



TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS

Insights on Enabling Effective AI Integration by Companies

"AI will happen anyway. Readiness determines whether it helps or harms organizations."
(Inspired by respondents statements)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artificial intelligence (AI) adoption is strongly accelerating across Europe. However, the capacity to integrate AI effectively, responsibly, and at scale varies considerably across countries and sectors. This report examines AI market readiness in Romania and Hungary, positioning both countries within broader European trends and moving beyond formal strategy analysis to capture how readiness is experienced in practice. Drawing on surveys and in-depth interviews with technology providers, the current report offers empirical insights into the organizational, workforce, and governance conditions shaping AI integration.

AI readiness is understood in this report as a multidimensional condition, encompassing infrastructure, data quality, skills, leadership, governance, and organizational culture. While both Romania and Hungary operate within the same **EU regulatory framework**, anchored in the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the Digital Markets Act (DMA), technology providers emphasize that formal compliance does not automatically translate into effective adoption. Instead, readiness is shaped by the interaction between regulation, institutional capacity, market demand, and organizational preparedness.

Survey data collected as part of the current report indicate that AI market readiness remains low in both countries, particularly on the client side. The majority of technology providers report that their clients are rather unprepared for AI solutions, with only a small minority perceived as ready. In Hungary, there is a higher share of clients perceived as neither prepared nor unprepared, while in Romania, there is a slightly higher proportion of perceived readiness. Across both countries, providers describe the AI market as emerging but fragile, characterized by growing openness to AI accompanied by limited internal capabilities.

Interview-based findings reveal several relevant trends. First, AI readiness is deeply fragmented and internally polarized. Providers distinguish between a small group of strategically AI-ready organizations, a large group that is disengaged or resistant to adopt AI, and a broad middle group that aspires to adopt AI but underestimates the organizational transformation required for this. Enthusiasm for AI frequently exceeds actual capacity, creating a significant gap between willingness and preparedness.

Second, AI is rarely treated as a standalone product. Instead, it is encompassed within broader services such as automation, marketing, analytics, and workflow optimization. Clients typically seek solutions to concrete business problems rather than AI per se, thus transforming providers into intermediaries who translate abstract AI narratives into practical organizational change. This dynamic is perceived as being particularly pronounced in regulated sectors and among Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

Third, the current report highlights persistent structural barriers, notably insufficient budgets, inadequate IT infrastructure, weak data governance, limited digital skills, and low trust in AI systems. Among the success factors are training and **upskilling, visionary leadership, and clear internal communication**. At the same time, supportive organizational culture and collaboration with providers play important roles.

According to the data collected for the purpose of this report, employee responses to AI adoption are ambivalent, **combining curiosity with fear of job displacement and loss of relevance**. Informal and unregulated AI use by employees is already widespread, increasing risks related to data protection and accountability. Technology providers stress that transparent communication, employee involvement, and continuous learning are essential pillars to build trust and avoid resistance towards further AI adoption.

At a systemic level, AI is widely perceived not necessarily as a technical upgrade, but as a structural economic transformation comparable to previous industrial revolutions. Skills gaps, weak data governance, and limited change-management capacity emerge as common challenges across the respondents in both countries. Without coordinated public-private action, technology providers warn that AI adoption will continue in fragmented and potentially risky ways.

The report highlights that effective AI integration requires a policy shift focus from adoption metrics to organizational readiness, leadership capacity, workforce skills, governance, and trust. Romania and Hungary illustrate how different EU economies face similar constraints despite having different strategic directions. The findings underscore the need for targeted, coordinated policy responses that support not only technological deployment but also the social and organizational foundations necessary for sustainable and inclusive AI-driven transformation.



AI READINESS: POSITIONING ROMANIA AND HUNGARY WITHIN EUROPEAN TRENDS

According to recent articles^{1,2} and reports³, *Artificial Intelligence (AI)* readiness refers to the degree of preparedness of an entity, be it an organization, region, or country, to implement and benefit from AI technologies. It encompasses far more than simply acquiring AI tools; it involves aligning technology, governance, people, and processes in a way that enables effective adoption and long-term use. According to industry frameworks, readiness is shaped by factors such as infrastructure capability, workforce skills, data quality, strategic planning, and cultural acceptance of digital transformation, meaning that being AI-ready requires a multidimensional approach to prepare for integration, operation, and scaling of AI systems.

From a broader economic and national perspective, AI readiness also includes the development of a comprehensive AI ecosystem that can sustain innovation across sectors. The PwC AI Readiness report⁴ highlights the importance of building a complete “AI stack” which includes hardware (such as AI chips), infrastructure, models, and services, so that technological capabilities are interconnected and can drive competitive advantage at scale. Countries and regions that cultivate these elements are better positioned to move beyond pilot projects into widespread adoption, using AI both for economic growth and societal benefit.

Studying AI market readiness in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is crucial because this region stands at a very relevant moment in the digital transformation era, where enthusiasm for AI adoption is high, even though the supporting ecosystem remains fragmented⁵.

According to a recent KPMG report^{6,7}, AI adoption is expanding rapidly across CEE countries, with nearly six in ten people reporting regular use of AI tools, although overall adoption in the region still trails the global average by approximately 10%. More striking, however, is the training gap, which is more than twice as large as the global benchmark, reaching around 25%, indicating that widespread use is not matched by sufficient skills development.

¹<https://www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/definition/AI-readiness>

²<https://www.genesys.com/definitions/what-is-ai-readiness>

³<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/technology/ai-readiness.pdf>

⁴<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/technology/ai-readiness.pdf>

⁵<https://www.blue-europe.eu/analysis-en/full-reports/artificial-intelligence-in-central-and-eastern-europe-opportunities-and-challenges/#post-14906-footnote-29>

⁶<https://kpmg.com/pl/en/insights/technology/ai-in-central-and-eastern-europe.html>

⁷<https://kpmg.com/pl/en/media/media-press-artificial-intelligence-adoption-accelerates-across-central-and-eastern-europe.html>

According to the same report, organizational readiness also remains limited, since only 23% of employees report that their organization has a formal AI policy, while many of them are unsure whether such guidelines exist at all. At the same time, risky or unethical AI practices are common, with up to one-third of employees admitting to improper use, revealing governance and awareness gaps. Trust patterns further reveal that employees in the CEE region tend to place greater confidence in international AI regulations than in local or national frameworks. The same report states that, within the region, Poland leads in regular AI use, and Romania and Slovenia report the highest levels of AI adoption in workplace settings, showing both shared regional dynamics and notable national differences. Such discrepancies reveal the need to understand not only whether AI is adopted, but how well societies, companies, and institutions are prepared to manage, govern, and benefit from AI technologies in both economic and social contexts.

At the same time, the CEE region faces several structural challenges that make such readiness studies especially timely⁸. Awareness of legal and regulatory frameworks remains low, with a large majority of respondents unfamiliar with existing AI regulations, even as concerns about risks such as misinformation and inaccurate outputs grow. This gap between rapid adoption and limited regulatory or governance understanding underscores the importance of assessing market readiness as a composite phenomenon that includes skills, governance, infrastructure, and risk awareness. By examining readiness across countries like Romania and Hungary, researchers and policymakers can identify patterns of strength and weakness in the region's approach to AI, thus providing evidence that can inform targeted strategies to build skills, bolster governance frameworks, and ensure responsible, inclusive AI adoption that aligns with broader European goals.

According to the 2025 OECD reports, Romania and Hungary demonstrate active engagement with the EU Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence⁹, but they differ in strategic focus, implementation structures, and enablers of AI readiness. In Romania¹⁰, the new National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2024-2027)^{11, 12} was developed through multi-stakeholder and international collaboration, explicitly considering the EU Coordinated Plan as a foundation for national policy efforts. According to the OECD 2025 report, Romania has anchored many AI-enabling activities within its National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)¹³, mobilizing investments in data infrastructure, high-performance computing, cloud/ edge computing, and semiconductor development. The mentioned OECD report states that the country also foregrounds AI education and research, with initiatives spanning multiple levels of education and the establishment of new research centers. At the same time, the country supports AI adoption in priority socio-economic areas such as healthcare and the public sector.

⁸<https://wiiw.ac.at/a-stronger-cee-for-a-stronger-europe-p-6916.html>

⁹<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/coordinated-plan-artificial-intelligence-2021-review>

¹⁰https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/progress-in-implementing-the-european-union-coordinated-plan-on-artificial-intelligence-volume-1_6d530a88-en/romania_a8f9b33e-en.html

¹¹<https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ANEXA-1-10.pdf>

¹²<https://stip.oecd.org/stip/interactive-dashboards/policy-initiatives/2025%2Fdata%2FpolicyInitiatives%2F200002174>

¹³<https://proiecte.pnrr.gov.ro/#/home>

Hungary¹⁴, on the other hand, has an AI strategy¹⁵ launched in 2020 that was being reviewed to align with rapid technological developments and the updated EU context. The strategy emphasizes strengthening foundational capabilities such as data-driven economy elements, research and development infrastructure, and high-performance computing (HPC) capacity, for example, through major projects like the Komondor and Levente supercomputers. The OECD report suggests that Hungary places particular emphasis on facilitating AI adoption among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through initiatives such as European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) and technology voucher programs that provide financial and advisory support. In both countries, it is notable that national AI governance is framed within sectoral programs and supported by EU funding, but Hungary's approach highlights targeted capacity building and infrastructure projects, while Romania's strategy is more closely integrated into broader digital transformation and research ecosystems.

At both the European and national levels, Romania and Hungary operate within a shared legal and regulatory framework that shapes the boundaries of AI development. At the EU level, this framework is anchored in the EU Artificial Intelligence Act¹⁶, which introduces a risk-based approach to AI regulation, alongside complementary instruments such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹⁷, the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the Digital Markets Act (DMA)¹⁸. Together, these regulations establish common standards for transparency, accountability, data protection, and fundamental rights, while also setting expectations for innovation, competitiveness, and trust. In addition, policy coordination mechanisms such as the EU Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence¹⁹ and monitoring tools like the European Semester reports²⁰ provide guidance and benchmarks for national implementation, ensuring a degree of regulatory convergence across member states.

At the national level, both Romania and Hungary have translated these EU-level requirements into domestic legal and strategic frameworks through dedicated AI and digital strategies, institutional coordination mechanisms, and sector-specific regulations. Romania's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2024-2027 and Hungary's National AI Strategies (2020-2030; updated for 2025-2030) mentioned above explicitly align with EU legislation and anticipate the implementation of the AI Act, while broader digitalization strategies support compliance through investments in infrastructure, skills, and governance capacity. These national frameworks define the formal rules under which AI-related activities take place, but they do not fully capture how regulation is interpreted, operationalized, or experienced by market actors.

Nevertheless, the purpose of this report is not to provide an exhaustive comparison of national AI or digital strategies in Romania and Hungary, but rather to use these policy frameworks as a context for understanding how AI market readiness is articulated, interpreted, and enacted by key actors on the ground.

