the wheel

Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.



AI Use and Attitudes

Community and Voluntary Sector Skills Digest

This report was authored by **Sheryl Lynch** and **Mairead O'Connor**, on behalf of The Wheel and supported by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, through the National Training Fund.

The authors wish to thank the following:

- The **398 organisations** that contributed to the survey and focus group activities.
- **Intermediary organisations** and **networks** that supported dissemination of research activities across the country.
- **Colleagues** who helped us to host the focus groups and gave feedback on aspects of the draft report, including Rob Brown who supported the editing of the final report.
- **The Sector Skills Subcommittee of The Wheel's Board**, that reviewed and provided guidance on the research plan, activities and report findings, as they evolved.

A note on terminology

The authors recognise the complexity of Ireland's nonprofit sector and the large range of important, distinct subsectors operating in this environment. This report refers to the nonprofit sector interchangeably with "the sector" and the Community and Voluntary (CV) sector. Included in this designation are community organisations, voluntary groups, charities, and social enterprises that are independently governed by unpaid volunteers and operating for the public good.

About The Wheel

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups, and social enterprises. As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the sector and advocate on behalf of our growing community of members. As a supportive resource, we offer advice, training, and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the sector.

the wheel
Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Contents

Introduction **4**

Context **5**

Methodology **10**

Key Findings **11**

- CV Sector Engagement with AI 11
- AI use patterns in the CV sector 12
- Key take aways from the Short AI Use Survey 15

Attitudes about AI use in the CV sector **16**

Risks **17**

- Risk Theme 1 Deskilling as a sector capital loss risk 18
- Risk Theme 2 Lack of trust and safety of AI 19
- Risk Theme 3 Depletion of environmental and critical resources 20
- Risk Theme 4 Job loss and redundancy as a sector capital loss risk 21

Opportunities **22**

- Opportunity Theme 1 Use of AI tools to save time 23
- Opportunity Theme 2 Use of AI tools to boost skills and fill skills gaps 24
- Opportunity Theme 3 AI as resource provider and maximiser 25
- Opportunity Theme 4 AI as accessibility enabler 25

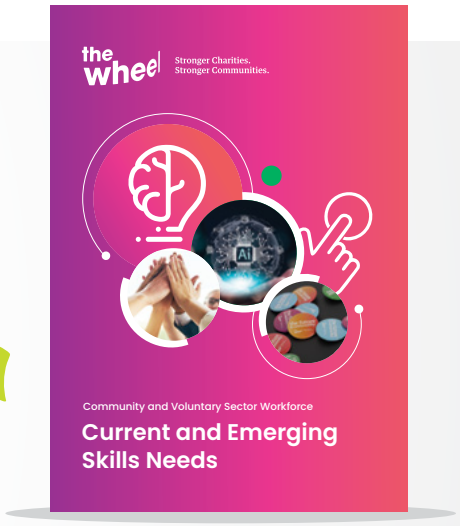
Conclusion and key recommendations **26**

Recommendations **29**

References **30**

Introduction

This publication is a companion report to The Wheel's **Community and Voluntary Sector Workforce: Current and Emerging Skills Needs** report, launched in November 2026.



This report provides insights on how the Community and Voluntary (CV) sector workforce are using artificial intelligence (AI) and what they think about the

Risks and

Opportunities

of this technology.



The report then explores what this data can tell us about facilitating sector responses to protecting and enhancing our work in the age of AI. The authors endeavour to contribute to a sectoral view of AI skills adoption and the strategic responses that may be most appropriate at this phase of digital transformation.

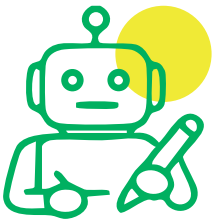
Context



The Central Statistics Office (CSO) released figures in 2025 showing that



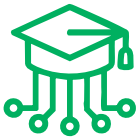
42%
of internet users had used generative AI in some form.[1]



Of that cohort



50%
had used AI for **work**, while



28%
had used it for **educational purposes**

1 In the three months prior to completing the CSO *Household Digital Consumer Behaviour* 2025 survey

Having published a new National Digital and AI Strategy, *Digital Ireland – Connecting our People, Securing our Future*, in February 2026, the Irish Government has articulated its ambition to build

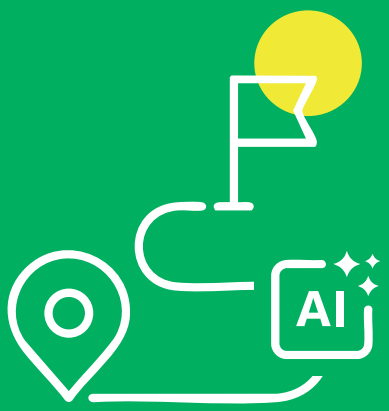
"a digital economy which supports competitiveness and innovation, while also protecting data privacy and fundamental rights"

(Department of the Taoiseach, 2026:3)



The commitments under the strategy, enhanced by the announcement of the *Intelligence: Applied* initiative in October 2026, include:

- 100% of key public services digitalised by 2030;
- A new AI Office of Ireland, as the central coordinating authority for the EU AI Act;
- €150 million AI Future Skills programme to support workers' skills and lifelong learning;
- The next phase of AIReady.ie, the Government's free online AI skilling platform;
- A New National AI Literacy Taskforce;
- AI Sector Champions to spotlight AI opportunities;
- A national network of Digital Citizenship Champions; and
- Enhanced readiness in cybersecurity and regulation.



The implications of AI adoption go well beyond technology alone and are impacting **every aspect of community and public life.** Increasingly, digital skills needs and the impact of AI are major themes for the workforce and for workforce policy globally.

The **OECD** has noted the impact of AI

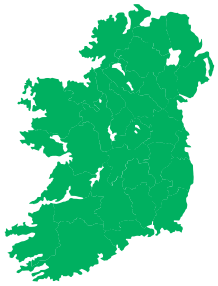
"driving significant shifts in job creation, skills demand and overall workforce dynamics"

(2026:14)

The **National Skills Council** recently released advice that emphasised the wide-ranging impact of AI on skills and the need for targeted action across various sectors and cohorts.

