Ibec
For Irish Business

Guide 1.

# AI 101 AND WHY IT MATTERS



WORK JUST GOT SMARTER

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# About us

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby and business representative group.
Our purpose is to help build a better, sustainable future by influencing, supporting and delivering for business success. With over 300 employees, Ibec engages with key stakeholders in Ireland and internationally through our six regional offices and our Brussels office, along with an extensive international network in the UK and US.

Ibec positions are shaped by our diverse membership, which range from small to large, domestic to multinational and our 39 trade associations cover a wide range of industry sectors.

As well as lobbying, Ibec provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.

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**Disclaimer:** This guide aims to provide general guidance to businesses and organisations on AI literacy and preparing for implementation of the EU AI Act. It is not exhaustive and is not intended as the definitive analysis on AI as a technology or as legal or other advice on compliance with the EU AI Act. Please be aware that Ibec may update the guidance as the implementation of the EU AI Act progresses.

# GUIDE 1. AI 101 AND WHY IT MATTERS

This guide describes AI and its subsets, its opportunity and associated imperatives for business.

## 1.1 What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

**Artificial intelligence (AI) can be described as a suite of machine-based technologies or systems aimed at reproducing certain human cognitive processes** e.g. recognising patterns and understanding language.

- **Machine learning is a central subset of AI, enabling machines to learn and adapt from data inputs.** Data quality[1] in machine learning may impact the effectiveness and/or reliability of an AI system. **Consequently, good data governance is important in safeguarding safety, rights and ensuring more effective outputs and benefits from AI**.
- ***'Predictive AI'*** can make complex *predictions* based on past trends and observed patterns in datasets; and **aims to improve[2] the prediction element of decision making**. Predictive AI is suitable for tasks such as targeted marketing, customer service, maintenance of equipment and suggestion of services.
- ***'Generative AI'*** **(GenAI)** can generate content based on data they were trained on, in response to questions or prompts posed by the users[3]; and **aims to improve[4] content generation**.
    - **These capabilities offer economic opportunity.** Combining (predictive and/or generative) AI with domain experts can enhance its performance. **While AI mimics *certain* human cognitive processes and offers opportunity, it is *not* a substitute for all human cognitive processes**.

The EU AI Act focuses on regulating *'AI systems'* and *'General Purpose AI (GP-AI) Models'*. See quick glossary of AI terms below.

**AI is not new; it has many existing applications.** AI development is iterative and has sometimes gone unnoticed. However, while sometimes misunderstood or misrepresented, **there has been significant recent progress in AI development through a combination of technical progress, increased volumes of computing power and the availability of large datasets as a source of training data**.

The most common type of AI is known as *'Artificial Narrow Intelligence'*, focussed on specific problems. **AI can surpass human performance on some tasks but not on all** e.g., visual common-sense reasoning and planning. The development of a theoretical *'Artificial General Intelligence'* – one that could match all human cognitive capacities or surpass them (*'Artificial Super Intelligence'*), appears distant at present, and is not the subject of this guidance.

### Quick glossary of AI terms

- The European Commission (2022) has published a compact but comprehensive **glossary of terms on AI[5]**.
- The EU AI Act legally defines an **AI system** as a *"Machine-based system[6] that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy[7] and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment[8], and that, for explicit or implicit objectives[9], infers[10], from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments"*[11]. The EU's legal definition of AI systems aligns with an OECD[12] definition of AI systems to encourage international alignment. **AI systems rest upon three elements: data (inputs), AI models (algorithm output), and computing hardware**. AI systems can be used as stand-alone or as a component of a product (whether 'embedded' i.e., physically integrated), or not (i.e., 'non-embedded'). AI systems can be deployed across economic domains and across borders.

