sector, % as of 3 May 2026



Source: US Census Bureau, Business Trends and Outlook Survey [1]. The retail figure is the approximate share the Census Bureau gives in words.

Retail sits below the average

In retail, around 14% of US businesses currently use AI and about 17% expect to in the next six months [1]. Retail is a large, low-margin sector with many small firms, which fits the size pattern in chapter 3.

Reading the sector gap

The two leading sectors share three features: much of their work is already digital text and numbers, they employ many people who write software or analyse data, and they buy software as a matter of routine. A sector that runs on physical work, in shops, kitchens or building sites, has fewer tasks that today's AI tools touch directly. The same order shows up in Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Union in the next chapters. NEWMIND analysis.

Questions to ask in your own sector

- Which of our tasks are already digital text or numbers? Those are the candidates for a first pilot.
- Who in the team already writes software or works with data? A sector-average adoption rate says little about a firm that has those people.
- Are our competitors in a leading sector or a lagging one? Benchmark against the sector rate, not the national one.

CHAPTER 05

Canada: use doubled in a year

In the second quarter of 2025, 12.2% of Canadian businesses reported having used AI to produce goods or deliver services over the 12 months preceding the survey [2], up from 6.1% in the second quarter of 2024 [2].

12.2%
Canadian businesses that used AI to produce goods or deliver services, 12 months to Q2 2025 [2]

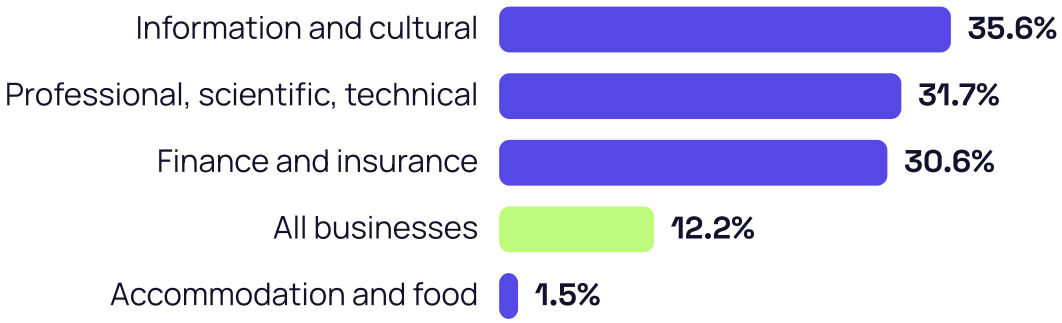
6.1%
The same measure for Canadian businesses, Q2 2024 [2]

35.7%
Canadian AI-using businesses whose most adopted application was text analytics [2]

The same sectors lead

Among Canadian businesses, those in information and cultural industries, at 35.6%, professional, scientific and technical services, at 31.7%, and finance and insurance, at 30.6%, were the most likely to use AI [2]. Use was lowest in accommodation and food services, at 1.5% [2].

Canadian businesses using AI, by industry, %, second quarter of 2025



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Business Conditions [2].

What Canadian firms use it for

Among Canadian businesses that used AI, the most adopted application was text analytics, at 35.7%, followed by data analytics, at 26.4%, and virtual agents or chat bots, at 24.8% [2]. These are reading, summarising and answering tasks: the work that language models made cheap.

Canada's measure is narrower than the US one: it counts AI used to produce goods or deliver services, not AI used anywhere in the business. The two rates are not directly comparable.

CHAPTER 07

United Kingdom: roughly a third of firms

The Office for National Statistics reports that self-reported AI use in UK businesses with 10 or more employees increased from around 12% to around 35% since late 2023, with larger firms more likely to have adopted AI [3].

About 35%
UK businesses with 10 or more employees using AI, up from about 12% since late 2023 [3]

18%
UK businesses with 10 or more employees using large language models, the most used AI technology, June 2026 [3]

58%
UK businesses in information and communication using AI [3]

Sector and size

Over half of UK businesses in information and communication, 58%, reported using AI, compared with 13% in construction [3]. By size, 28% of UK businesses with 0 to 9 employees reported use of at least one AI technology, against 49% of those with 250 or more employees [3].

UK BUSINESSES	USING AI	NOTE
10 or more employees, latest	about 35%	From about 12% in late 2023 [3]
Information and communication	58%	[3]
Construction	13%	[3]
0 to 9 employees	28%	[3]
250 or more employees	49%	[3]

Source: Office for National Statistics, Business Insights and Conditions Survey [3]. The UK rate is higher than the US and Canadian rates partly because the survey asks about a list of AI technologies and partly because its headline covers firms with 10 or more employees.