(2026:3)

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs note that



Ireland ranks 1st in the EU in relation to AI diffusion **(2026:9).**

71.7% of all Irish enterprises are using at least one advanced digital technology such as AI, cloud and data analytics, above the EU average 63.2%

(European Commission, 2026:15).

However, the CSO show that

20% of *Household Digital Consumer Behaviour* respondents who had not used GenAI in 2025 did not know how to use it.

(CSO, 2025).

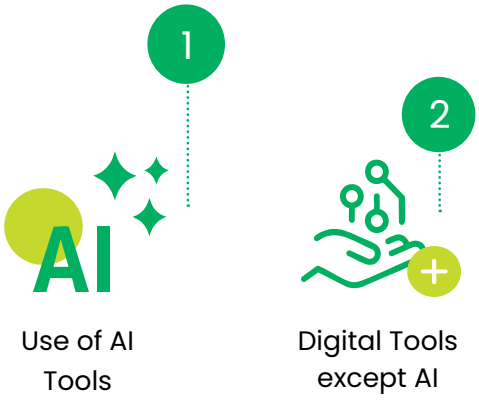
"57% of respondents ranked AI as impacting the skills required by Irish operations over the next five years [...] divergent views on new technologies points to a preparedness gap between small and large firms."

(Ibec, 2025: 50)

The CV sector is also at **risk of a preparedness gap**, both in terms of maximising the opportunities of AI and in safeguarding against the unique risks that a hurried, uncritical integration poses.

In The Wheel's recent Current and Emerging Skills Needs Report, the top organisational skills need identified by decision makers was the 'Use of AI Tools', with 'Digital Tools, except AI' a close second.

The Wheel, 2026: 67



Use of AI Tools

Digital Tools except AI

However, there is currently **no national digitalisation strategy** or **targeted systemic digitalisation funding** for the Irish CV sector. There is also a lack of granular data on digital maturity levels among CV sector organisations in Ireland. Given the government's ambition for digitalisation of public services and building an inclusive digital society, the urgent need for more digitalisation capacity, and digital skills data for the sector is obvious.

The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht's recently published five-year strategy recognises that:

"the introduction of AI-driven technologies and increased digitalisation pose challenges for the sector and supports will be needed if the sector is to thrive in an increasingly complex digital world".



The strategy commits to working with colleagues in the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment to support

> "the C&V sector to enhance digitalisation, through the AI – Good for Business initiative and the Charter for Digital Inclusion, and ensure digital inclusion for marginalised communities and other digitally excluded groups"

(2026:25).



However, the *Digital Ireland* strategy, which sets out the Government's ambition to strengthen our position as a global hub for applied AI innovation, does not refer to the CV sector at all.



The European AI Act (2024) establishes a comprehensive framework for AI regulation, tiered according to risk exposure. Given the nature of the work carried out by many CV organisations, and the communities and sensitive data that they work with, the implications of the AI Act will be far reaching. Agencies and regulators in Ireland in various sectors are recognising the need for AI guidance, as evidenced by recent publications such as the National Disability Authority's 2024 paper, *AI and Disability Inclusion in Ireland* (NDA, 2024) and the Health Information and Quality Authority's *National Guidance on Responsible and Safe Use of AI in Health and Social Care* Services (HIQA, 2026).

The complexities of applying guidance and regulation to the use of such a quickly evolving and complex technology are evident in the literature. For example, the NDA acknowledges:

> "Effective inclusive AI has the potential to address many of these challenges [of access to public services] both from a service provider and user perspective, whereby it could streamline operations and enhance engagement and accessibility for all users. However, it is crucial to recognise that mishandling AI interactions or limiting access modalities could lead to significant marginalisation of people with disabilities."

(NDA, 2024; 22)

An important thread through the emerging regulation and guidance on the use of AI is **the need for transparency**.

- Under the AI Act, providers and professional deployers of generative AI must ensure that synthetic content is clearly disclosed as AI-generated to the public.
- Under the HIQA guidance, the need for transparency is emphasised for services when using AI tools, including having appropriate levels of traceability and explainability (2026:24).

There is **no national standard** for digital competence in Ireland.



The **DigComp framework**, endorsed by the EU Commission, is the recognised standard in this area and has been adopted by 22 of the 27 member states since its launch in 2013

(European Commission, 2025).

DigComp 3.0, the revision launched in 2025, prioritises Artificial Intelligence (AI) competence, cybersecurity competence, digital rights, choice and responsibilities, wellbeing in digital environments, and competences to tackle mis- and disinformation (Cosgrave and Cachia, 2025). Many of which are identified in our research below as AI skills priorities for CV sector workers.

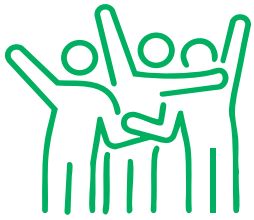
Despite the absence of a national sector AI strategy, the sector itself has **actively engaged** with the development of AI.

Since 2024, The Wheel has delivered and supported AI workshops with trusted partners through our **training programmes:**

Upskilling over

1,350

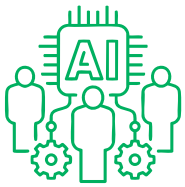
trainees across the sector.



Our Training Calendar provided AI upskilling to over

700

people



The Wheel has also **funded AI skilling** through the Training Links programme, resulting in the upskilling of over



650

sector trainees working in social enterprises

In recent years, other sector bodies and education providers have also produced training and guidance targeted at the specific digital needs of the sector.

In 2026 **Rethink Ireland** commenced the delivery of the AI for Good Fund, a capacity-building initiative to help the sector understand and adopt AI.

The research in this report points to a widespread engagement with AI, right across the sector, but crucially also to gaps in the provision of training, support and strategic oversight.



Given the demand for AI skills and the national digital funding and strategic context, The Wheel's AI research set out in this report offers important insights on how the sector is responding to this workforce transformation. It also sheds light on how support may best be coordinated to maximise the benefits and mitigate the potential risks.

Methodology



The Wheel conducted research with **400 Community** and **Voluntary sector workers** and **volunteers** as part of our Sector Skills Research programme between March and August 2026.