¹⁴https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/progress-in-implementing-the-european-union-coordinated-plan-on-artificial-intelligence-volume-1_6d530a88-en/hungary_e87ac822-en.html

¹⁵<https://oecd.ai/en/dashboards/policy-initiatives/hungarys-ai-strategy-8439>

¹⁶<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20230601STO93804/eu-ai-act-first-regulation-on-artificial-intelligence>

¹⁷<https://gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/>

¹⁸<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act>

¹⁹<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/coordinated-plan-artificial-intelligence-2021-review>

²⁰https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2025-european-semester-country-reports_en

Even though official strategies outline priorities related to skills, infrastructure, governance, and innovation, they often present an aspirational and institutionally driven view of AI development. This report, therefore, shifts the analytical focus away from formal policy design toward the key ideas, narratives, and practical concerns that emerge from the insights (interview- and survey-based) offered by technology providers operating in both countries. These actors are directly involved in developing, deploying, or integrating AI solutions and are thus well positioned to reveal how policy ambitions translate – or fail to translate – into market realities.

CONCLUSION:

By centering the perspectives of technology providers, the report aims to capture how AI readiness is experienced in practice, including perceived opportunities, constraints, and mismatches between rapidly accelerating AI deployment and slower-moving regulatory, infrastructural, and skills frameworks²¹. Insights from interviews and surveys allow for the identification of shared themes and country-specific differences that may not be visible in strategy documents alone, such as barriers to adoption, attitudes toward EU regulation, reliance on external technologies, or uneven sectoral development shaped by gaps between innovation and governance capacity. In this sense, Romania and Hungary serve not only as policy cases but as empirical contexts through which broader dynamics of AI readiness in the CEE region can be examined.

This analysis thus prioritizes lived experiences and market perceptions, using national strategies as reference points rather than endpoints, to better understand how AI market readiness is constructed and negotiated beyond formal policy texts. Focusing on AI market readiness in Romania and Hungary, the findings point to significant structural asymmetries between the two countries, alongside common systemic barriers that call for targeted and coordinated policy responses to support AI diffusion in Central and Eastern Europe.

²¹<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/10/this-month-in-ai-deployment-accelerates-but-is-regulation-keeping-up/>



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QUANTITATIVE DATA

When looking at the data, the market is seen as not prepared for AI solutions by experts in both countries. Clients of companies offering AI solutions in both countries are more likely not prepared (45.9%) than prepared (16.7%) (see Figure 1)

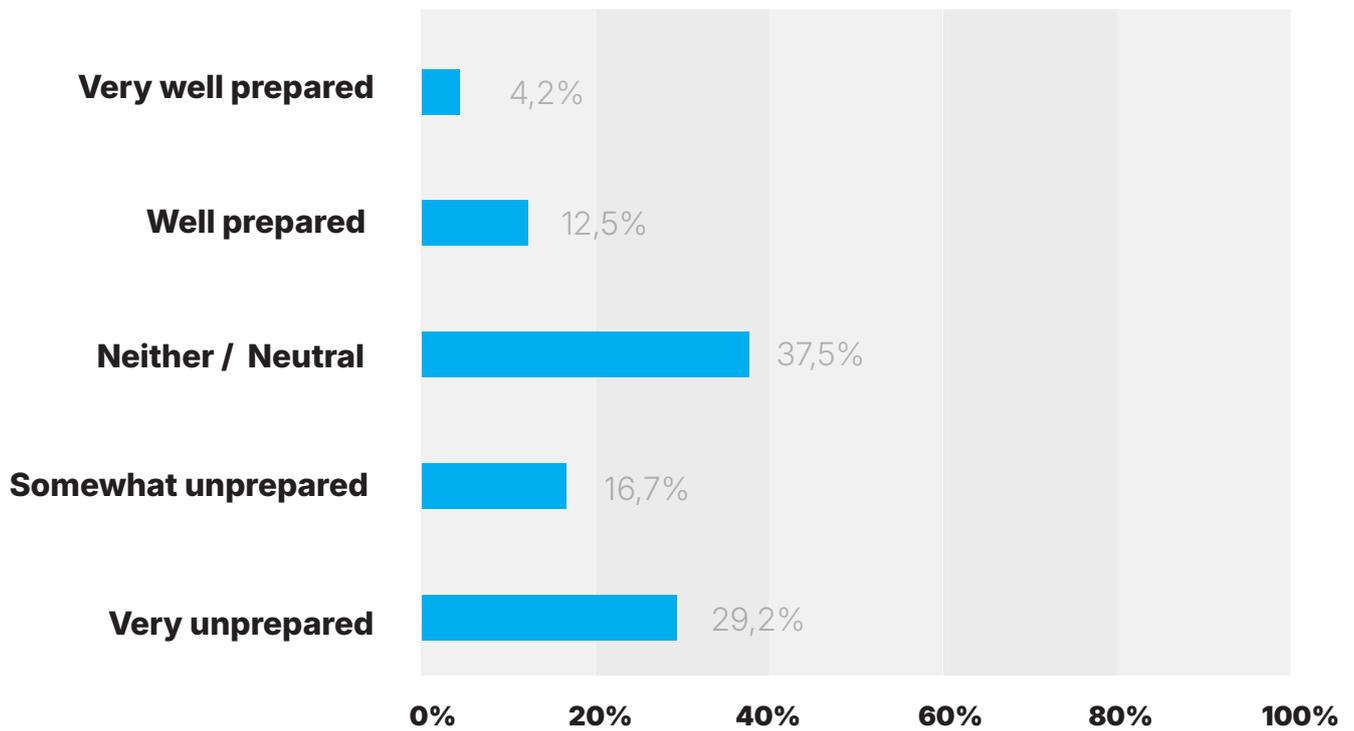


Figure 1. Clients' readiness for AI solutions

There are some notable differences in how companies appreciate the readiness of their clients for AI based solutions (See Figure 2):



clients in Hungary are seen to a much higher extent as neither prepared, nor unprepared (50%, as compared to 28.6% in Romania)



while the proportion of prepared clients is perceived as higher in Romania (21.4%) than in Hungary (10.0%).

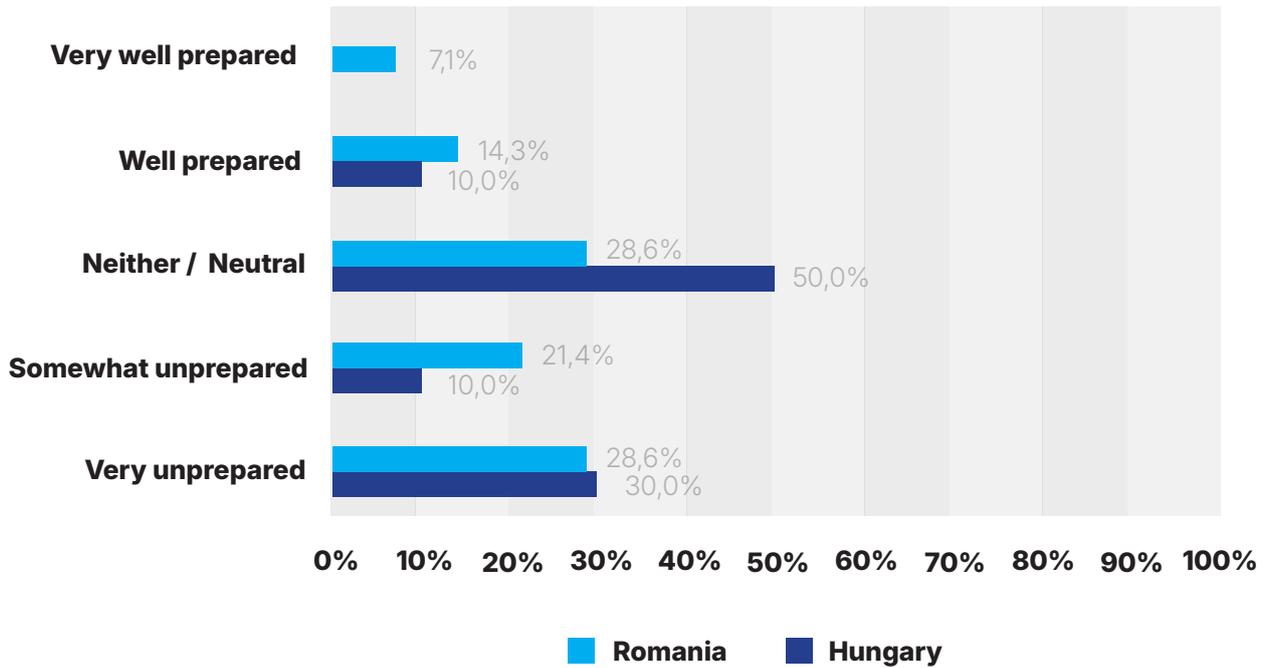
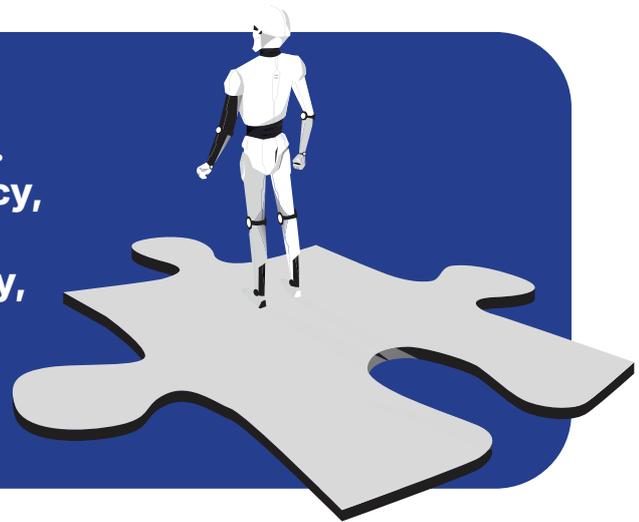


Figure 2. Clients' readiness for AI solutions by country

Clients readiness for AI solutions is low. A market for AI solutions is still in infancy, though more and more clients from various fields (education, health, energy, etc.) are open to improve their activity based on AI generated solutions.



Qualitative data

Triangulating the quantitative findings with insights derived from expert interviews, the analysis identifies several convergent trends shaping the evolution of the AI market.

TREND 1

AI market readiness is uneven and internally polarized in both countries

Across interviews, experts consistently describe organizational readiness for AI as highly uneven, fragmented, and structurally polarized. Rather than a linear progression from low to high readiness, experts portray the current landscape as divided into distinct groups of organizations, differentiated less by sector than by leadership mindset, organizational culture, and learning capacity. A recurring distinction emerging from the analysis identifies three broad categories of companies with respect to AI readiness and adoption:



AI-strategically ready.

A relatively small group of organizations is described as genuinely AI-ready. These companies actively monitor technological developments, invest in understanding AI capabilities and limitations, and approach AI as a strategic transformation rather than a technical add-on.



AI-aware but resistant.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, a large group of companies remains disengaged from AI adoption. These organizations are either insufficiently informed about recent AI developments or perceive AI as largely irrelevant to their core activities. As a result, they exhibit low levels of preparedness and limited engagement with AI-related skills development or organizational adaptation.



