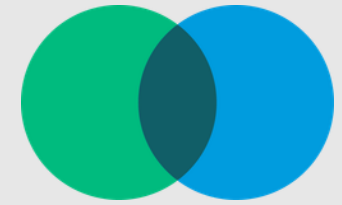


AI & the Future of Talent 2027



Executive Summary



As organisations in the GCC adopt AI, broader implications are emerging. Respondents note productivity gains, task automation, role redesign and workforce consolidation, rather than direct job loss. Longer-term considerations include skills development, human judgement and leadership pipelines.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents report functional AI adoption or beyond. Productivity was the most commonly reported measurable impact, while revenue growth was rarely identified, and enterprise-wide embedding remains limited. Views of AI performance vary sharply by seniority, suggesting that leadership and those closer to implementation do not always experience its impact in the same way.

Organisations are redesigning roles, combining responsibilities, and considering workforce consolidation. Much of this change focuses on entry-level tasks where employees traditionally learn how organisations operate, develop judgement, and build critical-thinking skills

This leads to the central question of this year's report:

As organisations prioritise speed and productivity, how do they ensure these gains do not come at the expense of the experiences through which people learn to question, interpret and lead?

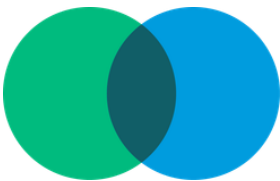
Key Findings

24% Of respondents have redefined or upskilled roles due to AI.	57% have no AI governance or only an informal, evolving framework.	59% say productivity is AI's most measurable impact	31% of executive respondents say AI has exceeded expectations
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* Functional adoption refers to AI being used for specific tasks or business areas.

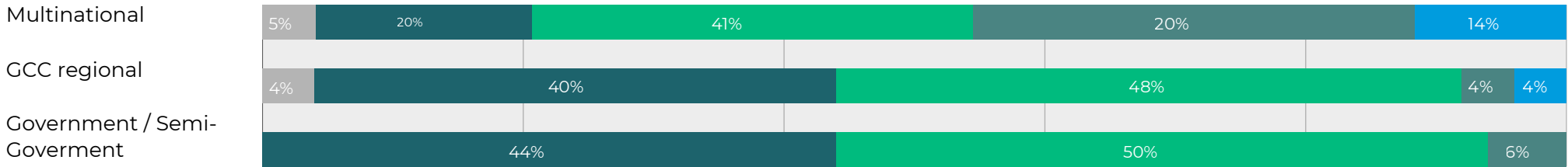
MARKET OVERVIEW

Many organisations report using AI for *specific use, but most have not implemented it across all business operations.



AI adoption maturity

Stage of adoption % of respondents No adoption Exploring specific tasks Scaled Fully embedded

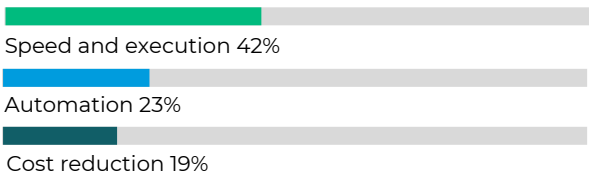


In last year’s report, about 60% of GCC organisations were piloting or exploring AI, with 19% reporting functional adoption. In our latest survey, 44% of respondents across the GCC report specific-use adoption, while only 8% have fully embedded AI.

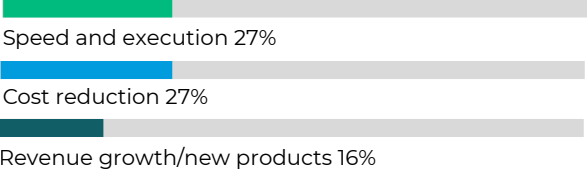
Investment priorities 2027

Top 3 main drivers of AI investment

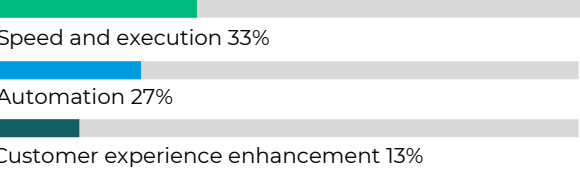
GCC regional companies



Multinationals



Government / semi-government



Privacy and regulatory risk emerge as a leading barrier to AI advancement across organisation types.