The authors conducted a quantitative survey followed by qualitative focus groups to explore the numerical results. The survey captured qualitative data on the risks and opportunities of using AI tools. The authors conducted a lexical count of the opportunities and risks data, which is a quantitative and qualitative measurement of vocabulary choices, word types, and semantic patterns used in spoken or written discourse. A frequency and collocation count was also conducted, which identifies how often specific words, terms, or semantic clusters appear, and which words tend to co-occur together (collocations) e.g. "time" with "saving" and "security" with "data". The authors then conducted a thematic analysis and summarised the key themes.

Throughout July 2026, we conducted

2 **online** sessions

2 **in-person** sessions

reaching

86 people working and volunteering in Ireland's nonprofit sector.

All 86 of these participants answered an additional **one-question survey** on AI use.

The authors applied descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to deduce AI use patterns and compare against a UK dataset.

This mixed methods approach enabled comparative analysis and an affinity mapping exercise that produced a thematic analysis. For a detailed methodology description for this research and the more in-depth sector skills programme of work, please see section 3 of The Wheel's *Community and Voluntary Sector Workforce: Current and Emerging Skills Needs* (2026).



Key Findings

The authors found a high demand for AI upskilling and a high level of use in our empirical research.

1. **65%** of respondents are using AI to carry out tasks in their work, with little difference between usage in larger and smaller organisations;
2. As an international comparison, the UK's *Charity Digital Skills Report* (2026:6) found that **79% of UK charities are using AI**;
3. Almost a quarter of those who use AI stated that they are **"not so"** or **"not at all confident"** using AI tools in their role;
4. Younger workers are leading in confidence in their use of AI. However, where **83%** were "very confident" or "extremely confident" using other digital tools, this fell significantly to 38% for AI tools;
5. **75%** of all respondents reported needing some or significant upskilling in AI tools;
6. For decision makers, the top two upskilling priorities are the **use of AI** and using **digital tools** (except AI); and
7. **55%** of decision makers in organisations with over 50 employees have "no formal approach" to AI

Further findings regarding confidence rates, upskilling needs and emerging skills trends can be found in The Wheel's *Community and Voluntary Sector Workforce: Current and Emerging Skills Needs* report (The Wheel: 2026).

The remainder of this *AI Use and Attitudes* report outlines how CV workers and volunteers in Ireland are using AI and what they think about the

Risks and

Opportunities

associated with it.

The Wheel conducted in-person focus groups in July 2026 as part of the skills research programme. The 86 attendees were from a variety of organisations in the sector and held a mix of professional roles at various levels. They were asked to fill out a one-question survey. We received a 100% response rate. All attendees were either interested in or professionally expert in CV skills and workforce development. This should be considered when interpreting the AI use findings, particularly the high use of AI for learning and development tasks. The figure below shows the top uses of AI as reported by this Focus Group cohort.

Figure 1 Use of AI tools for work[2]

Do you or others in your organisation use AI tools in any of the following areas (formally or informally)?



2 Use of AI tools for work. Access the data via Datawrapper here: https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/ypwPb/1/

The figure below compares the top five uses of AI from The Wheel's sample with the UK's *Charity Digital Skills Report* (2026: 65) where 994 charities were surveyed.

Do you or others in your organisation use AI tools in any of the following areas (formally or informally)?

Figure 2 Comparing Ireland and and UK top 5 answers



CV Sector
Ireland 2026

59%
Administration and project management*

42%
Grant or funding application writing

36%
Communications and fundraising

35%
Social Media

29%
Translation, interpretation or accessibility, tied with Learning and Development



CV Sector
UK 2026

63%
Administration and project management*

45%
Grant fundraising

39%
Social Media

36%
Communications and Fundraising

31%
Monitoring and Evaluation, tied with Governance and Compliance

* E.g. meeting notes, emails

Figure 2 shows that there is broad similarity in the use patterns across both samples.

- The top two uses of AI for both samples are for administration and project management and grant or funding application writing;
- A similar pattern of use for content creation is evident as illustrated using AI for communications and social media; and
- For The Wheel's sample, using AI for translation, interpretation or accessibility (29%) tied with Learning and Development (29%). This is likely due to the type of professionals surveyed at the sector skills research event and is significantly higher than the UK (13%). However, the results point to the need for further research on the adoption of AI for upskilling and accessibility and its potential sector-specific opportunity in Ireland.

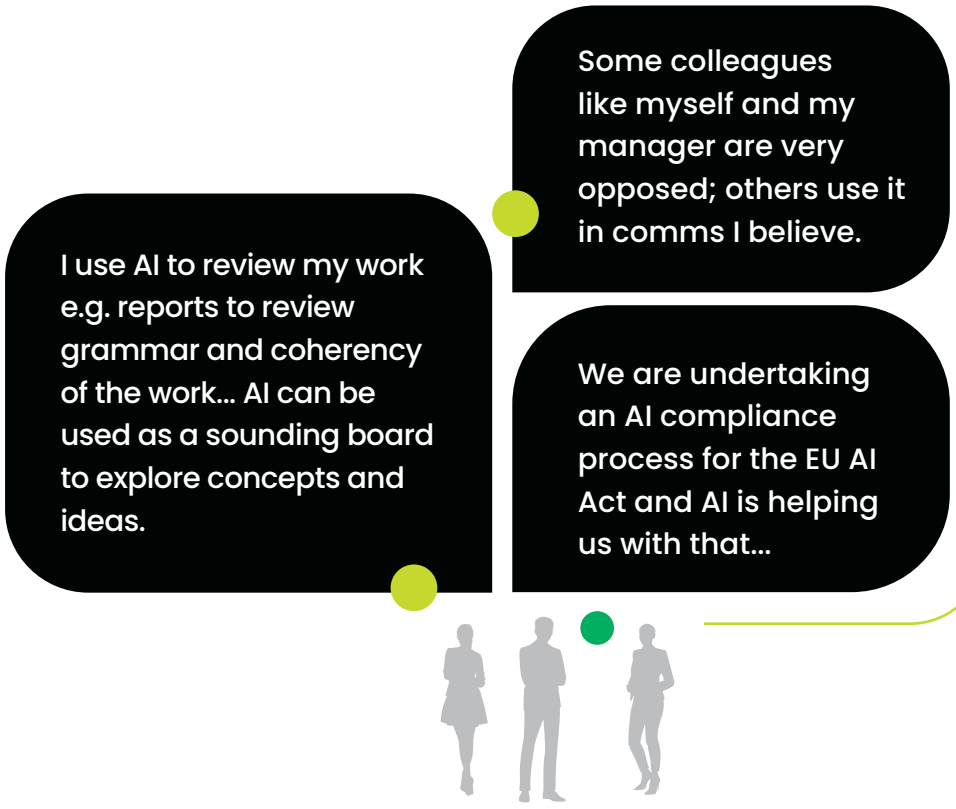
Our findings differ considerably in rates of AI use for the following tasks:

- Governance and Compliance (17%), almost half the rate for the UK (31%);
- Monitoring and evaluation (15%), half the rate for the UK (31%); and
- Recruitment and HR (23%), 15% higher than the UK (8%)

Respondents for both cohorts report low usage of AI for the following tasks:

- Service delivery (8%) compared to 9% in the UK; and
- Financial management (12%) compared to 8% in the UK

The Wheel's short AI Use survey collected feedback on "other uses" of AI that were not listed. Some quotes from respondents are presented below:



The range of uses reported in our research inform us that sector workers are using AI to assist with specific communications deliverables (e.g. press releases) and even AI compliance tasks in response to the EU's AI Act (2024).

Key take aways from the Short AI Use Survey

- It is notable that the top four tasks that people are using AI for (i.e. administration, grant writing, communications, and social media) are the same in both Irish and UK samples with similar proportions of use;
- Use of AI for Governance and compliance in Ireland (17%) is much lower than the UK (31%);
- The sector seems to be more comfortable with using AI for content creation than procedural checks such as compliance or financial management; and
- The sector reports low use of AI for "service delivery" (8% for Ireland) which suggests sector-specific frontline skilled workers are least likely to need or trust AI to carry out their work

Attitudes about AI use in the CV sector

A recent legal blog from Australia highlights the unique position and perspective that those working with CV groups bring to the global discussion on the application of AI.

The authors point out how the

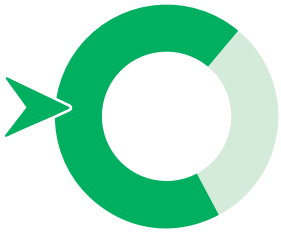
> "sector occupies a unique space, built on trust, human connection and service to beneficiaries. This context calls for thoughtful and meaningful engagement with AI, recognising both its potential and its risks"

Gilbert and Tobin, 2026

In terms of AI behaviours in Ireland, the CSO revealed:

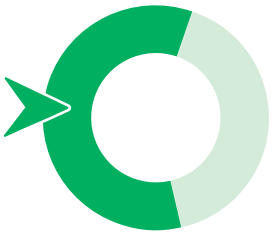
People are using AI more for private purposes (69%) rather than in their professional lives.

69% private use



It also shows that **younger men** are the keenest adopters

72% had used GenAI tools.



The 19% of respondents that had not used GenAI in 2025 "had concerns around the security/ privacy/safety of using GenAI tools" (CSO:2025).[3]

The next section draws on data from The Wheel's Training and Skills Survey where the authors asked respondents about the risks and opportunities associated with AI. Below sets out our findings on current attitudes towards AI.

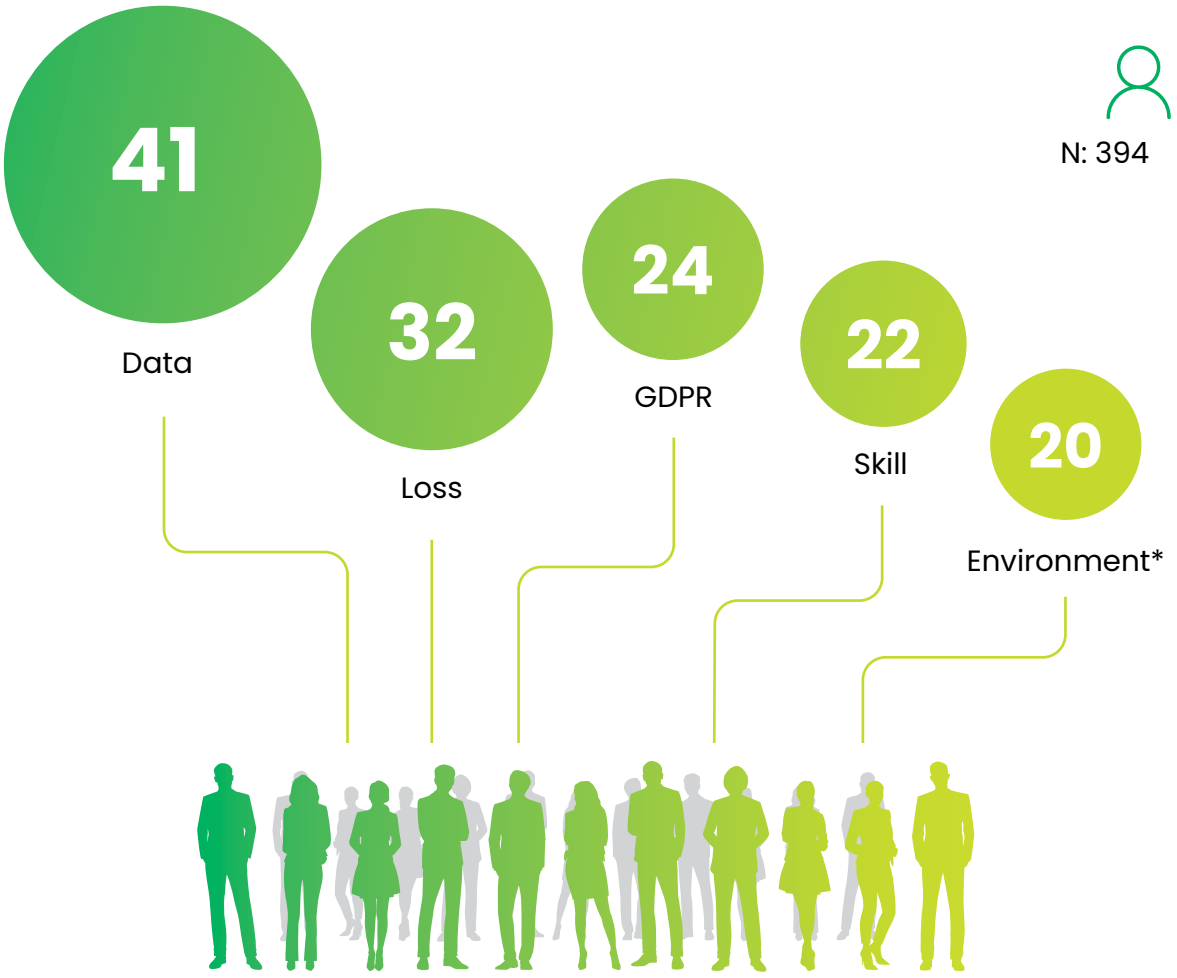
3 The CSO also note that "[f]emales had more security, safety, or privacy concerns about using GenAI tools. Almost one in four (24%) females had such concerns compared with just 13% of males" (2025).