- The EU AI Act defines a **General Purpose AI (GP-AI) model** a *"Model trained with a large amount of data using self-supervision at a scale, that displays significant generality and capable of competently performing a wide range of distinct tasks regardless of how placed on the market and that can be integrated into a variety of downstream systems or applications,* ***except*** *AI models that are used for research, development or prototyping activities before they are placed on the market."*
    - **Although AI models are essential components of AI systems, they do not constitute AI systems on their own.** AI models require the addition of further components, such as, for example a user interface, to become AI systems. AI models are typically integrated into and form part of AI systems.
    - **A key functional feature of such models is the generality** – i.e., the ease with which the model can be adapted to different domains of application – and the capability to competently perform a wide range of distinct tasks.
    - Pre-training an AI model on a larger set of generalised and unlabelled data ('unsupervised learning') may be used to develop a **'foundation model'** (FM) or GP-AI e.g., ChatGPT or Gemini, which can be then further modified or ***'fine-tuned'*** by introducing labelled data ('supervised learning') and guardrails and used as the foundation for several downstream domain specific applications.

## 1.2 The AI Opportunity

### AI offers cross-sectoral opportunities

**AI is a transformative general-purpose technology that can bring social and economic benefits across many sectoral domains** through improving the prediction element of decision-making processes and/or improving content generation (see Section 1.1). **Annex 1 of this Guide provides examples of AI use across several sectoral domains.**

**AI readiness[13] is a strategic cross-sectoral issue** and matters to both organisations who intend to provide AI products/services and those who intend to deploy AI products/services across the broader economy. Ireland's knowledge-based economy could be boosted further by AI adoption under the right conditions[14] [15]. **Enabling our AI readiness means:** (i) **addressing internal hurdles to competitiveness** (e.g., complete the EU single market and simplify and increase the coherence of our digital rulebook); and (ii) **enabling investment in 'foundational capacities' in AI, while remaining open to trade, technology, ideas and people**. These foundational capacities include AI skills, research and development, ecosystems and infrastructure (e.g., compute capacity, connectivity and energy).

Gartner reports that between 2023 and 2024, the portion of CEOs surveyed naming AI as the technology that would most significantly impact their industry nearly tripled[16] and that **AI is seen as an important theme in the next business transformation**, with 87% of CEOs agreeing that the benefits of AI to their business outweigh its risks[17]. In 2024, **over half of manufacturing companies that Ibec surveyed in Ireland, (56%) plan to adopt AI in 1-2 years, primarily to improve efficiency/productivity[18], increase innovation and increase profits**. Over a third surveyed (39%) say AI is a priority for their business to improve efficiency and productivity. Notably, AI is a higher priority for pharmaceutical companies, with over 54% identifying it as crucial, and 75% planning to adopt AI initiatives in the next 1-2 years[19]. Skillnet Ireland (2025) reports that attitudes towards the impact of AI are broadly positive and there is a growing awareness of the importance of AI for business success. While 54% of Irish businesses surveyed are yet to use AI, **66% of companies believe AI adoption has the potential to grow their business within the next two years[20]**.

Eurostat and CSO (2025) reports that **AI adoption is growing but still at a relatively early stage and there are divides in AI adoption** across the EU27 (e.g., AI divides along geographic; sectoral and firm lines). These divides illustrate that **Ireland has a political and competitive imperative to match AI adoption and intensity in other digital frontrunners and enable widespread benefits of AI across the economy**.

### AI can enhance productivity

**AI is a 'general-purpose technology' with a potential to enhance innovation and aggregate/firm level productivity**[21] [22] [23]. Trinity CDBA and Microsoft (2025) reports that 71% of organisations surveyed agree that AI's capacity to enhance efficiency and resource usage also make it a tool in supporting sustainability-related activities[24].

Industry sources estimate a return on investment of 14 months on average[25] and that **in the long run AI could boost productivity and Ireland's annual GDP** by between €40[26]–€60 billion[27].

### AI can enhance trade

AI, as a general-purpose technology, is capable of use across a wide range of domains and tasks. **The WTO reports that AI could affect trade** by being leveraged to:

- Overcome trade costs associated with logistics, supply chain management and regulatory compliance. Lower-income economies are expected to gain more here.
- Enhance connectivity by reducing language barriers.
- Boost demand and trade in complementary goods i.e. ICT infrastructure, tools and services.
- Affect productivity, which could: transform patterns of trade in digitally delivered services; and/or reshape economies comparative advantages. Larger productivity gains are expected in high-income economies.