AI-aspirational.

Positioned between these two extremes is a sizeable middle group of companies that recognize the growing importance of AI but primarily conceptualize it as a purchasable technological solution. These firms tend to view AI as a “plug-and-play” software feature that can be integrated with minimal organizational change, often underestimating the need for workforce reskilling, process redesign, and internal governance mechanisms.

As one expert noted, “the biggest group is the one that treats AI like a software upgrade, believing that everything can stay the same.” This perception is repeatedly contrasted with the view that AI represents a structural transformation comparable to earlier industrial revolutions, requiring fundamental changes in workflows, decision-making processes, and skill profiles rather than isolated technological investments:

“In reality, companies are never truly ready, because people are not ready. And when it comes to artificial intelligence, someone drew an interesting parallel: when trains first appeared, people were mainly travelling by horse-drawn carts, and doctors warned that the speed of trains would “liquefy the brain” and that people would be unable to cope. We see exactly the same type of reaction today in relation to AI: “AI will take our jobs,” “AI will control us,” “AI will turn us into slaves.” People project a range of anxieties generated by the unknown onto new technologies. And I believe that, at least in the case of Romania, this mindset represents a significant barrier to AI adoption” (Romania, IT provider)

The experts also emphasized that declared willingness to adopt AI far exceeds actual preparedness. Several interviewees describe a pronounced gap between enthusiasm and capacity, captured succinctly by one expert who assessed readiness at “three out of ten” while describing willingness to adopt as “eleven out of ten.” This gap is attributed to limited data maturity, insufficient internal capabilities, and unrealistic expectations regarding the speed and ease of AI implementation.

Leadership emerges as a decisive differentiating factor in readiness assessments. Organizations perceived as more prepared are those in which senior leadership actively assumes responsibility for understanding AI, setting strategic direction, and fostering learning across the organization. In these cases, readiness is not understood as a fixed state but as an ongoing process involving experimentation, internal dialogue, and iterative adjustment. One expert emphasized that “as a leader, you have to constantly think about where AI can create value and how the organization needs to change.”

At the same time, interviewees caution that employee behavior often outpaces formal organizational readiness. Several respondents stress that employees are already using AI tools independently, frequently relying on free or unregulated applications accessed via personal devices. From this perspective, the absence of organizational readiness does not prevent AI use but rather shifts it into uncontrolled and potentially risky forms. More prepared organizations are therefore described as those that seek to channel inevitable AI usage into structured, transparent, and supported frameworks, rather than attempting to block or ignore it. Finally, respondents express concern that premature or poorly prepared AI adoption contributes to high failure rates and limited returns on investment. References to external statistics indicating that a majority of AI projects fail to generate expected returns are interpreted as further evidence that many organizations adopt AI before establishing the necessary organizational, cultural, and skills foundations.

TREND 2

AI market readiness is uneven and internally polarized in both countries

Across both Romania and Hungary, technology providers consistently describe artificial intelligence not as a discrete commercial product, but as an enabling layer integrated into broader service offerings. AI is embedded within automation solutions, customer support systems, software development processes, marketing services, data analysis, and internal workflow optimization. From the perspective of providers, AI rarely constitutes the primary value proposition presented to clients. Instead, it functions as an invisible or background component that enhances efficiency, speed, scalability, or consistency of existing processes.

The interviewed experts emphasize that clients typically approach AI adoption from an outcome-oriented perspective, focusing on concrete business results rather than on the technology itself. Companies are primarily interested in reducing operational costs, accelerating delivery times, improving customer experience, or compensating for labor shortages.

As a result, AI is framed by providers as a means to achieve these goals rather than as an innovation to be adopted for its own sake. This framing is particularly evident in service-based sectors, where AI is used to streamline repetitive tasks, support decision-making, or augment human work without fundamentally altering the client-facing offer.

Romanian technology providers, especially those working with large organizations and regulated sectors, underline that positioning AI as a standalone product is often neither feasible nor desirable. Regulatory constraints, compliance requirements, data protection obligations, and heightened risk aversion among enterprise clients make explicit “AI products” difficult to market. Instead, AI is introduced incrementally, embedded within familiar systems and processes, and framed as an extension of existing digital infrastructures. In this context, AI adoption is deliberately de-emphasized at the discursive level, even when it plays a substantial role in the underlying solution.

Hungarian providers report a similar pattern, though driven less by regulation and more by limited organizational readiness and conceptual misunderstandings among clients. Many clients explicitly request “AI solutions,” but providers frequently find that AI is not strictly necessary to address the underlying business problem. This leads to a strong emphasis on advisory, diagnostic, and consulting work, aimed at clarifying client needs, assessing process maturity, and determining whether AI adds real value compared to simpler forms of automation or process redesign. In several interviews, providers describe situations in which AI demand reflects symbolic expectations or market hype rather than concrete operational requirements.

These dynamics are reflected in the way providers describe their own role vis-à-vis client organizations. Rather than acting primarily as technology vendors, they position themselves as translators and intermediaries, helping companies navigate between abstract AI narratives and practical organizational realities. As one Romanian respondent explained, “we don’t sell AI as such; we sell solutions, and sometimes AI is the right tool,” while a Hungarian consultant similarly noted that very often, companies ask for AI, but what they really need is better processes.” Such statements underscore a shared provider perspective that AI adoption should be problem-driven and context-sensitive, rather than technology-led.

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON AI AS AN ENABLING LAYER

"We don't really offer AI solutions as such. We offer marketing solutions, and these solutions end up including AI components."

(Romania, marketing and automation provider)

"AI is not something we sell separately. It is integrated into our solutions when it actually helps the business."

(Romania, IT solutions provider)

"Clients don't come and say we want AI. They come with a problem: things take too long, cost too much, or people are overloaded."

(Romania, automation specialist)

"Very often, what the client needs is not necessarily an AI solution."

(Hungary, AI consultant)

"Most of our work is actually consulting. The development part is relatively easy."

(Hungary, AI workflow automation provider)

"In many cases, when companies say they want AI, what they really need first is better processes."

(Hungary, enterprise AI consultancy)

EXPERIENCES WITH AI ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Although artificial intelligence is often framed as a primarily technical innovation, evidence from technology providers in Romania and Hungary indicates that successful AI adoption depends far more on organizational capacity and cultural readiness than on algorithmic sophistication. This section examines how AI initiatives are initiated, developed, and implemented in Romania and Hungary, with a focus on the barriers and enabling conditions shaping their outcomes. Particular attention is given to recurring patterns of success and failure, including the tendency of many AI projects to stall at the pilot stage.

Qualitative data

Thus, the survey data indicate that the most important issues on the clients' side when it comes to AI solutions adoption are insufficient budgets and inadequate IT infrastructure, followed, in this order, by lack of trust in AI technology, lack of clients' digital skills, legal or ethical problems and lack of managerial support. Though the management's lack of support for AI solutions is considered the least of the problems, it still sits just slightly below the mean of the scale from 1 to 5. (Figure 3)

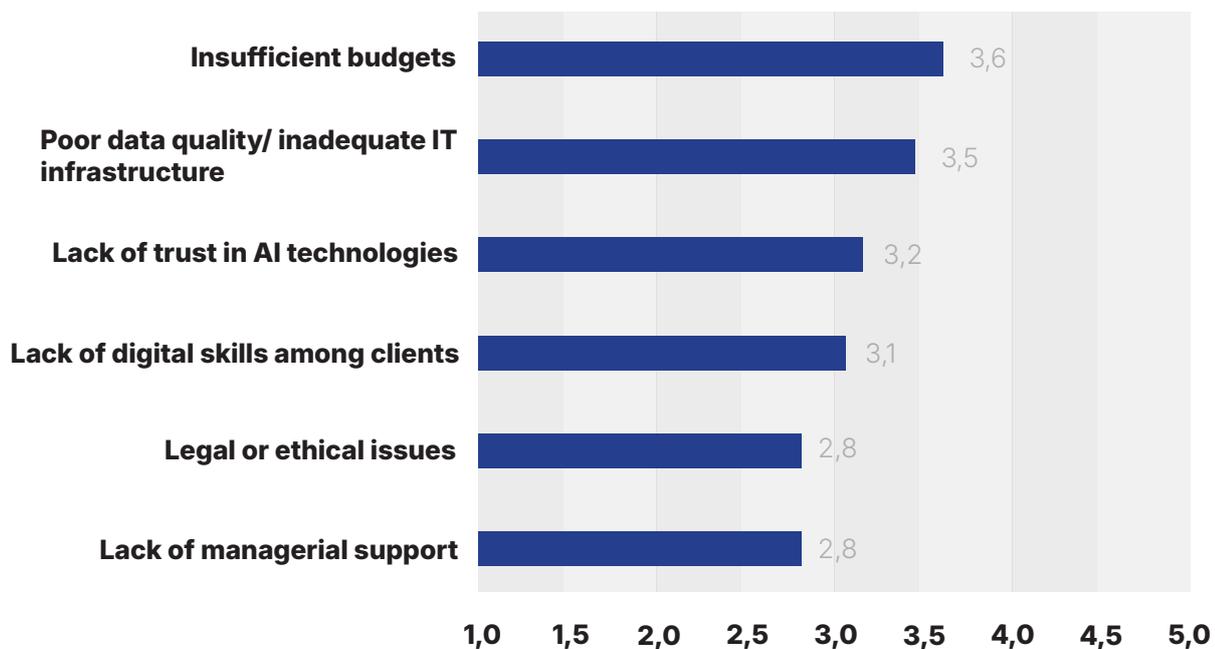


Figure 3. Problems in adopting AI-based solutions (on the client's side)

(on a scale from 1 to 5, how frequently you encounter these problems on your clients' side, where 1 means "never" and 5 means "very frequently.")

Looking at country differences, there are some small variations in how IT/AI companies perceive their clients' problems: though the budget issues are seen as highly problematic in both countries, the inadequate IT structure is seen as much more of a problem in Hungary (Figure 4).

