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COMPANY

Class of 2030

The future of early careers hiring

Research report



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Executive summary

The global workforce is entering a period of profound transition. Artificial intelligence (AI), persistent skills scarcity, economic uncertainty and declining trust between employers and candidates are reshaping the labor market just as the first members of Gen Alpha prepare to enter it.

Drawing on a survey of more than 500 HR leaders and more than 5,000 candidates, this report examines what these shifts mean for early career hiring, entry-level work and the workforce strategies that organizations will need for 2030 and beyond. The central finding is clear: entry-level work is not disappearing, but it is fundamentally redefined. Employers that continue to rely on legacy graduate programs, traditional screening signals and generic candidate engagement will struggle to attract, assess and retain the next generation of talent.

The oldest members of Gen Alpha are beginning to enter a labor market shaped by AI, pervasive connectivity, social media, economic volatility, and the lasting effects of the global pandemic. Our research shows that future job seekers aged 16 to 24 are confident and pragmatic. Fifty-eight percent of those ready to enter the workforce now believe they will secure a job in the next 6 to 12 months, and nearly 70 percent are open to project-based, part-time or temporary work rather than waiting for the perfect full-time role.

But this confidence is not uniform, and neither are their priorities. Competitive compensation is the leading consideration when evaluating job opportunities, but pay transparency, work-life balance, flexible hours and health benefits carry different weight by region and gender, and willingness to relocate is lower than among older workers. Employers will need to adapt their talent strategies to each market rather than assume global consistency.

The same variation appears in how this generation wants to work. Contrary to common assumptions, fully remote work is not the dominant preference. Most future job seekers prefer hybrid or onsite arrangements, suggesting that flexibility matters, but so do connection, learning and workplace experience.

Sector interest is also changing. Young job seekers may be digitally fluent, but they are not necessarily drawn to technology employers by default. Public-sector roles attract the greatest interest, while energy and industrial and health and life sciences roles also rank highly. Companies across sectors should read this as a signal that their employer value propositions and early career narratives must evolve.

Skills are at the center of the future workforce challenge. Young job seekers report strengths in adaptability, emotional intelligence, creativity, communication and AI literacy, aligning in many ways with what employers say they need from early career hires. But important gaps remain. Employers rank problem-solving highest among desired skills, while job seekers rate it lower. Leadership potential and functional expertise show even wider gaps still. Organizations will need to examine how these capabilities are understood, demonstrated and assessed, then create development opportunities that build them over time.

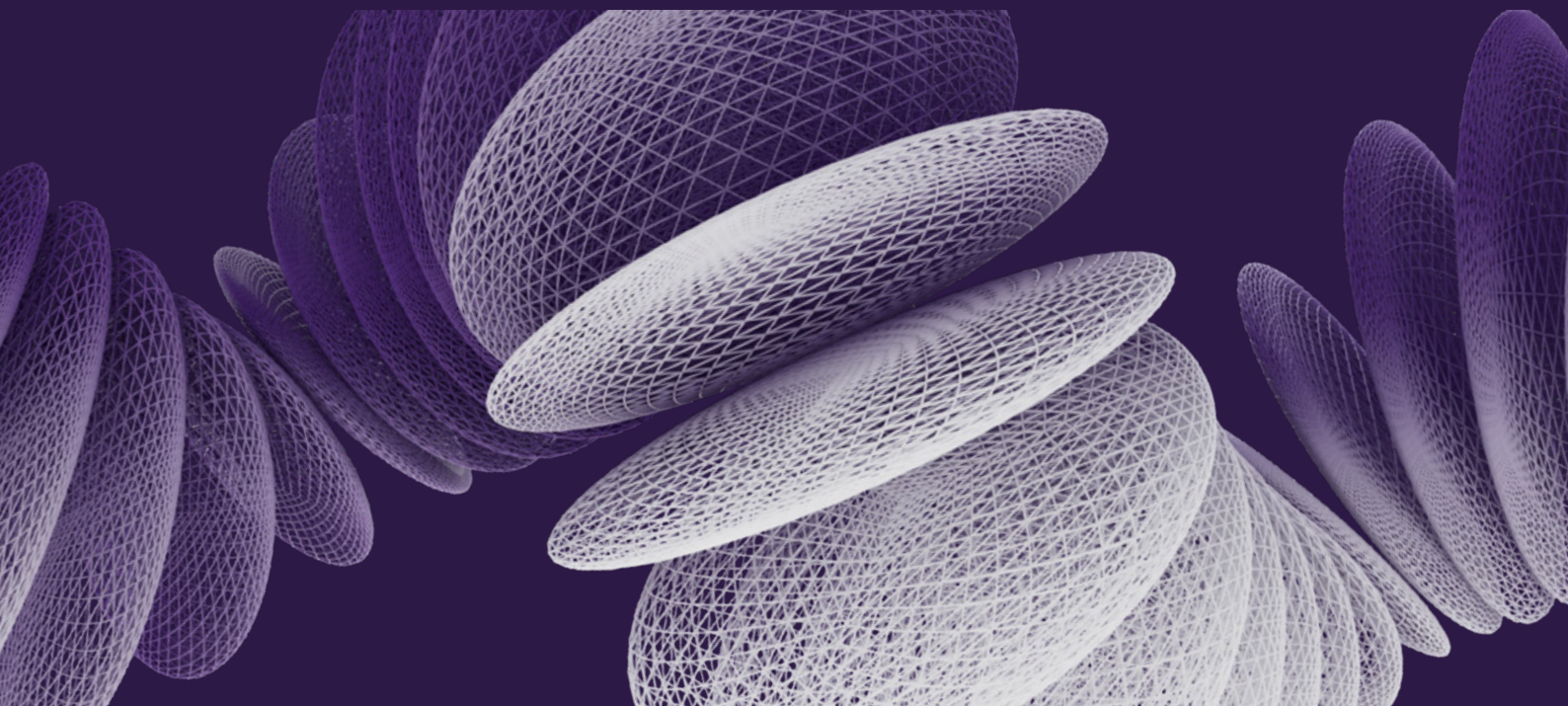
At the same time, the external talent climate is growing more complex. Generative AI has quadrupled application volumes in some sectors without bringing in more qualified candidates. AI-generated profiles and inflated experience are making hiring signals harder to trust. These pressures are compounded by a persistent skills shortage and a deepening trust gap. Only 16 percent of HR leaders say their organizations have the skills they need for the future, while just 27 percent of job seekers trust employers to protect their data during hiring, and only 17 percent trust AI screening tools to assess them fairly. Transparency, verification and communication are no longer nice-to-haves in early career recruiting; candidates expect them as baseline.