Risks

The Risks of AI are articulated by themes of skills and job loss, and concerns about trust, safety and environmental damage

When asked, "What do you think is the biggest risk posed by adopting AI?", "skill" came up 22 times both in terms of the risk of "deskilling" i.e. losing personal or organisational skills due to AI substitution, atrophy or erasure and "upskilling" i.e. the need to learn how to choose, use, and deploy AI tools effectively.

What do you think is the biggest risk posed by adopting AI?



* including 'environmental damage'

Interestingly, words including "secure" "securing" "security" were mentioned 19 times.

4 6/400 did not complete both the risk and opportunities questions hence why we report N=394 for this dataset

Risk Theme 1

Deskilling as a sector capital loss risk

As the sample is saturated with training and skills professionals, their perspective is that of an expert practitioner. When analysing the occurrence of the word "skill" for this AI risk question, it is apparent that respondents are concerned about the "loss of cognitive skills" as evidenced by a selection of quotes below:



Risk Theme 2

Lack of trust and safety of AI

In addition to respondents articulating the risk of skill attrition or "deskilling" that AI poses to the CV sector, there is a clear lack of confidence in the safety of AI tools. As a sector of experts devoted to advancing social and environmental security, there are well informed arguments of resistance against the adoption of AI tools in their current form.

To illustrate this point, see below some voices from the sector:

Intellectual property and copyright breaches, especially for creative work and research

Biggest risk is that the generated documentation does not receive appropriate quality review before finalisation and publication, which has the capacity to erode public trust as well as relationships between funders and other organisations in the network/sector.

Cyber Security is an issue in a sector where this is skimped on in terms of budget and infrastructure. Hacking into systems is a risk that increases with AI agents. Publishing confidential information publicly will undermine trust in our sector.



Risk Theme 3

Depletion of environmental and critical resources

A widely shared view among respondents was the impact of AI adoption on environmental and energy systems. Though not directly related to skills acquisition, it is clear that without serious attention to AI critical literacy many workers will be alienated from the digital transformation agenda.



Environmental/climate impact and energy needs demanded by AI are detrimental to our goals around reducing carbon emissions. There are also many secondary concerns regarding AI safety and data, ownership of AI companies, ethical issues etc.

For now, I am considering Environmental damage as the biggest risk with reference to AI. Second is privacy.

Due to safety concerns and abuse of electricity and water, [senior leadership] does not want the use of AI at the moment.



Risk Theme 4

Job loss and redundancy as a sector capital loss risk

Sector workers mentioned "job losses" frequently. Being made unemployed in the name of innovation and efficiency is a real fear for people working in an already precarious sector.

> Loss of jobs for real people along with lack of human empathy or understanding.

> I'm worried about AI in relation to redundancy of job roles for humans. Oracle let go of 30,000[5] people. There's an irritating mantra in Ireland of how AI can benefit our work, but let's be real, it has already created huge redundancies [...] Need to put parameters on AI so that it is used by everyday workers to complement their work, while protecting Irish and international jobs and not lining the pockets of the 2% billionaires/ trillionaires and creating greater financial divide.



In conclusion, the thematic analysis suggests that there is a significant cohort of the CV sector that do not trust AI from a data privacy or ethical perspective. The CV workforce has material concerns about the eroding potential of AI on skills acquisition (particularly for younger workers). There are also concerns regarding the retention and mastery of skills, particularly for those with existing sector human capital in the form of highly skilled workers with rich organisational knowledge.

On the other hand, advantages of AI use were articulated by respondents in our research. The section below outlines such benefits and opportunities.

5 There are conflicting sources for this figure e.g. Forbes (April 2026) "Oracle Lays Off 30,000 As AI Spending Surges" and BBC (June 2026) "Tech giant Oracle cuts 21,000 jobs as it embraces AI". Either way, tens of thousands of job cuts have been recorded in 2026.