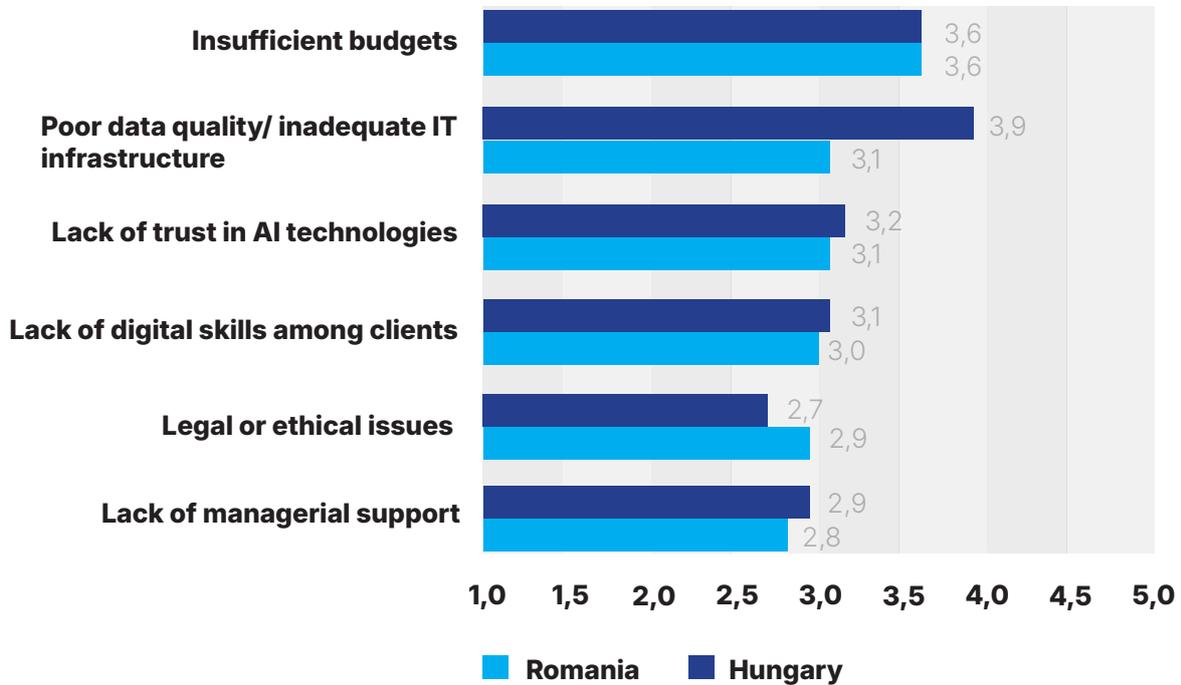


Figure 4. Problems in adopting AI-based solutions (on the client's side), by country (on a scale from 1 to 5, how frequently you encounter these problems on your clients' side, where 1 means "never" and 5 means "very frequently.")

The main problems in adopting AI based solutions by companies are, in this order:

- Insufficient budgets
- Poor data quality or lack of a proper IT infrastructure
 - Lack of trust in AI based technologies
 - Lack of clients' digital skills
 - Legal or ethical issues
- Lack of managerial vision or support

While the above problems can hinder the fast adoption of AI solutions to improve companies' activities, there are several factors of success that could help them implement AI programs and various types of AI support. On a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important), training and upskilling are the highest, closely followed by visionary leadership and clear internal communication. The least important (still quite important) is considered the supportive organizational culture (Figure 5).

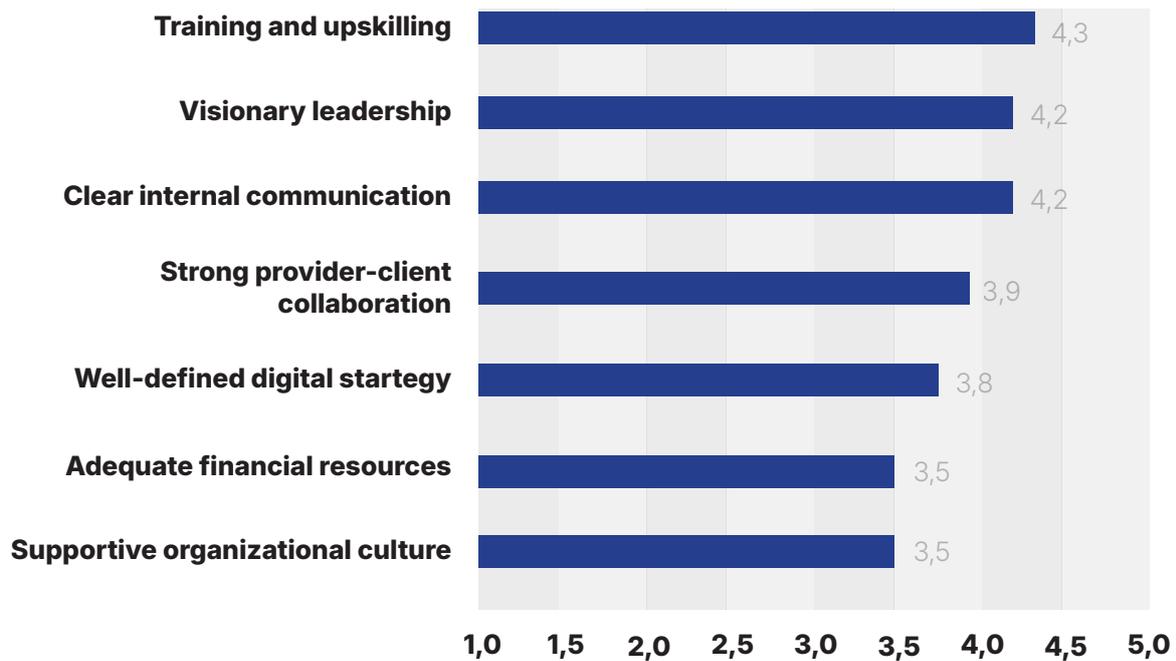


Figure 5. Factor of success for AI-based solutions implementation (on a scale from 1 to 5, how important you consider each factor for the successful adoption of AI, where 1 means “not at all important” and 5 means “very important.”)

Romania and Hungary are somewhat different in terms of how AI companies experts perceive the factors of success. If for Hungarian experts, training and upskilling are key, Romanian experts believe the most important factor of success is visionary leadership. The least important factor is considered strong provider-client collaboration in Hungary (which is seen as the second-most important one in Romania), and supportive organizational culture in Romania (**Figure 6**).

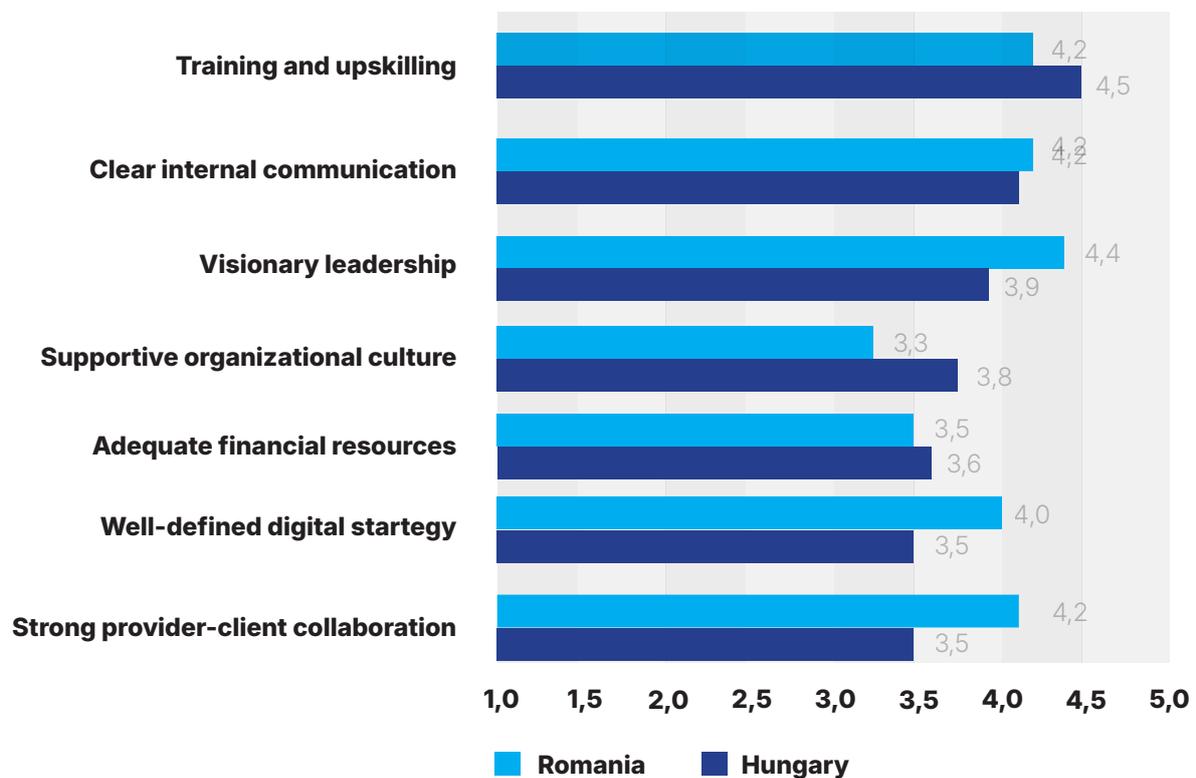


Figure 6. Factors of success for AI-based solutions implementation, by country (on a scale from 1 to 5, how important you consider each factor for the successful adoption of AI, where 1 means “not at all important” and 5 means “very important.”)

The main success factors for adopting AI based solutions by companies are, in this order:

- Training and upskilling
 - Visionary leadership
- Clear internal communication
- Strong provider–client collaboration
 - Well-defined digital strategy
 - Adequate financial resources
- Supportive organizational culture

Qualitative data

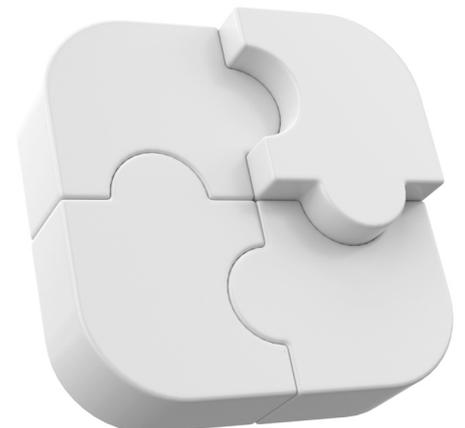
Combining quantitative data with expert perspectives, the findings point to several trends emphasizing some examples of good practice for the development of the AI market.

TREND 1

AI implementation is primarily an organizational transformation process

Across both Romania and Hungary, technology providers consistently emphasize that AI adoption is fundamentally an organizational transformation process, rather than a technical deployment exercise. Interviewees repeatedly note that the most resource-intensive aspects of AI projects are not coding or system development, but consulting activities such as process mapping, clarifying responsibilities, aligning departments, and redefining workflows. In many cases, AI projects expose pre-existing organizational fragmentation rather than resolving it.

Providers report that a large share of client organizations lack clearly documented processes, standardized data flows, or shared understandings of how work is actually performed. This challenge is particularly pronounced in SMEs and public institutions, where institutional knowledge is often embedded in individuals rather than formal systems. As a result, AI projects frequently stall at early stages, as providers are required to reconstruct workflows before any form of automation or intelligence can be introduced.



TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON AI AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

"The technical part is easy. Understanding how the organization really works is the hard part."

(Hungary, AI automation expert)

"AI doesn't fix chaos; it makes it more visible."

(Romania, AI expert)

"Before AI, we often have to spend months just clarifying processes."

(Romania, digital transformation consultant)

"Many companies don't actually know how their processes function end to end."

(Hungary, AI consultancy)

"Most projects fail not because of technology, but because the organization is not ready."