Even so, employers have not given up on early career talent. Seventy-six percent of talent acquisition (TA) leaders do not believe entry-level jobs are disappearing from their organizations, and 81 percent plan to hire more of this cohort over the next two years. What is changing is the work itself.

Pacesetter organizations, those outperforming their peers on revenue growth and profitability, show what that shift looks like in practice. They are more likely to put early career talent at the center of their 2030 workforce strategy, and they are rethinking what junior work involves: less repetitive execution and more reviewing AI outputs, monitoring workflows and exercising judgment. Many are reconsidering how they balance graduate and apprenticeship pathways to build a more flexible talent pipeline.

Recruiting is changing too. Skills-first hiring, now used by 82 percent of companies, has become the norm rather than the exception. AI adoption in recruiting is still catching up. Only 13 percent of organizations say they use it well, but the ones that do report stronger financial performance, employer brand and customer retention. Always-on recruiting shows a similar financial edge, and hyper-personalized candidate experiences seem to be paying off on both the financial and innovation fronts.

The organizations best positioned for 2030 will be those that treat early careers as a strategic workforce priority now. That means pairing data-led workforce planning with human-centered design; using technology to improve, not replace, human judgment; and building recruitment experiences that are transparent, adaptive and trusted by the next generation of workers.



Introduction

The world of work is undergoing its biggest transformation since the industrial era. CHROs and their teams are grappling with a multitude of external forces that are converging on the enterprise, forcing rapid decision-making and enterprise-wide redesign efforts across the talent domain. Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping jobs, skills, leadership and the workforce. Alongside the impact of AI, geoeconomic fragmentation, demographic shifts and the green transition are expected to displace 92 million roles globally.¹ Layered onto this is a global war for talent and skills that has reached a tipping point. More than 90 percent of global enterprises are projected to face critical skills shortages by 2026, at a cost of up to \$5.5 trillion in delayed products, missed revenue and impaired competitiveness.² And, amid deeply uncertain economic, social and geopolitical conditions, trust is eroding among employees, job seekers and their employers.³

Against this backdrop, the next generation of workers is about to enter the global workforce. What should organizations consider as they look to hire this cohort? What practices must be redesigned to successfully integrate this new segment into the workforce? Our latest research explores these questions through an examination of the emerging profile of the next-generation worker, a review of the future of entry-level work and the strategies leading companies are using to attract, hire, engage and develop their future talent pipelines. We surveyed more than 5,000 job seekers and employees from around the globe, including students and early career workers ages 16 to 24, to understand their preferences, expectations and aspirations. We also measured the talent acquisition and HR practices of more than 500 companies across a range of industries and spoke with several leading organizations to examine how their approach to graduate and early career hiring is shifting.