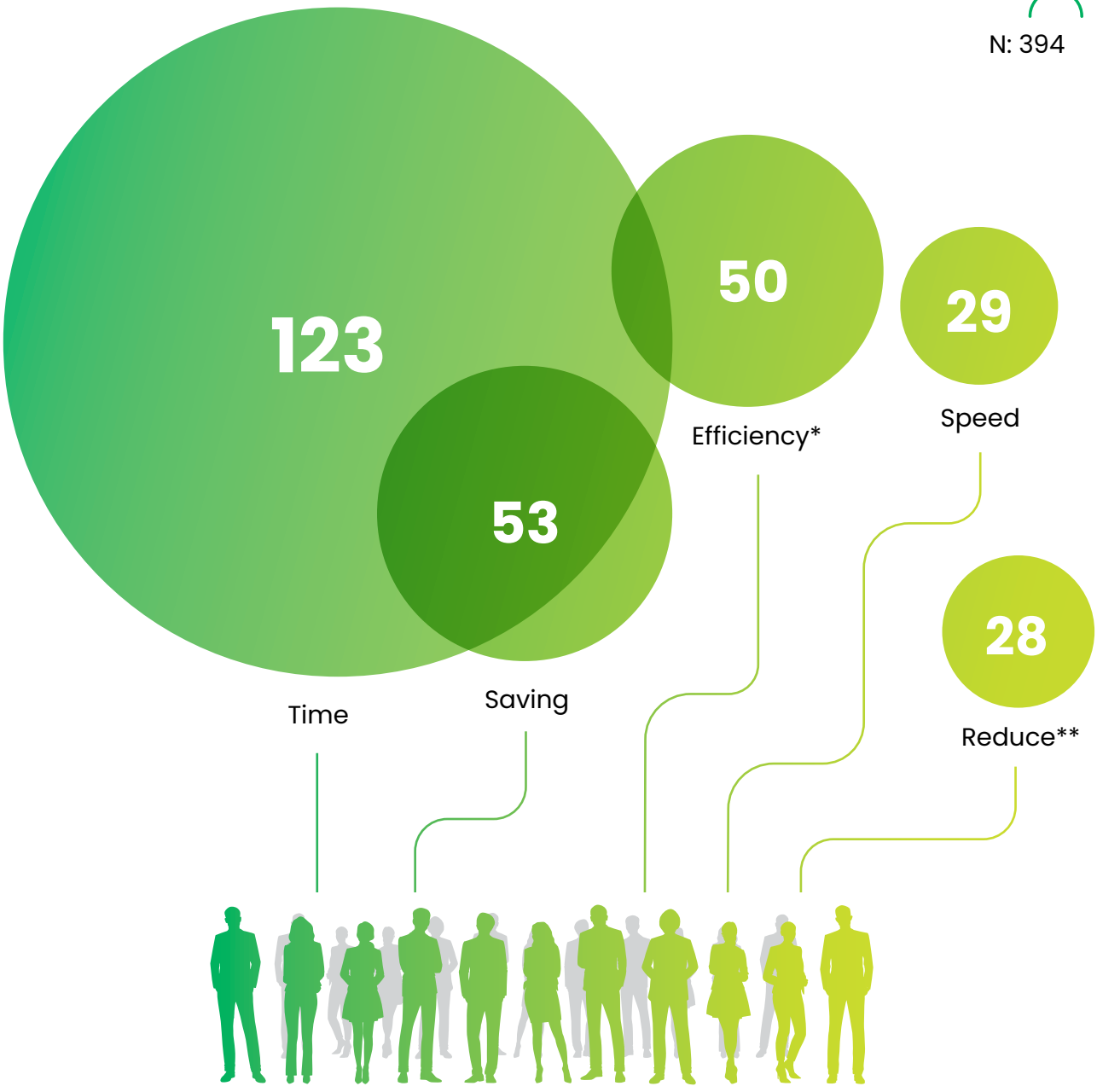
Opportunities

The **Opportunities of AI** are articulated by hopes of saving time and increasing efficiency

What do you think is the biggest opportunity posed by adopting AI?

The **top five words** mentioned by respondents were:

N: 394



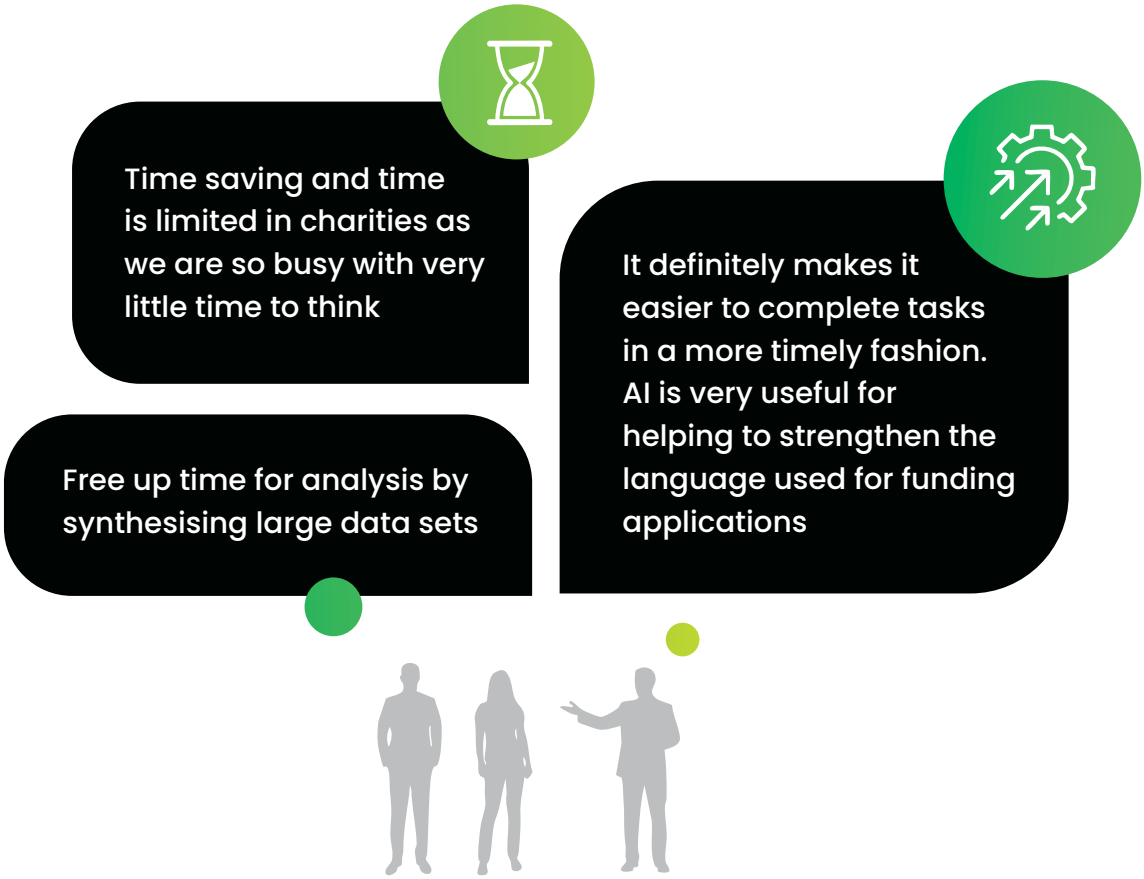
* including 'efficiency'and 'efficient'