GCC regional respondents identify data privacy and regulatory risk as their leading barrier at 44%, followed by systems integration at 36%. Multinational respondents also rank privacy and regulatory risk first at 45%, followed by internal expertise at 40% and unclear ROI at 38%. Among government and semi-government respondents, internal expertise and privacy or regulatory risk are the most commonly identified barriers.

*Specific use or functional AI is being used for specific tasks or business areas.

INVESTMENT, PERFORMANCE & BUSINESS VALUE

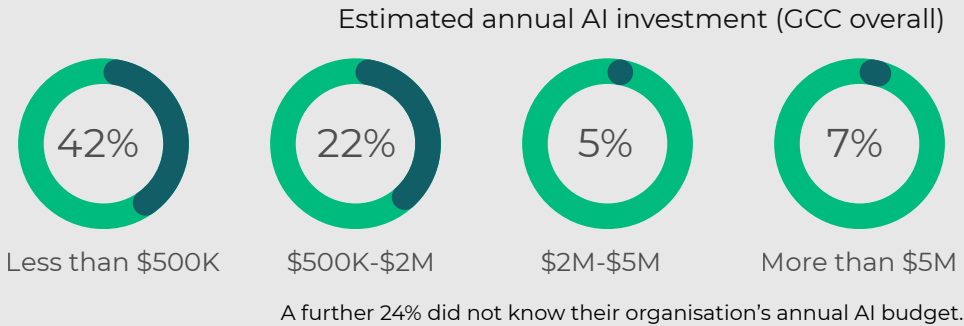
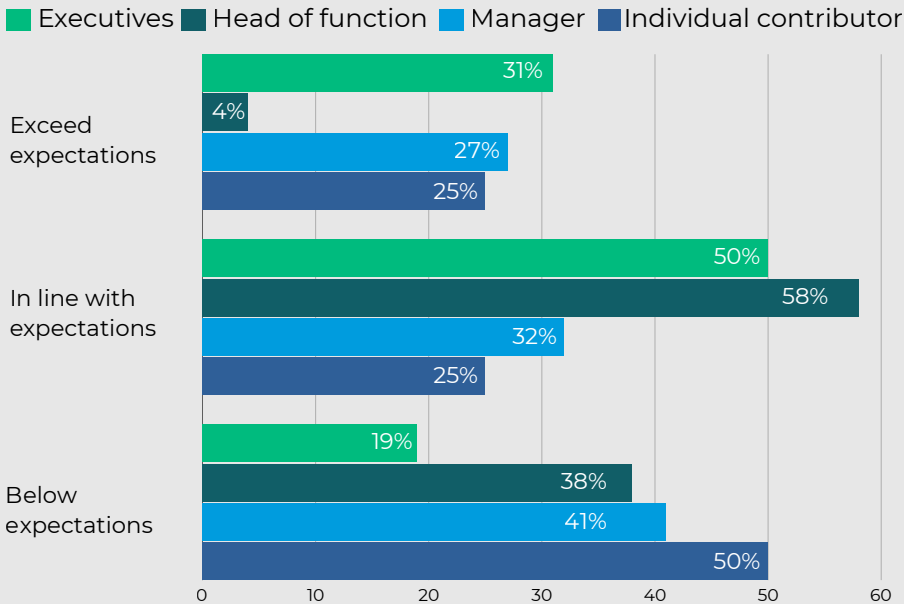


AI investment has increased most notably in the mid-range. The share of respondents reporting annual investment between \$500K and \$5M has risen from 19% in the previous report to 27% in the latest survey, while investment above \$5M remains broadly stable at 7%.

UAE vs Saudi Arabia investment

UAE respondents are more likely to report annual AI investment above \$5M, at 11% compared with 3% in Saudi Arabia. At the lower end, 44% of Saudi respondents report budgets below \$500K, compared with 36% in the UAE.

AI performance against expectations, by seniority



Executives have the most positive view of AI performance, while views among those closer to implementation are more mixed. This raises a practical question: **does leadership's view reflect the experience of those implementing AI?**

While 31% of executives say AI has exceeded expectations, just 4% of directors and heads of function say the same.