In a scenario of universal AI adoption and high productivity growth up until 2040, the WTO estimates that global real trade growth could increase by almost 14 percentage points. In contrast, a scenario, with uneven AI adoption and low productivity growth, projects trade growth of just under 7 percentage points[28].

## 1.3 The AI Challenge

### AI may be disruptive, risks must be mitigated

**AI, while a significant opportunity[29], may also be disruptive** or misused - concerns have been raised in relation to the disruption of certain sectors, jobs displacement and the protection of safety and rights[30]. In this context, **public policy, business leadership and responsible use have important roles in ensuring the potential benefits of AI and digital automation can be realised and potential risks mitigated** through ambitious planning and implementation.

On the regulatory front, **the provision and deployment of artificial intelligence in the EU will be regulated by the EU AI Act from 2 August 2024** - the world's first comprehensive AI law. The Act seeks to both safeguard people's health, safety and fundamental rights; and encourage responsible AI innovation and use by organisations and individuals. **Fundamentally this involves risk-based organisational and technical measures safeguarding health, safety and rights in AI provision/deployment; transparency in AI provision/deployment; appropriate data governance in AI development/deployment; and avoiding biases in AI algorithms**. Trinity CDBA and Microsoft (2025) report 40% of organisations are uncertain about meeting EU AI Act compliance deadlines – a sentiment that appears to be stronger among SMEs. **There is a need to ensure clarity and support for organisations in navigating the evolving AI regulation**.

## AI has limitations, it must be used responsibly

**AI is not infallible**. Some AI have the capacity to '***hallucinate***'. AI hallucination is a phenomenon where a large language model (LLM) — often a generative AI — may perceive patterns or objects that are non-existent or imperceptible to humans, creating outputs that are nonsensical or inaccurate. **However, there are strategies to mitigate this** (see Guide 3).

## Strategy and culture matter in AI adoption

### *The need for human oversight*

AI is a tool. As AI improves the prediction element of decision making, then the **value of judgement** will increase. As AI commoditises content generation more, the **contextualisation and evaluation of that content** will also become important[31]. Organisations and individuals should not overlook the fact an AI generated prediction or content (based on their input) must be still reviewed and adopted/acted on. Consequently, **structured AI adoption and governance is important. Poor governance may pose risks to safety, rights, compliance and/or organisational reputation**.

### *The importance of strategy and organisational culture towards AI*

**Organisations must understand the business problem they are trying to solve, so they ask the right questions and identify whether and how AI is the right approach**. Trinity CDBA and Microsoft (2025) report that while close to 70% of organisations surveyed have financial resources available for AI implementation, only 60% identified a clear business case for AI adoption. This highlights the **need for a deeper strategic focus on integrating AI into organisational processes to maximise its benefits**. Strategic alignment ensures that AI applications directly contribute to the business's key objectives. **Businesses will benefit from putting in place conscious interventions to establish a culture of collaboration between human talent and AI systems**.

**Technological change/opportunity depends on organisational culture and change management** i.e., the capacity to successfully adopt the technology. There are divides in AI adoption between firms, sectors and regions. However, there can be divides in AI adoption *within* an organisation too. A so-called **'shadow AI culture'** may arise, where employees use (usually unauthorised) GenAI tools to enhance their productivity without telling their employers. Outright organisational prohibitions on AI or a lack of organisational awareness/governance on AI can foster this phenomenon. Curiosity, lack of appropriate management from employers, a desire to gain perceived advantage or avoid being left behind in the face of technological change may incentivise employees to covertly use AI tools in such an environment. Shadow AI culture, even well-intentioned, may pose risks to both organisations and individuals e.g., data risks such as inadvertent exposure of sensitive data; reputational and legal risks such as risk of plagiarism or inaccuracies; over-reliance on AI; and siloed knowledge. Trinity CDBA and Microsoft (2025) indicate that a **shadow AI culture is common in Ireland, and organisations should focus on acknowledging/managing AI use rather than prohibiting it outright** - 80% of managers surveyed report that 'free/public' (i.e., consumer grade) AI tools (i.e., not enterprise grade AI tools) are being used within their organisations. The same study indicates that 13% of surveyed organisations had strict prohibitions of these free/public AI tools (61% of this segment, indicated having a shadow AI culture). **Organisations without a clear AI policy were also found to have the highest use of these free/public AI tools, underscoring a need for defined organisational policies on AI**.