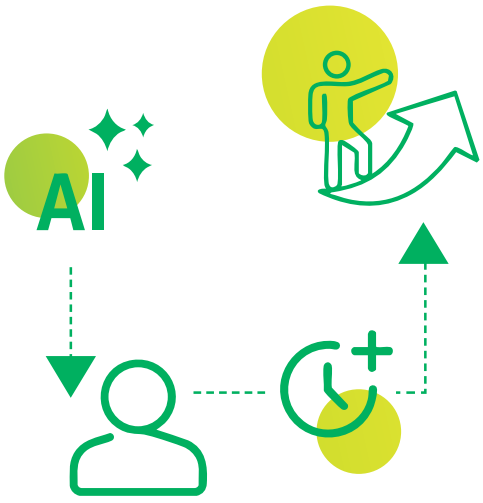
**including 'reduction' 'reduce'

Opportunity Theme 1

Use of AI tools to save time

The time saving benefit of AI adoption is referred to throughout the feedback.





From the perspective of skills and training, time saving from AI adoption could be a lever for increasing lifelong learning rates, as lack of time is a key blocker for upskilling

(The Wheel: 2026).

Opportunity Theme 2

Use of AI tools to boost skills and fill skills gaps



"Skill" came up eight times when asked about opportunities. For example:

> Money saving for work previously done by skilled professionals e.g. Graphic Design, Visual Imaging.

AI was mentioned as a support to bridge the digital divide. In the focus groups a risk of "leap frogging" over the digital skills divide rather than addressing it was identified, here one respondent sees AI tools as a mitigation of this risk:

> Easier access to information and supports for people who have limited digital skills knowledge.

Some respondents ranked certain skills as "low skill" therefore giving a permission of sorts to delegate this work to AI:

> Could be a very useful aid to help improve efficiency, reduce time spent doing some low-skill work.

Time-poor organisations with limited in-house skills potentially could benefit from AI use:

- Addressing areas of skill shortage, increasing access to certain services and solutions to address societal [challenges] across healthcare, education, etc. and environmental challenges. BUT depending on what AI technology is used. Small context specific models can be used to address many challenges.

Opportunity Theme 3

AI as resource provider and maximiser

Maximising the existing expertise and time of staff and volunteers, while allowing more time for analysis and human interaction were common threads in the responses. Words related to "**efficiency**" came up 50 times; "time" came up 123 times; and "time saving" came up 35 times in the feedback.

- Enabling more efficient and effective ways of working when used correctly by knowledgeable people
- Doing all the process tasks so we can interact more with people.
- Helping to streamline the drafting of routine reports and documents … so staff can spend more time on improving the quality of publications and strategic decision-making.
- AI can give smaller organisations the ability to operate like larger well resourced ones. AI is a real leveler

Opportunity Theme 4

AI as accessibility enabler

Respondents mentioned the opportunity of AI to assist from an accessibility perspective **"Access"** was mentioned 15 times.

- It enables me to manage my energy and put it to more tasks. I have a cognitive disability. If I did not have access to AI to proofread or improve my writing, I would spend much more time on it, and it would negatively affect my other work and my ability to work at all.
- To support neurodivergent needs - memory, timeframe supports, to do lists, reviewing and summarise data
- Supporting education providing equitable access to learning
- I think it can be helpful to people with learning difficulties

The thematic analysis above gives a clear picture of a time-poor sector reaching for a time saving tool and getting tangible benefit from it. Respondents' comments on the benefit of using AI for administrative tasks and grant applications is supported by the high use rate for those tasks illustrated in Figure 1.

The sentiment around AI adoption is mixed in the sector. Regular adopters and reluctant users both articulated material concerns related to risk in addition to use cases for the benefits of AI use. While the CV workforce is hopeful about the potential of AI to decrease workload and increase efficiency, there is concern about AI causing skills loss, job precarity and environmental damage.

Conclusion and key recommendations

The widespread adoption of AI amongst CV sector workers is testament to the adaptability of this workforce, as they see clear opportunities for improving the efficiency of their work. Conversely, the sector is well informed about the potential real-world damage the current use of AI tools may cause.

The CV sector is well placed to advise on a set of ethical guidelines for AI use in Ireland, not least within our own community and voluntary sector. Given the government's stated ambition for



"a digital Ireland that is **confident**, **connected**, and **inclusive**"

(Department of Taoiseach, 2026:3)

a consultation involving the CV sector on AI adoption would be of great value.

In summarising the findings in this report, **four themes** emerge:

1. Time
2. Trust
3. Transparency
4. Training



Time

In a sector where a focus on public benefit is foremost and efficiencies and cost-saving can contribute to more focus on core mission activities, the benefits of allowing some administrative, information gathering and content creation tasks to be handled by AI technologies are clear.



Trust

For a sector that places a high value on public trust and accountability, AI adoption poses challenges and opportunities. For example, AI is reported to have exceptional benefits for workforce inclusion of people with disabilities. However, where improperly deployed AI systems could inadvertently amplify existing inequalities rather than alleviating them (NDA, 2024). Other areas where trust is crucial, as evidenced in this research, are around data safety and environmental impacts. The need for risk mitigation with human oversight must be acknowledged.



Transparency

To build trust into AI deployment, transparency of use is required. Particularly in light of Article 50 of the EU AI Act, the use of generative AI content must be clearly indicated. As recent HIQA guidance outlines, transparency of AI tool use if key to good governance and accountability (HIQA, 2026).



Training

Underpinning the efficient, effective and accountable use of AI, is a focus on training. A workforce supported to develop AI critical literacy can audit the right tools to use, address issues of data autonomy, perpetuity and safety, while also building AI capabilities that support inclusion, innovation and integrity. The research in this report demonstrates a clear appetite for appropriate training among sector workers.