Despite these differences, productivity is the most commonly reported measurable impact across seniority groups: 53% of executives, 68% of heads of function, and 63% of managers. Revenue growth is identified by 4% across these groups.

SECTOR PRIORTIES

*Generative AI is the most commonly used technology across the sectors surveyed. The technologies used alongside it reveal how priorities differ by sector.



Faster execution AI speeds up research, planning, content creation, and delivery. By handling more initial work, people focus on judgement, validation, and decision-making.	INDUSTRY	SUPPORTING AI TECHNOLOGIES	WHAT THIS MEANS
	Consulting & professional services	Predictive analytics + AI-assisted decision-making	44% prioritise speed and execution, reflecting shorter research, analysis and delivery cycles.
	Retail, e-commerce & FMCG	Predictive analytics + process automation	43% prioritise speed and execution, with AI shortening content, planning and customer-response cycles.
	Technology, digital & AI	Predictive analytics + AI-assisted decision-making + AI agents	Speed and automation are joint priorities at 33%, alongside the broadest mix of AI technologies in the sample.
	Real estate & construction	AI agents	Respondents point to both faster execution and better decision-making, with AI agents supporting these objectives.
AUTOMATING WORKFLOWS AI is increasingly handling repeatable tasks, reducing manual work and shifting people to oversight, problem-solving, and accountability.	INDUSTRY	SUPPORTING AI TECHNOLOGIES	WHAT THIS MEANS
	Finance, banking & insurance	AI agents + process automation	Automation and cost efficiency are tied at 23%, pointing to a focus on structured, repeatable workflows.
	Government & public sector	Forecasting + process automation + AI-assisted decision-making + AI agents	33% prioritise automation. The broad technology mix suggests AI is being applied across multiple functional use cases rather than centred on one technology.
	Energy, oil & gas	No clear secondary technology	Automation is the clearest investment priority, while no single supporting technology dominates.
	Transport & logistics	AI agents + process automation + forecasting	Cost efficiency is the clearest investment priority, with AI use concentrated around coordination across multi-step workflows.
	Media, advertising & creative	Predictive analytics	Cost efficiency is the leading investment priority, while predictive analytics points to greater emphasis on audience, campaign and media optimisation.
MIXED TECHNOLOGY USE Beyond generative AI, technology use is more evenly spread, reflecting a wider mix of sector use cases.	INDUSTRY	SUPPORTING AI TECHNOLOGIES	WHAT THIS MEANS
	Education & research	Predictive analytics leads; generative AI follows	Investment priorities are distributed across several objectives. Education is the clearest exception to the broader generative AI-led pattern, with predictive analytics the most commonly selected technology.
	Hospitality & tourism	Predictive analytics and generative AI are used to a similar extent	Investment priorities span speed, cost efficiency and revenue growth, suggesting a mix of operational and commercial objectives.
	Healthcare & life sciences	Process automation leads; generative AI follows	Investment priorities span speed, automation and decision-making, while process automation is the most commonly selected supporting technology.

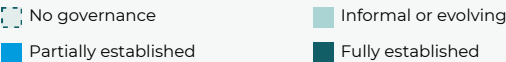
* Generative AI includes tools such as ChatGPT and Claude.

AI GOVERNANCE, TRAINING & OWNERSHIP



Compared with last year's report, fewer respondents report unclear AI ownership or no formal upskilling plan. Governance remains less mature, with formal controls still limited.

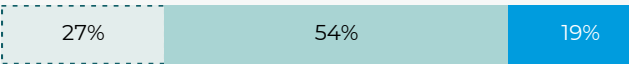
AI governance



Multinational



GCC regional

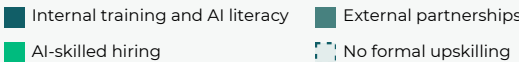


Government / semi-government



Just 10% of GCC respondents report fully established AI governance, despite 97% reporting some level of AI adoption and 66% having reached functional adoption or a more advanced stage.