(Romania, IT provider)

TREND 2

Data readiness and skills gaps are the most persistent barriers

A second dominant trend emerging from the interviews concerns data readiness and skills gaps, which technology providers consistently identify as the most significant and persistent barriers to effective AI implementation. Across both Romania and Hungary, respondents emphasize that many client organizations approach AI with high expectations regarding what these systems can deliver, while simultaneously underestimating the foundational role of data quality, structure, and governance. This mismatch between expectations and organizational capacity frequently results in disappointment and superficial deployments that fail to generate meaningful value.

Providers repeatedly note that AI is often perceived by clients as an intelligent, autonomous solution capable of compensating for weak internal systems. In practice, however, AI systems depend heavily on well-structured data, clearly defined processes, and continuous human oversight. When these prerequisites are missing, AI does not compensate for organizational deficiencies but instead exposes them more clearly. Several respondents describe AI projects that initially generated strong enthusiasm but were later abandoned once it became evident that the necessary data infrastructure was not in place.

Across both countries, limited AI and data literacy among management and employees further exacerbate these challenges. Providers report spending considerable time explaining fundamental concepts, such as the probabilistic nature of AI systems, the need for training data, and the importance of ongoing monitoring and adjustment. When these explanations are not internalized, AI projects tend to be evaluated against unrealistic benchmarks, leading to perceptions of failure even when the technology functions as intended. In many cases, this results in AI being reduced to symbolic or cosmetic applications, rather than being integrated into core business processes.

TREND 3

Leadership support is necessary but uneven across management levels

Leadership commitment is widely identified by technology providers as a necessary precondition for AI adoption. Interview data reveal that such commitment is often unevenly distributed across organizational hierarchies. While top management may formally endorse AI as part of a strategic vision, innovation agenda, or modernization narrative, this support frequently does not translate into sustained operational engagement. As a result, leadership commitment remains symbolic rather than transformative.

Technology providers consistently stress that successful AI implementation requires active and informed leadership involvement, rather than passive approval. Leaders who engage in learning processes, seek to understand the capabilities and limitations of AI, and communicate transparently about expected changes are better able to build internal trust and reduce resistance. In these cases, AI adoption is framed as a collective organizational learning process rather than as a top-down technological imposition. Conversely, where leadership engagement remains formal or episodic, AI initiatives tend to remain isolated within innovation units or experimental teams, with limited impact on core organizational processes. From a policy perspective, these findings underscore the importance of addressing managerial capacity and leadership skills as part of AI readiness, rather than focusing exclusively on technical competencies.

“Leaders need to understand AI, not just approve budgets. If they don’t understand it, they can’t guide the organization.”
(Hungary, technology consultant)

In cases where a company is right before a generational change in leadership. In Romania and in Hungary, many companies were established 20–25 years ago, during the period of system change after the socialist era, and now the founders are approaching retirement. You probably know this situation very well. After leading a company for 20, 25, or even 30–35 years—since there was a big wave of company creation in Hungary around 1990–1991—many of these firms have been led by the same founders for decades. In many cases, they are not very open to change. They are already at retirement age and have become used to the fact that they know the market and do everything themselves. So, often it is hard to make them believe that software or machines of this kind can really help them, because they simply believe more in the human factor. That is a key problem. (Romania, AI expert)

EXPERIENCES WITH AI ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Although artificial intelligence is often framed as a primarily technical innovation, evidence from technology providers in Romania and Hungary indicates that successful AI adoption depends far more on organizational capacity and cultural readiness than on algorithmic sophistication.

This section examines how AI initiatives are initiated, developed, and implemented in Romania and Hungary, with a focus on the barriers and enabling conditions shaping their outcomes. Particular attention is given to recurring patterns of success and failure, including the tendency of many AI projects to stall at the pilot stage.

Qualitative data

Employee responses to AI adoption within their organization are mixed:

almost **40% of the experts** consider employees are rather curious, while **34.7% believe they are resistant (Figure 7)**. Resistance to change is always high, but in the case of AI adoption, there is also a real fear of losing jobs among employees.

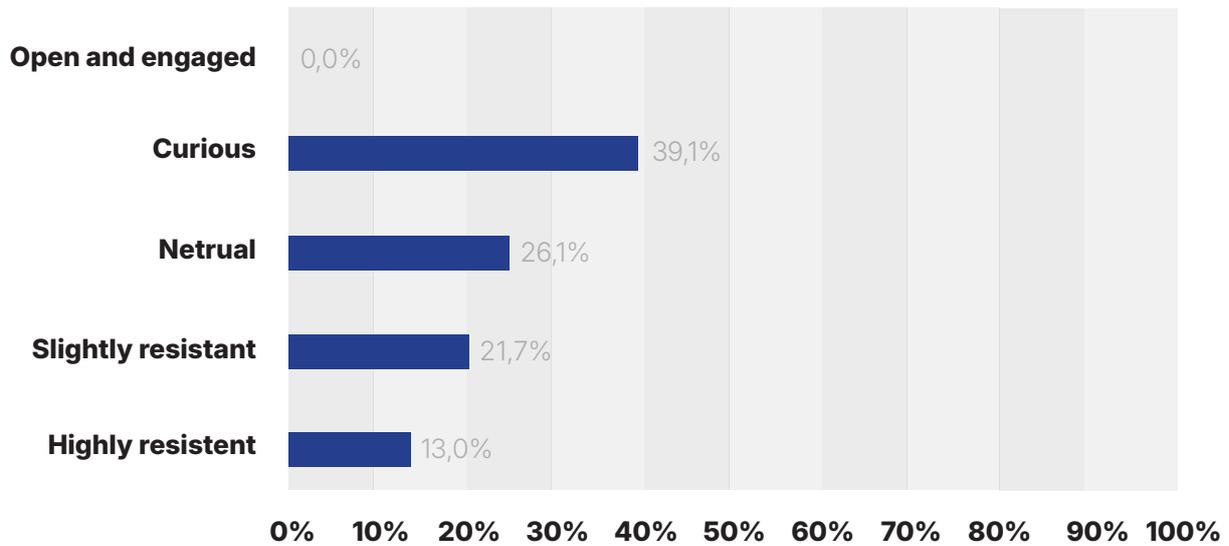


Figure 7. Employees' reactions to AI adoption in general

There are only small country differences between Romanian and Hungarian experts' views on employees' reactions: in Romania, experts consider to a greater extent that the normal employees' reaction is to be curious, that is, being interested in exploring how AI could support their work. Interestingly enough, no expert in either country considered employees to be open and engaged, in other words, to actively adopt AI tools and internally promote them.

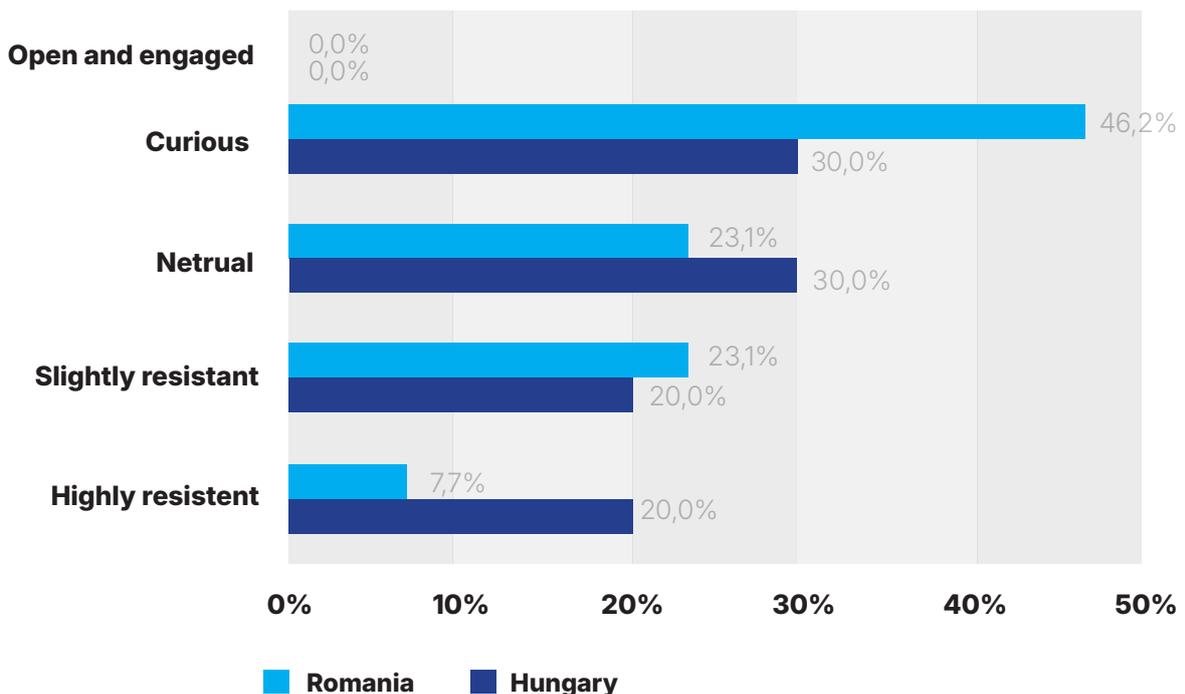


Figure 8. Employees' reactions to AI adoption in general, by country

Resistance to AI adoption translates into being cautious, needing additional reassurance and training (slightly resistant), or even showing fear, mistrust, or opposition to AI in general (highly resistant). There are several activities that organizations implementing AI solutions offer to their clients, to help them faster adopt AI solutions, among which: technical trainings, that is practical instruction on using AI applications and integrating them into workflows; then awareness workshops or sessions focused on understanding AI benefits and limitations, reducing resistance to change; mentoring and coaching activities, offering individual or group support during the transition toward new technologies, and various internal communication activities, such as campaigns or materials clarifying the goals, benefits, and impacts of AI on employees' roles **(Figure 9)**.