This report offers a roadmap for preparing for the next generation of workers while responding to the technology transformation already underway. We provide practical recommendations that will prepare your organization for the workforce of 2030 and beyond.

1. World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025 (Geneva: World Economic Forum, January 2025), <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025>
2. IDC, Closing the AI Skills Gap in the Enterprise, analyst brief sponsored by Workera (Needham, MA: IDC, 2025), <https://www.workera.ai/guides-reports/analyst-insights-closing-the-ai-skills-gap-in-the-enterprise>
3. 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report (Edelman, January 23, 2025), https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2025-01/2025%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report_01.23.25.pdf

Part 1

The next-gen candidate: Understanding the graduate hire of the future

The next major generation of workers will begin to enter the labor market in large numbers in the next 5 years, with estimates suggesting that Gen Alpha — those born between 2010 and 2024 — will make up 19 percent of the global workforce by 2035.⁴ This generation has been shaped by the global pandemic, pervasive connectivity, influential social media and geopolitical and economic uncertainty. They will be the first fully AI-native generation to enter the labor market, doing so amid evolving operating models and tech-driven transformation across every sector. Indeed, the roles they enter may look quite different: 66 percent are expected to work in jobs that do not exist today.⁵

As organizations prepare to add this next cohort of hires into their workforce, it is helpful to understand the values, aspirations, preferences and skills that the new generation of talent brings with them. Here we explore key findings from our latest global research of more than 5,000 workers and job seekers to give leaders a preview of the future entry-level candidate. We look at how and where this generation diverges from their predecessors, and we compare the perceptions of this future talent segment with the expectations of CHROs and TA leaders from more than 500 companies around the world.



4. McCrindle, Generation Alpha Infographic 2025 (Norwest, NSW: McCrindle Research, 2025). <https://mccrindle.com.au/app/uploads/infographics/Generation-Alpha-Infographic-2025.pdf>
5. AMS Research, “The Emergence of Gen Alpha in the Workforce: What Employers Need to Know” (2025). <https://www.weareams.com/whitepapers/the-emergence-of-generation-alpha/>

Their confidence and willingness to flex vary by region

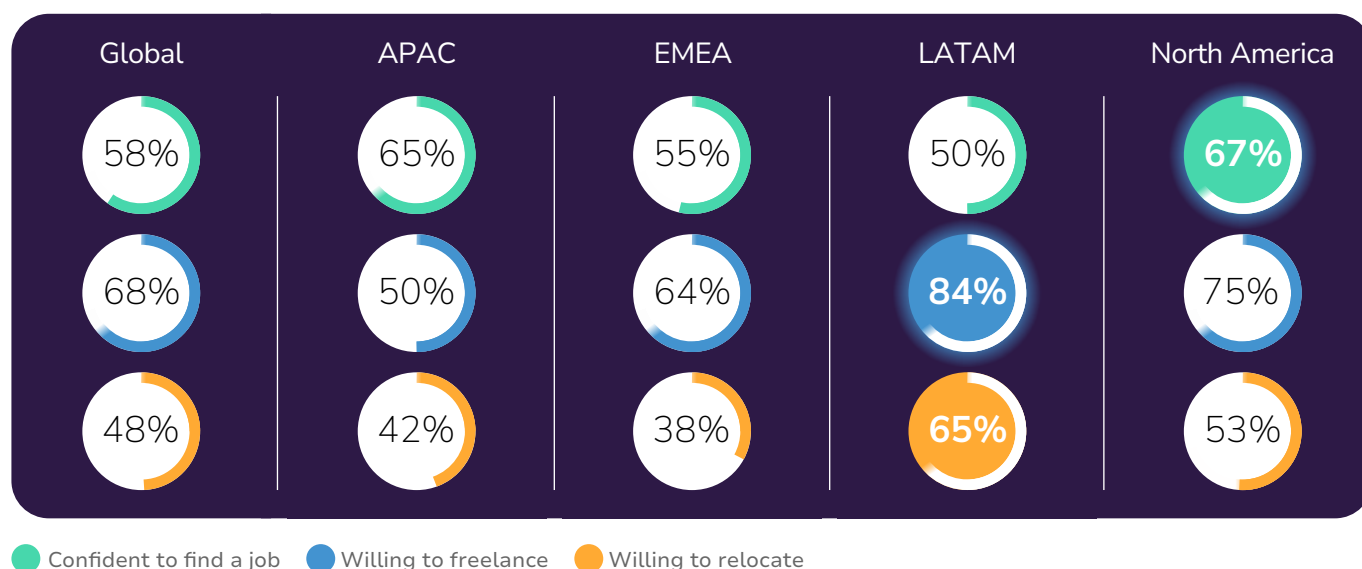
The next generation of hires — including the start of the Gen Alpha workforce — has a strong sense of confidence about their future at work. Our data shows that 58 percent of those who are ready to join the workforce soon report a high level of confidence that they will secure a job. This suggests an optimism that belies media headlines that predict the end of early career work. Young job seekers appear to be determined to find employment despite challenging conditions and changing work. Globally, their attitude toward freelance or gig work reflects this optimism: nearly 70 percent of future job seekers are open to taking project-based, part-time or temporary roles rather than waiting for the perfect full-time role. However, a lower willingness to relocate may impede their efforts, with less than half (48%) saying they would consider a move, which is a much lower number than their 25-35 year old peers (68%).