How organisations are preparing people



Multinational



GCC regional

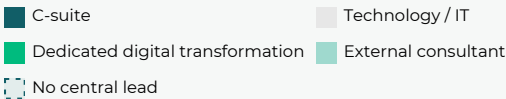


Government / semi-government

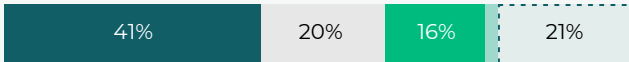


The share of respondents without a formal AI upskilling plan fell from 38% in 2026 to 24% in the latest survey. This suggests workforce preparation is becoming more established as adoption progresses. Internal training and AI literacy remain the most common approaches. They are reported by 69% of GCC regional companies, 70% of government and semi-government respondents, and 61% of multinationals.

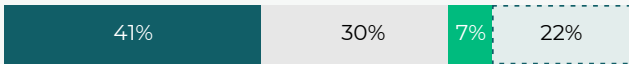
Who leads AI strategy



Multinational



GCC regional



Government / semi-government



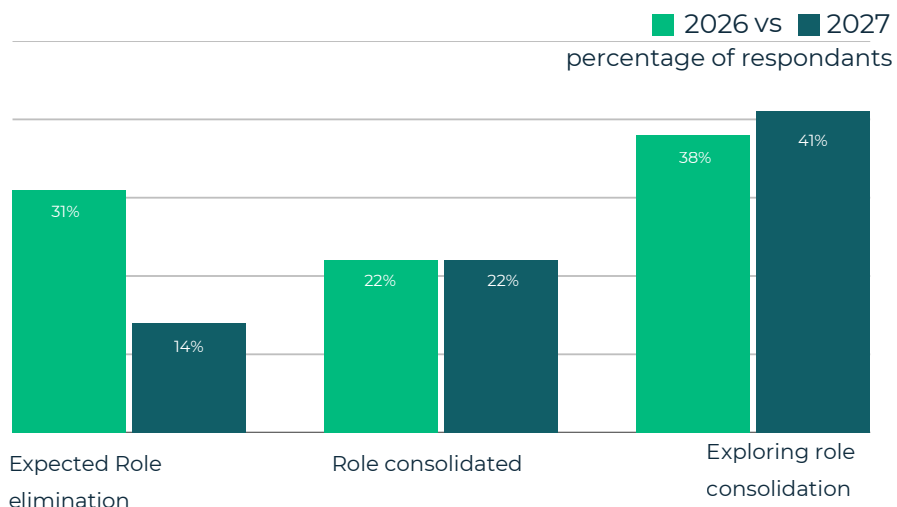
Government and semi-government respondents most often place AI strategy with Technology/IT or dedicated transformation teams. GCC regional companies and multinationals report greater C-suite involvement, although ownership remains decentralised or unclear in some organisations.

81% of GCC regional respondents describe AI governance as absent, informal or evolving

WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION

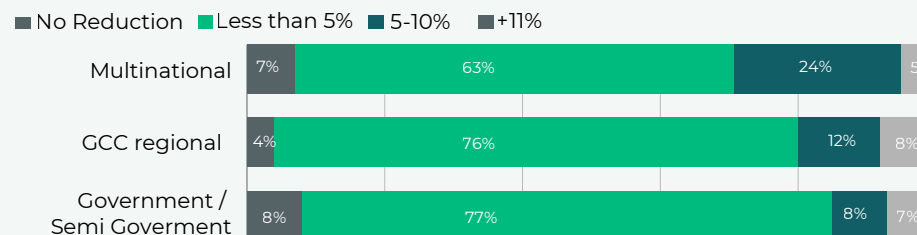


Expectation about AI-driven job losses have declined since last year's report, though workforce changes continue. Respondents observe that roles, tasks, and responsibilities are being consolidated more frequently than jobs are being eliminated.

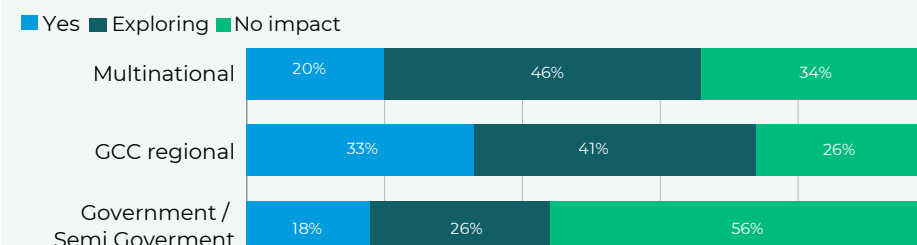


In the previous report, 31% of respondents expected AI-related role reductions within 12–24 months. In the latest survey, this has fallen to 14%. Meanwhile, 22% report some role consolidation and a further 41% are exploring it.