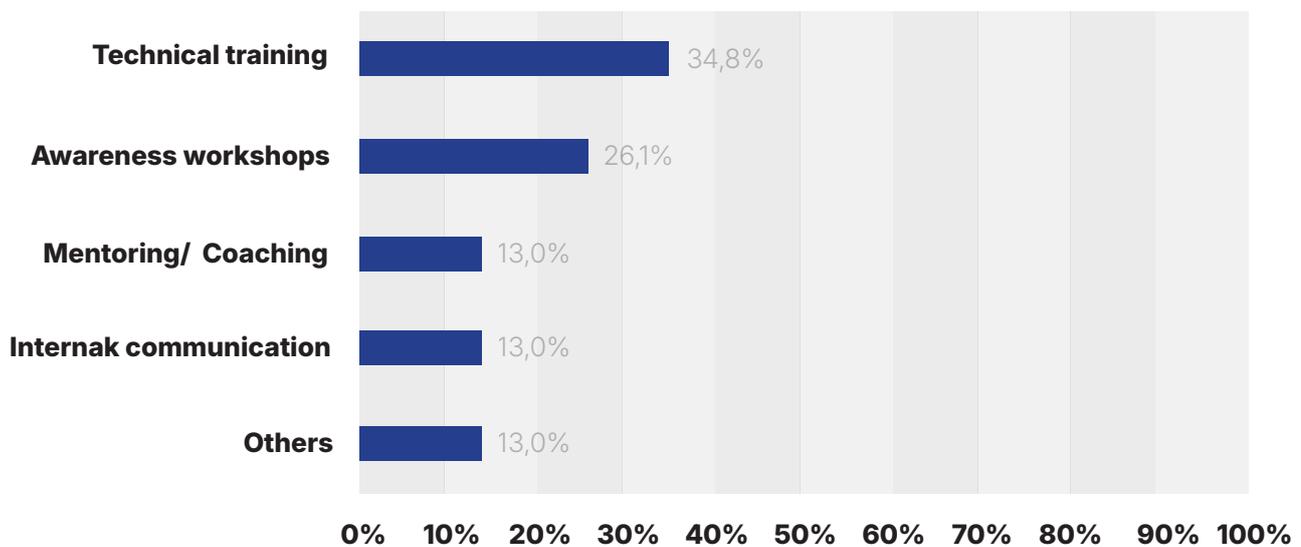


Figure 9. Activities offered by companies offering AI solutions to their clients

Companies offering AI solutions offer their clients various types of activities, to help them faster and more efficiently adopt AI, such as:

- Technical training: Practical instruction on using AI applications and integrating them into workflows
- Awareness workshops: Sessions focused on understanding AI benefits and limitations, reducing resistance to change
- Internal communication: Campaigns or materials clarifying the goals, benefits, and impacts of AI on employees' roles
- Mentoring / coaching: Individual or group support during the transition toward new technologies

TREND 1

Employee reactions combine curiosity with fear of job displacement and loss of relevance

Technology providers describe employee reactions to AI as deeply ambivalent, combining interest, curiosity, and experimentation with anxiety, resistance, and fear. Employees are rarely indifferent. Instead, they actively try to make sense of AI in relation to their own job security, professional identity, and future relevance within the organization.

Several respondents emphasize that fear is often expressed not only in terms of immediate job loss, but also in relation to longer-term obsolescence. Employees worry about falling behind colleagues, being unable to keep up with technological change, or losing their value within the organization. This concern is particularly visible in roles characterized by routine tasks, but also in creative and knowledge-intensive professions, where AI challenges established notions of expertise.

At the same time, technology providers note that employees are already experimenting with AI tools independently. As one respondent explicitly stated, employees will use AI regardless of formal organizational readiness, often relying on freely available or unregulated tools. This creates a paradox: fear of AI coexists with widespread informal adoption, driven by competitive pressure and peer comparison.

In Romania, respondents frequently link employee fear to broader cultural patterns of anxiety toward technological change and uncertainty, while in Hungary, fear is more often articulated in concrete terms of job replacement and task automation. In both contexts, unmanaged fear contributes to resistance, misinformation, and withdrawal from engagement.

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON EMPLOYEE FEAR AND CURIOSITY

“Employees will use AI no matter what. They have it on their phones, they have it on their computers, and they will use free software—sometimes even dubious or risky software—but they will use something.”

(Hungary, Technology provider)

“They need to keep up with colleagues and competitors by extending their human capabilities with machine capabilities.”

(Hungary, Technology provider)

“People project a lot of anxiety onto AI: AI will take our jobs, AI will control us, AI will turn us into slaves.”

(Romania, technology expert)

“Exactly the same reactions appeared with other technologies in the past, but now the fear is stronger because people don’t understand what AI actually does.”

(Romania, technology expert)

“Those who manage to keep up will adapt well. Those who don’t... won’t.”

(Romania, technology expert)

TREND 2

Training practices remain fragmented and largely informal

Training related to AI adoption is described by technology providers as uneven, fragmented, and often insufficient. While awareness of the need for upskilling is high, structured training strategies are rare. Instead, learning frequently takes place through informal experimentation, peer exchange, or ad hoc workshops rather than systematic programs.

Romanian respondents note that larger organizations are more likely to organize internal learning sessions or knowledge-sharing events, particularly for leadership and key specialists. Hungarian respondents, by contrast, emphasize reliance on external training, community learning, and self-directed experimentation, especially in SMEs. In both contexts, respondents stress that practical, hands-on learning is far more effective than abstract or theoretical instruction. A recurring theme is that training is often reactive rather than anticipatory. Companies tend to invest in learning only after AI tools have already entered everyday work practices, sometimes through informal employee use. This delay increases uncertainty and reinforces uneven skill development within organizations.

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON TRAINING AND LEARNING

“The companies that are more ready are those that organize knowledge-sharing events, provide formal and informal education for employees, and are actively engaged in brainstorming and designing how and where the company could be transformed—how these new tools could be used in specific processes, what competitive advantages they can create, and where the company can gain value from them.”

(Romania, Technology provider)

“For a company to be ready for these changes, leadership has to be conscious. As a leader, you need to educate people about what these tools are, what you can use them for, and what they are not suitable for within the company.”

(Romania, Technology provider)

“It’s not enough to say that AI should be used. People need guidance, concrete use cases, and scenarios that show how these tools actually fit into their daily work.”

(Hungary, Technology provider)

“We are at the beginning of a new industrial revolution. Adoption will happen gradually, people will get used to the technologies, but this requires learning by doing, not just instructions.”

(Romania, Technology provider)

TREND 3

Transparent communication and employee involvement are central to trust-building

Technology providers consistently underline that how AI is communicated internally is as important as what technologies are introduced. Where AI is presented as a top-down decision or as an abstract strategic objective, resistance tends to increase. By contrast, when employees are involved in discussions about use cases, limitations, and expected changes, trust is more likely to emerge.

It also depends greatly on the employee's perspective and on how open-minded they are. It is one thing to see a tool that could support daily work as a threat, and quite another to consider how it might help you become more efficient, achieve your KPIs, and perhaps advance within the organization. There is an important discussion here about employee mindset and everyday work attitudes. An employee who may not be performing particularly well—there's that saying, "time passes, the salary goes on"—is likely to feel clearly threatened when AI is introduced. By contrast, an employee who wants to grow, remain competitive, and continuously improve at work will, I believe, see AI as an ally rather than a threat. AI can significantly increase efficiency, enable people to do more, be more creative, contribute improvement ideas, and optimize their work (Romania, IT consultant).

Respondents stress that uncertainty fuels fear. When organizations fail to explain why AI is being introduced, how it will affect work tasks, and what role employees will continue to play, AI becomes a symbolic threat rather than a practical tool. Conversely, transparency about both opportunities and limitations helps reduce speculation and misinformation.

Several interviewees emphasize that employee involvement should not be limited to communication alone, but should include participation in experimentation, feedback, and evaluation. This reinforces the perception that AI is intended to support human work, not replace it.

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON EMPLOYEE FEAR AND CURIOSITY

"If this usage happens in a controlled environment, with clear use cases and scenarios, it is much better for everyone."
(Hungary, Technology provider)

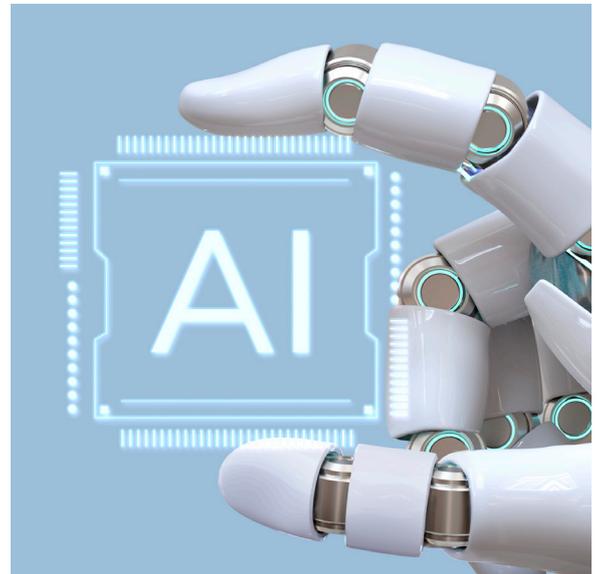
"As a leader, you are better off if AI usage is organized and transparent."
(Hungary, Technology provider)

"People need to understand what AI can do and what it cannot do."
(Romania, Technology provider)

"AI should extend human capabilities, not replace them."
(Hungary, Technology provider)

THE FUTURE OF AI: SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Beyond individual organizations, artificial intelligence raises systemic questions related to skills development, governance capacity, economic competitiveness, and social cohesion. Technology providers interviewed in Romania and Hungary consistently move beyond firm-level considerations when reflecting on the future of AI, emphasizing that the pace and direction of adoption will be shaped by institutional readiness, leadership capacity, and the ability of public and private actors to coordinate responses. This section synthesizes expert perspectives on how AI-driven transformation can be better supported at national and European levels, translating empirical insights into policy-relevant lessons.



Qualitative data

Insights from expert surveys show that several actions can be taken to help accelerate the adoption of AI-based solutions in companies. On a scale from 1 (very low potential) to 5 (very high potential), three were rated higher than 4: development of digital skills and technological education, executive leadership and strategic vision for digital transformation, and organizational culture open to innovation and experimentation (**Figure 10**). All these mirror what experts believe are success factors in adopting AI solutions. At the same time, access to public funding and AI regulation seem not to be as important (still above the mean of the scale from 1 to 5).

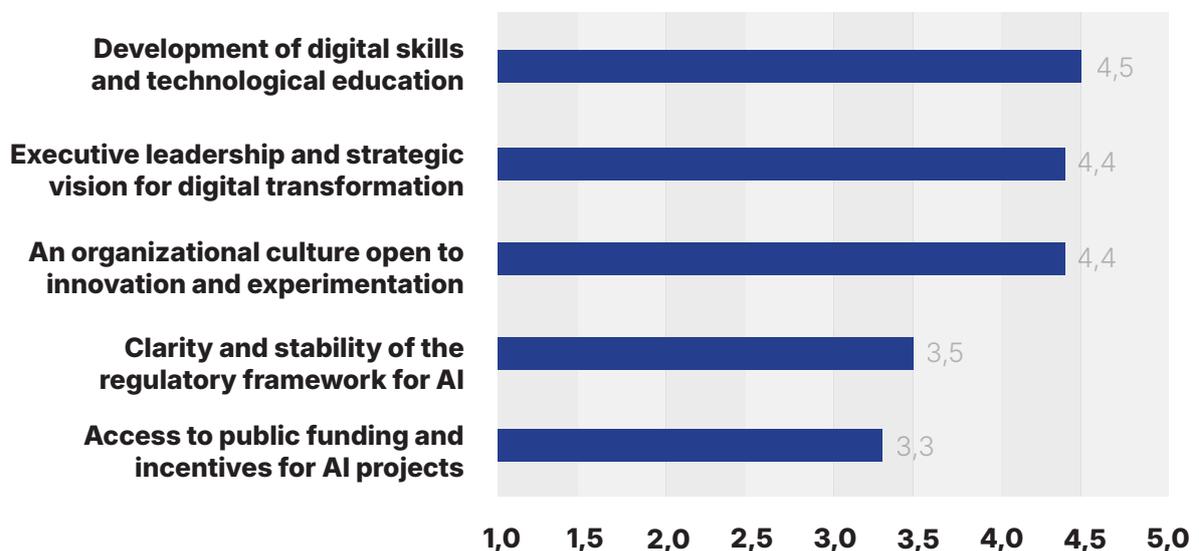


Figure 10. Actions that could help accelerate the adoption of AI-based solutions

There are no notable differences between countries, except maybe that the organizational culture open to innovation and experimentation seems to matter more in Romania than in Hungary (Figure 11).