**AI can significantly enhance productivity, but it's crucial to balance automation with the need for human involvement in building trust and adoption in the technology**[32]. Irish businesses should focus on blending AI tools with human skills to optimise workflows and maintain high morale and engagement in AI adoption.

AI-driven automation is at the forefront of augmenting talent in the workplace. **By taking over repetitive and time-consuming tasks, AI may enable**

**employees to focus on more strategic and creative responsibilities. This shift may not only improve operational efficiency but may also enhance employee satisfaction** by reducing the mundane or routine workload, allowing employees to engage in more fulfilling and impactful work. **However, care needs to be taken to achieve balance where task intensity increases**. If worker tedium is diminished, and time filled with complex tasks, workers may need more time to recover. This productivity conundrum requires a data driven and human centric approach for exploration. Organisations can experiment and iterate over time to ensure productivity gains and improvements to job satisfaction are sustainable.

## Skills are a strategic imperative

As with previous technological waves, there will be labour market disruption, **there will be new jobs, and there will be a demand for relevant skills associated with AI**.

AI applications may have a *complementary* effect on a workplace task (i.e. augment human capabilities and enhance productivity) or a substitution effect (i.e., automation replaces labour). Different demographic groups may be impacted in unique ways. **The impact of AI on our labour market (and research in this area) is evolving**.

- **AI is not expected to bring about a net loss of jobs**, but it will replace certain tasks within many jobs over time[33] [34] [35].
- OECD has reported **job reorganisation appears more prevalent than job displacement**, with automation prompting the reorientation of jobs towards tasks in which humans have a comparative advantage (i.e. AI has had a complementary effect)[36].
- **Digital inclusion is social inclusion**. Having digital, including AI, skills will be essential for studying, working, communicating, accessing online public services and finding trustworthy information. While progress is being made, many people in the EU still lack basic digital skills. This must be addressed[37].
- EGFSN (2022) point out that while AI developers and researchers may require specialist skills, **anyone working in an organisation deploying, managing or regulating AI will need an understanding of AI to work effectively with such systems or experts**. Equally, Article 4 of the AI Act requires that providers and deployers of AI systems, in particular circumstances, take measures to ensure a sufficient level of AI literacy amongst staff and others dealing with the operation and use of AI systems.
- This challenge will need to be addressed by policy makers, organisations, educators and individuals.

**Skill shortages can hinder AI adoption**. Eurobarometer (2024) highlights that nearly half of SMEs surveyed (45%) agree that skill shortages hinder their efforts to adopt or use digital technologies[38]. Skillnet Ireland (2025) reports that 73% of business surveyed cited a current lack of necessary skills as the greatest barrier to integrating AI into their business[39]. **By augmenting tasks, and retaining and retraining talent, organisations may be able to better address talent scarcity and compete**.

Individuals will need to acquire new skills and/or respond to change in the future workplace. **Organisations have a strategic interest in addressing this challenge**. Reskilling can enable a competitive advantage for organisations by developing talent not readily available in the market and/or filling skill gaps necessary to strategic goals. Reskilling should also be considered an employee value proposition[40]. A reformed approach to job design will also be needed with static job profiles struggling to remain relevant in a time of industry reinvention and rampant change.