APPROX PERCENTAGE OF ROLES REDUCED DUE TO AI



HAS AI ENABLED ROLE CONSOLIDATION



Where work is being consolidated

Area of work	WHAT RESPONDENTS DESCRIBE
Technology	Development, testing, maintenance and troubleshooting combined within broader technical roles. "Monotonous roles such as testing or code clean up"
Support & operations	Admin work, reporting, coordination, finance processing and customer-service tasks absorbed into wider positions. "Admin and junior roles," "Accounts Payable," "Back office, data entry, analytics, reporting"
Marketing & professional services	Content creation, design support, research and first-draft production completed faster, allowing fewer people to manage a broader workload. "Marketing, copywriting, Figma designers, creative testing"
As routine production is consolidated, the findings suggest human contribution is shifting towards validation, interpretation and judgement.	



WE MAY BE AUTOMATING SOME OF THE WORK THAT TEACHES PEOPLE HOW TO JUDGE THE WORK AI .

Much of the discussion around AI has focused on job loss. Our findings raise another workforce question. Respondents say junior, administrative, analytical, and reporting work is affected, while judgement, critical thinking, and AI validation are becoming more important. If AI automates the work people traditionally use to build experience, how will organisations develop those capabilities in the future?

HOW CAPABILITY HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN BUILT

Emerging specialist layer

AI governance, engineering, assurance and oversight where experience, judgement and expertise are required

Broader AI-enabled roles

Wider responsibilities supported by AI, where experience and judgement are applied

Entry-level foundation

Research, analysis, administration, first drafts and execution are where experience has traditionally been built.

↑ tasks within this layer are increasingly being automated



THE GAP

New roles require experience traditionally built through work that is now under pressure.



WHERE AI IS CREATING NEW ROLES

Leadership and senior specialist roles

Chief AI Officer, AI governance and compliance teams, AI observability and AI strategists

Technical and mid-level specialist roles

Agentic AI developers, AI programmers, consultants, software maintainers, IT troubleshooters, technical support and digital transformation teams

Few entry-level roles identified

Most roles require technical expertise, organisational knowledge, or prior experience. The survey does not identify an equivalent entry-level route

Tasks increasingly automated at this layer

Respondents identify first-draft content, reporting, basic research and analysis, administrative coordination, data gathering and routine problem-solving among the work most affected by AI.

This is also where early-career capability is built

Through repetition, mistakes, correction and gradually increasing responsibility, employees develop critical thinking, judgement, problem-solving, commercial awareness, pattern recognition, time management and the ability to recognise weak outputs.

If future leaders have fewer opportunities to develop judgement through independent problem-solving, will the CEOs of tomorrow be distinguished by their strategic vision, or by their skill in directing AI to generate strategy?

TRUST AND DECISION-MAKING



Respondents remain broadly positive about AI, but trust has limits and people still make the final decisions.

How involved is AI in decision-making?