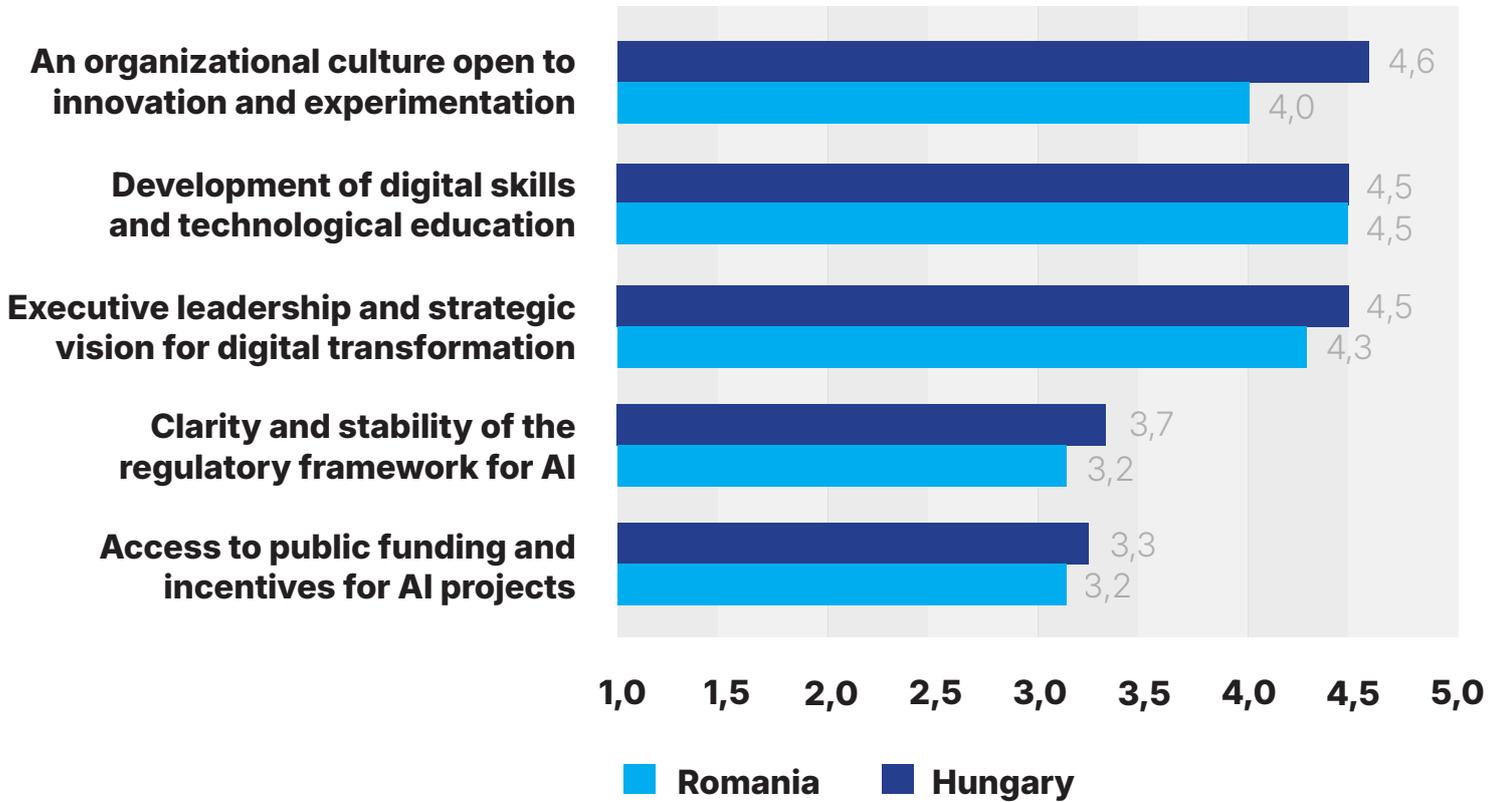


Figure 11. Actions that could help accelerate the adoption of AI-based solutions, by country

What can accelerate the adoption of AI based solutions (in the order of importance):

- Development of digital skills and technological education
- Executive leadership and strategic vision for digital transformation
- An organizational culture open to innovation and experimentation
 - Clarity and stability of the regulatory framework for AI
 - Access to public funding and incentives for AI projects

When discussing the role played by the private-public partnerships in preparing employees for the transition towards the use of artificial intelligence, experts in both countries foresee some key collaborative actions:

- The public entities should provide an education framework adapted to the present realities and the foreseeable future, dominated by AI, while the private companies should offer the technical expertise: ***“Public authorities could facilitate access to standardized educational programs and could create incentives for the development of digital competences. The companies could contribute by offering practical expertise, pilot programs, upskilling, and reskilling programs adapted to the real needs of the industry. “Public authorities can provide the strategic framework, funding, and integration of these skills into education and continuing vocational training, while companies can offer technical expertise, applied training programs, and access to real technologies.” “AI should be part of a mandatory education chapter in secondary schools and universities to be mandated by public administration.”***
- AI regulation should be the responsibility of public entities, while the non-profit organizations could offer guidelines on how AI should be used: ***“There should be some, preferably nonprofit organizations that set guidelines on how to and when to and for what to use AI for. Some international standards/certificate”***
- Partnerships that should offer in vitro testing of AI solutions: ***“innovation and testing hubs, where companies can experiment with AI technologies before investing in them.”***
- Joint training and mentoring programs: ***“I think professional organizations and public authorities should communicate and recommend training programs because the companies are searching themselves”; “Mentoring - the most important thing in the collaboration is the mentoring between the partners, also the support of executive leadership must play a part.”***

When discussing systemic changes, there are several insights from experts in both countries, with a specific focus. For Romania, some key strategies should be implemented at the system level:

- AI literacy integration in educational curricula, alongside developing critical thinking from secondary school onwards: ***“The effective adoption of AI in Romania requires both massive educational reform”; “If I were to make a systemic change, it would be to learn from school that it is better to try and fail (in time I will succeed) than to remain in my comfort zone.”***
- Constant training for obtaining digital literacy skills: ***“Large-scale national digital literacy programs for adults and civil servants, in multi-year projects, on an ongoing basis until levels comparable to the EU average are reached”; “Well-thought-out digitization strategies.”***
- AI regulation at least with some key guidelines: ***“Developing a predictable regulatory framework that encourages innovation while ensuring the ethical and responsible use of AI technologies”; “Standards, best practices, and regulations that explain how to implement AI safely, not just what risks it entails.”***
- Awareness campaigns about both the benefits and the dangers of AI use: ***“public awareness campaigns on TV and social media, focusing on the capabilities and dangers of AI.”***

- Investing in digital infrastructure: ***“Modern digital infrastructure - Functional government cloud.”***
- Economic support: ***“Money and support for those who want to adopt AI.”; “Economic support and adoption in the economy - AI grants and vouchers for SMEs that consume such services.”***

Hungarian experts, on the other hand, focus on three main issues:

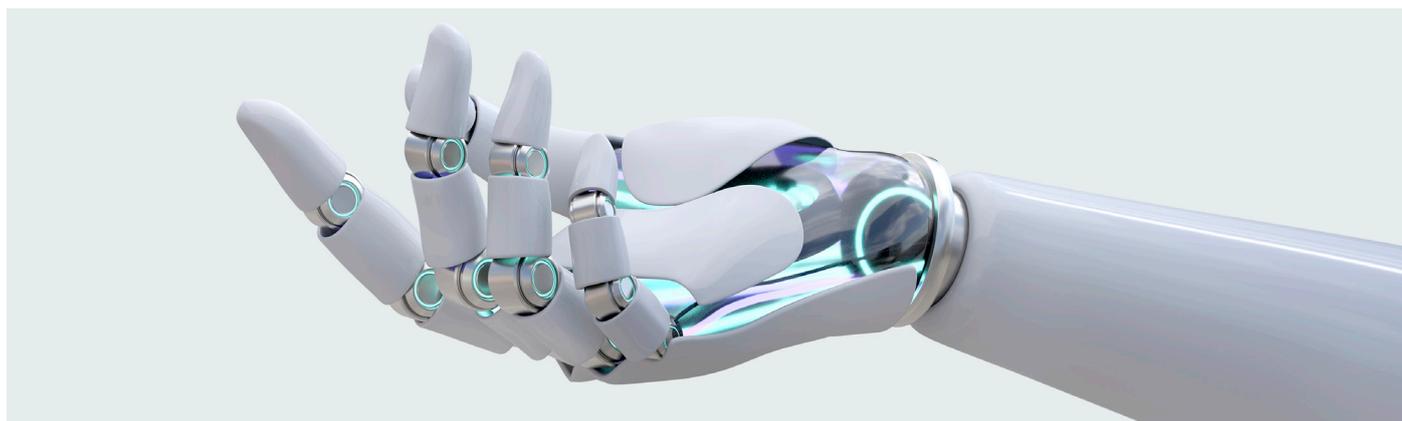
- The need for AI regulation: ***“Clear regulation - on company and EU scale, security assessments, and clear guidelines on usage and on tools. “Lack of a proper legal framework can be an issue.”***
- Open communication about AI (focused on benefits for society): ***“Better communication mainly concerning what AI (beyond ChatGPT, etc) and all the benefits it can provide to business, society, and individuals.” “I think a lot more communication around successful examples, even from professional bodies, would help a lot. But that means they should also use AI, and I don’t see the professional bodies using AI well.”***
- The need for continuing education: ***“Trainings with professionals, best practices guidebook, etc.”***

TREND 1

AI is perceived as a structural economic transformation

Across both countries, experts consistently conceptualize AI not as a discrete technological upgrade, but as a structural economic transformation comparable to earlier industrial shifts, such as electrification, mechanization, or automation. This framing recurs explicitly in interviews and shapes how respondents assess the adequacy of current organizational and policy responses. AI is described as a foundational infrastructure that will reshape entire industries, rather than as a tool that can be integrated incrementally without broader change.

Several respondents caution against narratives that treat AI as a “plug-in” solution or a short-term efficiency tool. Instead, they emphasize that AI adoption requires organizations to “zoom out” and reconsider how work is organized, how value is created, and how human and machine capabilities interact. From this perspective, isolated pilot projects or narrowly targeted interventions are unlikely to generate sustainable outcomes unless they are embedded within broader institutional adaptation.



TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON SYSTEMIC BOTTLENECKS

"We don't have an AI problem; we have a data and culture problem."

(Hungary, consultant)

"Organizations are not ready because people are not ready."

(Hungary, Technology provider)

"AI projects fail not because of technology, but because the foundations are missing."

(Romania, Technology provider)

"You cannot implement AI without governance, data discipline, and learning capacity."

(Romania, Technology provider)

"This is not only about companies. Institutions face the same limitations."

(Romania, Technology provider)

TREND 2

Skills, data governance, and change management are systemic bottlenecks

A second cross-cutting trend concerns the identification of skills, data governance, and change management as systemic bottlenecks that constrain AI adoption across sectors. Interviewees emphasize that these constraints extend well beyond individual companies and reflect broader institutional weaknesses, including education systems, training infrastructures, and public-sector capacity.

Respondents repeatedly stress that AI-related challenges are often misdiagnosed as technical problems when, in reality, they stem from cultural resistance, weak data practices, and insufficient understanding at the leadership level. The absence of coherent data governance frameworks and limited AI literacy among decision-makers undermines both private-sector implementation and public-sector oversight. Importantly, several experts highlight that public institutions face similar challenges to private organizations, particularly in terms of data fragmentation, legacy systems, and limited internal capacity to manage AI responsibly.

TREND 3

Coordinated public–private action is required to avoid fragmented and risky adoption

A third dominant trend concerns the perceived inevitability of AI adoption and the risks associated with unmanaged or fragmented deployment. Across interviews, respondents emphasize that AI use is already widespread at the individual level and will continue to expand regardless of formal policy frameworks. The key question, therefore, is not whether AI will be used, but under what conditions and with what safeguards.

Technology providers repeatedly warn that in the absence of coordinated public–private action, AI adoption risks becoming uncontrolled, uneven, and socially divisive. Employees already rely on freely available tools, often without guidance or oversight, while organizations struggle to establish coherent rules, training pathways, and ethical boundaries. From this perspective, policy inaction does not prevent AI adoption but shifts it into informal and potentially risky spaces. Respondents call for clearer regulatory guidance, sector-specific training frameworks, and targeted support for SMEs, combined with stronger dialogue between policymakers, employers, and technology providers. Importantly, they stress that policy should focus on readiness, governance, and trust, rather than on promoting AI adoption for its own sake.

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON THE NEED FOR COORDINATED ACTION

“Employees will use AI no matter what. The question is whether this happens in a controlled environment or in a risky one.”

(Hungary, Technology provider)

“If there is no coordination, adoption will be chaotic.”

(Romania, Technology provider)

“Support is needed not only for technology, but for people and organizations.”

(Romania, Technology provider)

TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS ON AI AS STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

"This is much bigger than just a plugin. It is more like electricity or steam—like an industrial revolution. You need to zoom out and completely reshape your organization."

(Technology provider)

"It will happen very quickly, and then we must ask what we are going to do with the workforce."

(Technology provider)

"AI is closer to electricity than to an app."

(Hungary, AI expert)

"We are practically at the beginning of a new industrial revolution."

(Technology provider)

"This is not just another software update. Entire industries will change."

(Romania, CIO)

Policy recommendations:

This report indicates that artificial intelligence adoption is already reshaping work, organizations, and skill requirements. However, the evidence also shows that AI-driven transformation is proceeding in an uneven, fragmented, and often poorly coordinated manner. Many of the barriers identified by technology providers cannot be addressed by companies acting alone. They require coordinated action by policymakers, social partners, and companies themselves. Based on the data collected for this report, several policy recommendations can be structured around five interrelated priorities:

1. Organizational readiness

2. Leadership capacity

3. Workforce skills

4. Governance and trust

5. Coordinated public-private action

Shift policy focus from AI uptake to organizational readiness

A central insight from the interviews is that the main obstacles to AI adoption are not technological, but organizational. Many companies attempt to introduce AI without having clearly documented processes, coherent data structures, or internal coordination mechanisms. As a result, AI projects frequently stall at the pilot stage or fail to deliver expected value. Thus:

- **Recommendation 1:** Policy interventions should shift emphasis from promoting AI adoption as an end in itself toward strengthening organizational readiness. Public support instruments (such as grants, vouchers, or advisory schemes) should explicitly include requirements or incentives for process mapping, data audits, and internal change management (in particular for SMEs, which often lack the internal capacity to undertake such preparatory work independently).

Invest in leadership and managerial capacity for AI-driven change.

Leadership commitment emerged as a necessary but insufficient condition for successful AI adoption. While senior management often endorses AI at a strategic level, uneven engagement across management layers frequently undermines implementation.

- **Recommendation 2:** Policymakers and social partners should prioritize leadership-focused capacity-building initiatives. These should go beyond technical AI literacy and address how AI reshapes workflows, decision-making authority, and professional roles. Training for managers should include practical modules on leading organizational change, communicating uncertainty, and managing employee concerns related to automation and job transformation.

Strengthening workforce skills through continuous, practice-oriented learning.

The research highlights a strong gap between employees' willingness to engage with AI and the availability of structured training opportunities. In many cases, employees are already using AI tools informally, without guidance, safeguards, or alignment with organizational objectives. While this demonstrates high motivation, it also increases risks related to data protection, quality control, and unequal skill development. Therefore:

- **Recommendation 3:** Public authorities, in cooperation with social partners, should ensure that AI-related training opportunities are accessible to SMEs and workers in routine-intensive roles, who are often excluded from advanced digital training. Where possible, training should be embedded in working time and linked to concrete organizational processes, reducing the risk that AI skills become the preserve of a small group of specialists.

Improve data governance and data literacy as foundations for AI adoption.

Data readiness and governance deficits represent one of the most persistent barriers identified by technology providers. Without structured, accessible, and well-governed data, AI systems cannot function effectively, regardless of technological sophistication. However, many organizations underestimate this requirement, leading to unrealistic expectations and project failure. Thus:

- **Recommendation 4:** Policy action is needed to strengthen data governance frameworks at organizational and sectoral levels. This includes support for data standardization, interoperability, and responsible data management, particularly in regulated sectors and public administration. At the same time, data literacy should be treated as a core competence for both management and employees, not as a specialist skill.
- **Recommendation 5:** National strategies should integrate data literacy into existing digital skills frameworks and vocational training curricula. For public institutions, dedicated capacity-building initiatives are needed to ensure that administrations can act not only as AI users, but also as informed regulators and partners in AI ecosystems.

Promote transparent communication and employee involvement to build trust. Employee reactions to AI adoption are shaped less by the technology itself than by how change is communicated and governed. Fear of job displacement, loss of relevance, or opaque decision-making processes can generate resistance even in technologically advanced organizations. Conversely, transparent communication and employee involvement reduce anxiety and foster acceptance.

- **Recommendation 6:** Employers should be encouraged, through guidelines, social dialogue frameworks, or conditional funding, to involve employees early in discussions about AI use cases, limitations, and expected impacts on work. Communication should address not only opportunities, but also uncertainties and risks, avoiding overly optimistic or deterministic narratives.

Support SMEs with tailored, integrated policy instruments. The research shows that SMEs face distinct challenges in AI adoption, including limited resources, lower data maturity, and restricted access to expertise. While SMEs may be more open to experimentation, they often struggle to sustain or scale AI initiatives without external support.

- **Recommendation 7:** Rather than isolated funding calls, policymakers should consider bundled support packages that address technology, skills, and organizational change simultaneously.
- **Recommendation 8:** Cross-border cooperation and access to European networks can also help SMEs avoid adapting too closely to low-readiness local markets, enabling them to remain competitive in more advanced environments.

Ensure coordinated public–private action to avoid fragmented adoption. A final overarching recommendation concerns the need for coordinated public–private action. The interviews make clear that AI adoption will continue regardless of policy frameworks; the key question is whether it unfolds in a controlled, inclusive, and responsible manner, or in a fragmented and risky one.

- **Recommendation 9:** Public authorities, employers, technology providers, and social partners should collaborate in designing coherent AI governance ecosystems. This includes aligning regulatory guidance, skills strategies, innovation support, and workplace policies.

METHODOLOGICAL ANNEX

This report was designed to enhance understanding of how artificial intelligence (AI) is adopted within companies and to identify ways to improve organizational and workforce-related processes associated with AI integration. The study focuses on the perspective of technology providers operating in Romania and Hungary, including developers, consultants, and implementation specialists who support companies in the adoption of AI and digital technologies. Operating at the intersection between technological capability, organizational readiness, and employee adaptation, these actors offer a system-level view of adoption dynamics across sectors, enabling the identification of recurrent patterns and structural constraints.

The research methodology was designed in direct alignment with the project's objectives to contribute to evidence-based policy discussions on AI-driven transformation of work by identifying the conditions, practices, and strategies that facilitate effective AI adoption, as well as the barriers that hinder it. In line with the project's emphasis on social dialogue and human-centered AI, particular attention is devoted to issues of employee preparedness, internal communication practices, and trust, highlighting their relevance for the design of targeted policy measures supporting responsible and inclusive AI integration in the workplace.

THUS, THE RESEARCH ADDRESSES FOUR INTERRELATED OBJECTIVES:

01

To map the key conditions, practices, and strategies that enable effective AI adoption in companies supported by technology providers in Romania and Hungary.

02

To identify the main enablers and barriers that influence the success or failure of AI implementation projects, focusing on interactions between technology providers and client organizations.

03

To understand how technology providers perceive and support employee preparedness, internal communication, and motivation for AI-driven transformations in client organizations.

04

To formulate practical recommendations for companies, social partners, and policymakers on strengthening workforce readiness, trust, and organizational resilience during AI integration.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENTS

The study adopts a **mixed-methods research design** that combines a structured survey with in-depth qualitative interviews. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods supports analytical triangulation and strengthens the robustness of the findings.

The survey targets technology service providers and **developers operating in Romania and Hungary**, with segmentation by country, company size, and organizational role. The sample includes large companies, medium-sized enterprises, and small firms, reflecting the diversity of the technology provider landscape in both countries. Respondents are drawn from different organizational levels, including C-level management, middle management, and employees directly involved in AI-related projects. This stratification ensures that the analysis captures strategic, managerial, and operational perspectives on AI adoption. The companies represented by the respondents cover a large range of sectors, from energy, retailing, manufacturing, education, to health, public administration, security, defense, etc.

In parallel, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a smaller, purposively selected subset of technology providers in each country. The interview sample includes representatives from large, medium-sized, and small companies, as well as respondents occupying senior management, middle management, and expert roles. The interviews follow a common guide structured around four thematic areas: company profile and market positioning; experiences with AI adoption and implementation; employee reactions, training, and internal communication; and broader systemic perspectives on AI adoption and policy support.

Effective AI integration requires moving beyond technology-centered approaches toward people, organization, and trust-centered policies.

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