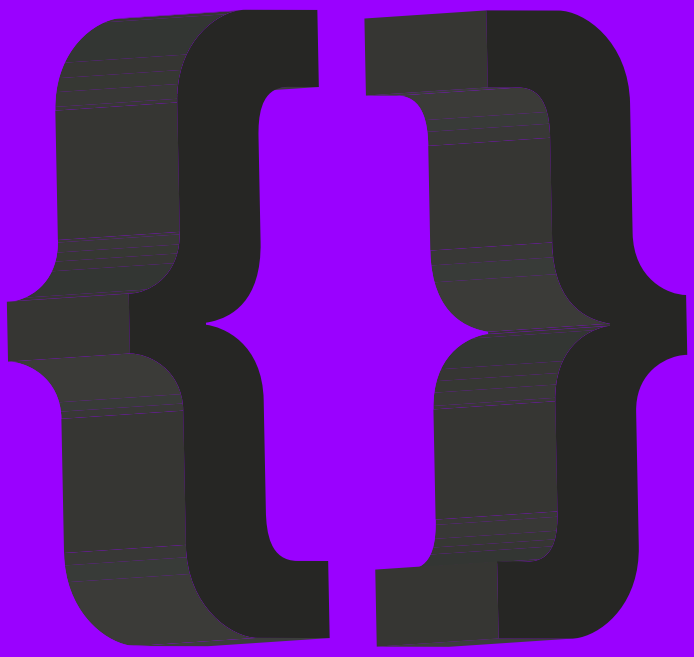
**Ibec believes that Ireland must pursue a strategic approach to addressing AI and digital skills that mobilises and coordinates the whole education and training system**. We must continue to gather intelligence on technological trends, our evolving labour market and consequent skills needs to inform supply. Respond to existing skill needs through upskilling and reskilling. Build a strong talent pipeline with multiple and varied opportunities to develop AI and digital skills; and support digital inclusion through

lifelong learning and AI/digital literacy so that a wide diversity of talent and people can participate in an evolving labour market. We must provide AI talent with opportunities to apply their experience in industry domains. **Government must resource this necessary strategic investment in our future by engaging business and leveraging the National Training Fund (NTF)**.[41]

## 1.4 Conclusion – Responsible AI enables AI Opportunity

- Artificial intelligence (AI) can be described as a suite of machine-based technologies or systems aimed at reproducing certain human cognitive processes.
- AI is transformative general-purpose technology that can bring social and economic benefits across several sectoral domains. AI adoption can augment human capabilities, productivity and trade. '*Predictive AI*' aims to improve the prediction element of decision making. '*Generative AI*' aims to improve content generation. These capabilities offer economic opportunity.
- AI, while a significant opportunity, may also be disruptive – this risk must be mitigated. Public policy, business leadership and responsible use have important roles in ensuring the potential benefits of AI can be realised and potential risks mitigated. From 2 August, 2024, the EU AI Act will require risk-based organisational and technical measures safeguarding health, safety and rights in AI provision/deployment.
- AI is not infallible; it must be used responsibly and with human oversight. Organisations and individuals should not overlook the fact an AI generated prediction or content (based on their input) must be still reviewed and adopted/acted on on. Structured AI adoption and governance is critical to maximising AI benefits and safeguarding safety, rights and organisational reputation.
- There is a need for both public and private organisations and individuals to prepare by seeking out the necessary education and training. Anyone working in an organisation deploying, managing or regulating AI will need an understanding of AI to work effectively with such systems or experts. Organisations should take a strategic approach to AI skills and the skills that will be required in the long term.
- Ireland must position itself in terms of policy, physical and institutional infrastructure and skills for this new technological wave. Irish businesses must navigate AI adoption with a focus on ethical practices, workforce development, productivity enhancement, and collaborative innovation. In doing so we will remain globally competitive and future fit.

# ENDNOTES



# ENDNOTES

### Guide 1: AI 101 and why it matters

1 Refers to how accurate, relevant and representative the data is. Does the data reflect a bias?

2 Means to lower cost by making prediction faster and/or increase quality by enhancing precision.

3 For example, Chat GPT

4 Means to lower cost by making content generation faster and/or increase quality by enhancing persuasion.

5 Estevez Almenzar, M., Fernandez Llorca, D., Gomez Gutierrez, E. and Martinez Plumed, F., (2022) Glossary of human-centric artificial intelligence, EUR 31113 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, ISBN 978-92-76-53432-7, doi:10.2760/860665, JRC129614

6 AI systems run on machines.

7 AI systems have some degree of independence of action from human involvement and capabilities to operate without human intervention.