Why the national rates differ

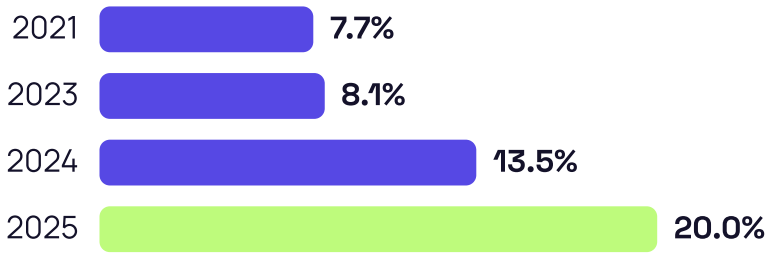
- Each statistics office asks a different question about a different population over a different period. The US asks about use in business operations; Canada about use to produce goods or services; the UK about use of at least one AI technology.
- Only the size and sector patterns line up exactly: larger firms and information businesses lead everywhere. Benchmark against those patterns, not the headline rates.
- Compare a firm with its own country's figure for its size band and sector. Chapter 13 sets the size bands side by side.

CHAPTER 08

European Union: one enterprise in five

Eurostat surveys EU enterprises with 10 or more persons employed, excluding the financial sector. In 2025, 20.0% of them used at least one AI technology, a share that rose from 13.5% in 2024 and from 7.7% in 2021 [4].

EU enterprises using any AI technology, %, by year



By size of enterprise

EU ENTERPRISES, PERSONS EMPLOYED	2021	2023	2024	2025
10 to 49 persons employed	6.1%	6.4%	11.2%	17.0%
50 to 249 persons employed	12.6%	13.1%	21.0%	30.4%
250 or more persons employed	28.4%	30.5%	41.2%	55.0%
All enterprises, 10 or more	7.7%	8.1%	13.5%	20.0%

Share of EU enterprises with 10 or more persons employed, excluding the financial sector, using at least one AI technology [4]. Eurostat's definition of 'at least one AI technology' has been extended over time, so the trend is a guide, not an exact series.

Large EU enterprises, those with 250 or more persons employed, went from 28.4% in 2021 to 55.0% in 2025. Small ones, with 10 to 49 persons employed, reached 17.0% [4]. The gap in points widened even as small firms grew faster in relative terms.

What this means

- The EU rate grew faster between 2024 and 2025 than in any earlier interval in the series, which matches the arrival of generative AI tools in ordinary office software.
- More than half of large EU enterprises now use AI; among small ones it is still fewer than one in five. Most firms buying advice on AI readiness are in the second group.
- The detailed chapters that follow split this rate by technology, purpose, sector and country.

CHAPTER 73

Sources

Each entry gives the date that applies to it: when a law was adopted or came into force, when a document was published, or, for live web pages and datasets, when it was accessed (9 October 2026). Figures quoted are short, attributed and linked; no paywalled tables and no third-party charts are reproduced.

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END OF SAMPLE

Get the full report

This sample includes the cover, contents, about page, executive summary, AI adoption in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Union, and the sources cited in them. The full report continues with adoption by technology, purpose, sector, country and firm size, workers and agents, the value gap and project failure, the readiness model, data, skills, governance, the EU AI Act as amended in 2026, the NEWMIND model, ten playbooks and the self-assessment toolkit.

Full report

newmindpartners.com/benchmark-ai-readiness.html#report

NEWMIND PARTNERS

NEXT STEP

TURN THIS BENCHMARK INTO AI THAT PAYS ITS WAY.

You now know what is published on AI adoption, value and readiness. NEWMIND PARTNERS measures where your organisation stands, then designs, builds and tests the use cases that close the gap, with the governance the AI Act asks for.

01

Feasibility audit

In 2–3 weeks we map where your organisation stands on your data (read-only): the AI already in use, the processes worth automating, the state of the data behind them and the skills in the teams. Then we compare every option on the market, off-the-shelf or custom.

02

Design

We rank the use cases by value at stake, write the pilot plan and the go or no-go rule for each one, and design the governance and AI Act inventory around them.

03

Build and run

Our senior engineers build the systems, connect them to the tools you already use, and can run them in production with monitoring.

04

Prove it

Baseline on day one, then the measured change in hours, cost and quality against a control, reported every month.

Start with a feasibility audit

Find out which use cases pay first, what stands in the way, and the business case to back them. No commitment.

Start a feasibility audit →

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