■ Not used ■ Occasionally used ■ Used in decision-making

Multinational



GCC regional



Government / semi-government

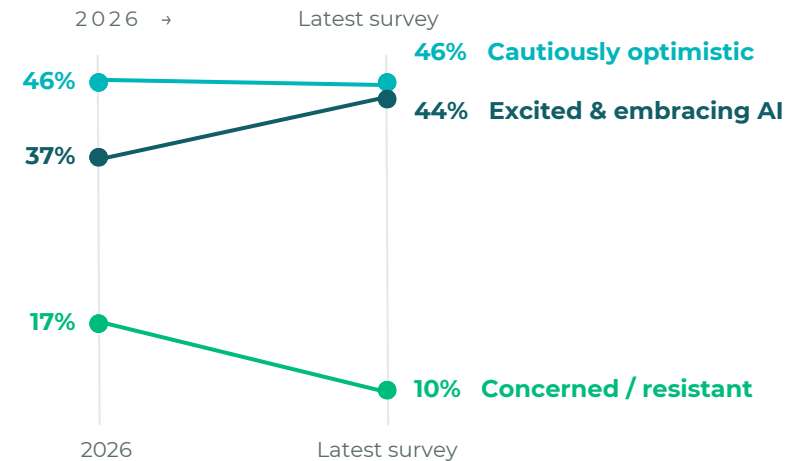


Respondents at multinationals report the greatest use of AI in decision-making, with 46% saying it supports decisions, compared with 35% of GCC regional companies and 25% of government and semi-government organisations.

When the same question is looked at by seniority

56% of executives say AI is used in decision-making, compared with 32% of heads of function and 42% of managers.

Overall sentiment



Sentiment remains broadly positive, with 90% of respondents describing their organisation as either excited about AI or cautiously optimistic. Cautious optimism is now the most common response.

50%

of multinationals say they use AI decisions making

65%

of respondents say AI outputs are always reviewed before use.



WHAT THE FINDINGS LEFT US ASKING

Rather than end this report with a traditional conclusion, we wanted to leave you with some of the questions these findings prompted for us. Much of the current discussion around AI centres on adoption, investment, productivity, efficiency and job loss. What follows sits alongside those themes: a set of questions raised by what our respondents told us.

01 **If AI removes junior work, what replaces the learning that came with it?**

As AI takes on routine analysis, reporting and administrative work, how will employees build the practical experience, organisational knowledge and judgement these tasks once provided?

05 **Are we automating work because we should, or because we can?**

As AI becomes capable of performing more tasks, have organisations decided which activities should still require human judgement, experience or accountability, even where automation may be faster or cheaper?

02 **When AI increases productivity, at what point does the workload become too much?**

If employees are expected to produce more because AI makes parts of their work faster, while roles and responsibilities are being consolidated, how do we distinguish a reasonable productivity gain from an unsustainable expansion of the role?

06 **Do current succession plans still work if the career path underneath it changes?**

As AI changes how work is performed, employees who adapt quickly, use AI confidently and take on broader responsibilities may become more valuable. Are succession plans identifying and developing those people or are they still built around traditional career paths and progression?

03 **Are we creating a workforce of generalists?**

If AI increasingly performs research, analysis and problem-solving, will employees still develop the depth of knowledge needed for specialist expertise?

07 **Could leadership optimism itself become an implementation risk?**

If executives see stronger AI outcomes than those closer to implementation, how do organisations ensure investment decisions, performance expectations, and workforce changes reflect operational reality as well as leadership ambition?

04 **Who will know when AI is wrong?**

Experienced employees can challenge AI because they understand the underlying work. If AI increasingly performs that work, how will future employees develop the expertise needed to recognise when its output is wrong?

08 **Have we decided where accountability sits before something goes wrong**

As AI informs more decisions use, who is ultimately accountable when an AI-supported recommendation leads to the wrong outcome?

About Cooper Fitch

Cooper Fitch provides Recruitment, Executive Search, HR advisory and RPO services. Our team supports clients in the GCC and Europe with all talent-related matters. We are also a proud member of the Talent Club group of companies, with 37 offices across three continents.

Services

- Recruitment
- Executive Search
- HR Advisory
- Recruitment Process Outsourcing



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We produce regular market insights and research and appear across respected business media outlets, including CNBC, Dubai Eye, Asharq News, CNN Business Arabic, Reuters, and Khaleej Times, to give our respected views on a wide range of human-capital subject areas.



Research Methodology

The Cooper Fitch: AI & the Future of Talent 2027 Report examines how organisations across the GCC are adopting AI and responding to its workforce implications. The analysis draws on survey responses across multiple countries, sectors, organisation types and seniority levels, covering adoption, investment, governance, workforce change, skills, sentiment and trust. Respondents range from firms with fewer than 50 employees to enterprises of 5,000-plus, with collectively more than 250,000 employees.

Percentages are calculated using the valid response base for each question. Open-text responses have been reviewed thematically and are used to illustrate recurring issues rather than to establish ranked findings.