8 AI systems have self-learning capabilities, allowing the system to change while in use.

9 The objectives of the AI system may be different from the intended purpose of the system in a specific context (i.e. implicit versus explicit objectives).

10 AI systems have the capacity to *infer* from its inputs which distinguishes AI from basic data processing or traditional software (where a computer program operates according to rules defined in advance by a programmer).

11 AI systems generate outputs that reflect different functions performed by AI systems and influence the environment (context) in which the AI system operates.

12 OECD (2019 and 2024) Recommendation of the Council on AI. These OECD AI Principles represent and promote a common aspiration for human-centric, trustworthy AI for adhering countries.

13 This means our readiness/capacity to provide (develop/innovate with) and/or deploy (adopt) AI in Ireland/EU.

14 Ibec (2024) Delivering our digital future p9.

15 Implement Consulting Group, commissioned by Google (2025) The AI innovation opportunity

16 Gartner (2024) How Your CEO Is Thinking About AI

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21 Brynjolfsson, E., Rock, D., & Syverson, C. (2019). Artificial Intelligence and the Modern Productivity Paradox. *The Economics of Artificial Intelligence: An Agenda, 23* and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2024). *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/27644

22 Martin Neil Baily, Erik Brynjolfsson, and Anton Korinek (2023) Machines of mind: The case for an AI-powered productivity boom Brookings Research Paper.

23 Siedschlag, Iulia and Duran Vanegas, Juan David, Does Artificial Intelligence Enhance Firm Productivity? (December 06, 2024). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4974850 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4974850

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27 Trinity CDBA and Microsoft (2025) The AI Economy in Ireland 2025: Trends, Impact & Opportunity.

28 WTO (2024) Trading with intelligence - How AI shapes and is shaped by international trade.

29 For example, in enhancing productivity, trade, content generation and the prediction element of decision making.

30 Pew Research (2018) Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humans.

31 Vakili, K. (2024) GenAI Masterclass, hosted by Technology Ireland Digital Skillnet in collaboration with London Business School. 'Collaborative intelligence' where AI augments human productivity.

32 N. Maslej, L. Fattorini, R. Perrault, V. Parli, A. Reuel, E. Brynjolfsson, J. Etchemendy, K. Ligett, T. Lyons, J. Manyika, J.C. Niebles, Y. Shoham, R. Wald, and J. Clark, "The AI Index 2024 Annual Report," AI Index Steering Committee, Institute for Human-Centered AI, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, April 2024. Chapter 4 (Economy) p 272.

33 EGFSN (2022) AI Skills: A Preliminary Assessment of the Skills Needed for the Deployment, Management and Regulation of Artificial Intelligence.

34 WEF (May, 2023) Future of Jobs.

35 ILO (August, 2023) Generative AI and jobs: A global analysis of potential effects on job quantity and quality.

36 Lane, M., M. Williams and S. Broecke (2023), "The impact of AI on the workplace: Main findings from the OECD AI surveys of employers and workers", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 288, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ea0a0fe1-en.

37 Ibec (2024) Delivering our digital future, see 'Priority 4: Include everyone in the digital opportunity'.

38 European Commission (2023) Eurobarometer 539 European Year of Skills: Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in small and medium-sized enterprises. Notably, 42% of SMEs surveyed in Ireland agreed that skill shortages hinder their efforts to adopt or use digital technologies.

39 Skillnet Ireland (2025) Ireland's Talent Landscape 2025: Future Skills Challenges of Irish Business.

40 HBR (2023) Reskilling in the Age of AI.

41 https://www.ibec.ie/influencing-for-business/ibec-campaigns/our-business-ambition/our-digital-ambition

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