In conclusion, when a sector is short on time and high on funding precarity, tools that promise efficiency are going to be adopted. This is clearly the case for the community and voluntary sector. The task is to train and protect the workers and organisations integrating these tools to ensure data integrity, compliance and staff wellbeing.

This includes ensuring skills acquisition is valued and invested in. This research shows that there are clear opportunities for using AI, but with risk mitigation in place.

Recommendations

01 **Assess the risks** and seize the potential opportunities of ethical AI use. Establish a consultative group to report on acceptable use for AI in the sector and develop a framework for ethical AI adoption and risk mitigation.



02 Build on existing sector expertise and AI innovation models to support **networked training** and skills sharing in the CV sector, through targeted funding for AI upskilling projects.



03 Conduct further **research** to fully assess the digital needs and maturity of the sector. Explore the levers required to support digital transformation among the sector workforce.

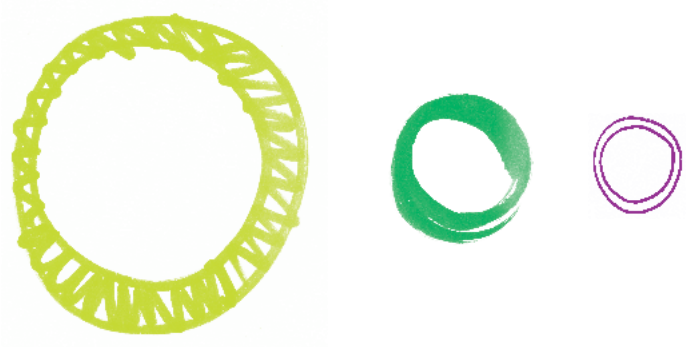


04 Provide **funding** for a tiered digital upskilling programme for the sector from foundational to advanced levels. This will support a sustainable, inclusive, and empowered sector into the future. Utilise DigComp 3.0 (Cosgrave and Cachia, 2025) as a basis for shared sector understanding of skills requirements.



05 **Advocate** for the extension of funding, already available to private firms, to fund digital and AI training related actions. Key models to examine should include, for example, Upskilling SMEs cost recovery programme and Digital Transformation voucher schemes.





References

Amar, Z. from Zoe Amar Digital and Nissa Ramay from Think Social Tech (2026), *Charity Digital Skills Report 2026*. https://charitydigitalskills.co.uk/

Central Statistics Office (2025), *Household Digital Consumer Behaviour 2025: Generative AI*. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-isshdcb/householddigitalconsumerbehaviour2025/generativeai/

Cosgrave and Cachia (2025) *DigComp 3.0: European Digital Competence Framework*. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC144121

Department of the Taoiseach (2026a) *Digital Ireland – Connecting our Future, Securing our People*. https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/press-releases/government-publishes-new-digital-ai-strategy-90-actions-to-strengthen-irelands-position-as-a-digital-leader-and-ai-hub/

Department of the Taoiseach (2026b) *Intelligence: Applied Programme to support Irish workers and business to adopt AI*. https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/press-releases/launch-of-intelligenceapplied-programme-to-support-irish-workers-and-business-to-adopt-ai/

Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (2026), *Ar Scáth a Chéile: Promoting Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2026-2030* https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/6ac589ce/CV_Strategy_2026-2030_V7.pdf

European Commission (2026), *2023 Digital Decade: Ireland's 2026 Digital Decade Country Report: Ireland's performance towards the Digital Decade targets and objectives*. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/factpages/irelands-2026-digital-decade-country-report

European Commission (2022) *DigComp 3.0*. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities/key-competences-lifelong-learning/digital-competence-framework-digcomp/digcomp-30_en

European Parliament (2024), *Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 Artificial Intelligence Act 2024. Official Journal of the European Union*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401689

Gilbert and Tobin (2026) *Cause and effect: AI use in the charity sector* https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=c86801f9-066b-4be4-b719-889c27fef02a

Grow Enterprise UK (2024), *What is the adoption curve of innovation, and how does it work?* https://growenterprise.co.uk/2024/09/09/what-is-the-adoption-curve-of-innovation-and-how-does-it-work-2/

Health Information and Quality Authority (2026) *National Guidance for the Responsible and Safe Use of Artificial Intelligence in Health and Social Care Services* https://www.hiqa.ie/reports-and-publications/guide/national-guidance-responsible-and-safe-use-artificial-intelligence

Ipsos (2026), *Artificial Intelligence: Key insights, data and tables*. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/artificial-intelligence-key-insights-data-and-tables

National Disability Authority: The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) (2024), *AI and Disability Inclusion in Ireland: Opportunities and Challenges Across Six Key Sectors* https://universaldesign.ie/communications-digital/artificial-intelligence

National Skills Council (2026), *Strategic Advice 2026: For Evidence to Action*. https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/826b4519/NSC_2026_From_Evidence_to_Action_-_An_Integrated_Skills_Infrastructure_for_an_Inclusive_Ireland.pdf

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD (2026), *OECD Artificial Intelligence Papers Skills in the AI age No. 60* https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2026/07/skills-in-the-ai-age_e8d8c1e6/972bd15e-en.pdf

Rodriguez Heyman, Darian and Cheryl Contee (2025), *AI for Nonprofits: Putting Artificial Intelligence to Work for Your Cause. Wiley Press*. https://www.wiley.com/en-gb/shop/general-introductory-business-management/ai-for-nonprofits-putting-artificial-intelligence-to-work-for-your-cause-p-9781394298426

The Wheel (2026) *Community and Voluntary Sector Workforce: Current and Emerging Skills Needs* https://www.wheel.ie/our-work/research-programme/community-and-voluntary-workforce/

the wheel

Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

Regus House, Harcourt Centre, Block 4,
Harcourt Road, Dublin 2

T 883 +353 (0) 1 454 8727
info@wheel.ie
www.wheel.ie

Registered Charity Number: 20040963
CHY Number: 13288
Company Number: 302282

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises.

As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the sector and we advocate on behalf of our growing community of members.

As a supportive resource, we offer advice, training and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the sector.