The confidence that young job seekers express in finding work varies by region, likely influenced by different economic realities, access to national student-work initiatives and overall market size. For example, North American respondents are 1.2 times as likely as their European peers to say they are confident they will find a job (see Figure 1). APAC respondents report confidence levels like those in North America, while future job seekers in Latin America have the lowest confidence, with only 50 percent expecting to find work.

Sentiment toward freelance work among this generation varies even more widely across regions. Respondents in Latin America topped the list, with 84 percent reporting they would consider gig or contract work, while North American respondents are close behind at 75 percent. Of interest, APAC respondents show lower interest in contract work, even though the region has witnessed a material increase in the utilization of contingent workers in recent years.⁶

There are also material differences across regions in early career candidates' willingness to relocate for a job. Figure 1 shows that Latin American respondents are most likely to accept work in other locations, while respondents in APAC and EMEA are least likely to consider relocation in their job search.

Figure 1: Future job seeker confidence levels and willingness to freelance or relocate



6. Kanchan Khatana and Sulakshana Banerjee. "The Contingent Workforce Revolution in APAC," *Journal of Informatics Education and Research* 4, no. 2 (2024). <https://jier.org/index.php/journal/article/view/1138/952>

Pay is important, but it is not the whole story

In this highly uncertain and volatile economic climate, it is not surprising that our research shows that the youngest generation of workers prioritizes pay above any other factor when it comes to what matters most to them at work (see Figure 2); they rated both competitive pay and higher-than-previous pay to be critically important.

Other factors among the top five most important to future job seekers include traditional elements like flexible working hours and job security, but in most cases, they rank well below the desire for competitive pay. That priority is reinforced in expectations around pay transparency: this generation expects employers to disclose salary or pay immediately and clearly during recruitment and may abandon applications when pay is not listed. Indeed, future job seekers who have declined offers of employment say their number one reason is that salary/pay changed during the hiring process.

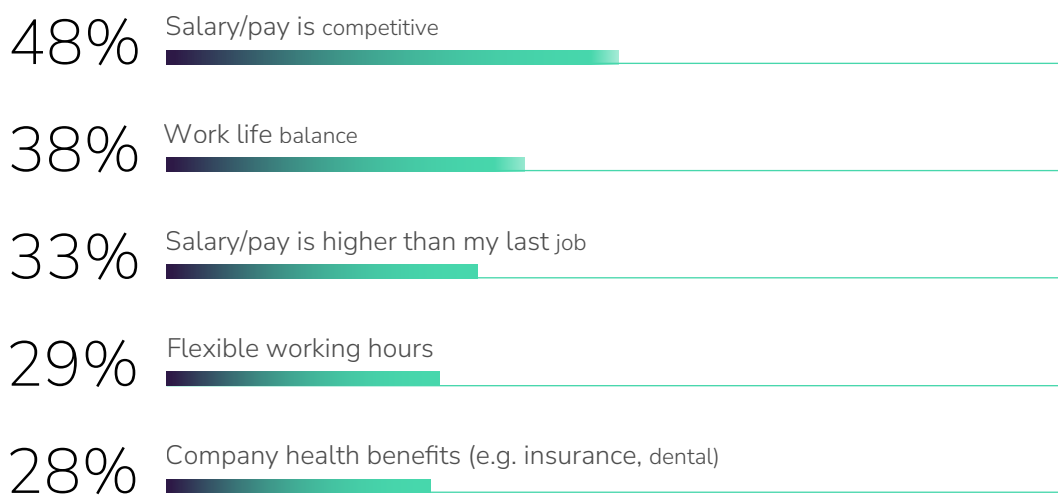


Figure 2: Top five factors most important to 18- to 24-year-old job seekers

However, as we explored the data across dimensions including gender and location, several interesting findings surfaced. For example, female respondents in the future job seeker group ranked competitive pay second to work-life balance, with only 42 percent saying it is important to them, while nearly two-thirds (58%) of their male peers rated it as their top factor. Fifty-six percent of nonbinary and gender-diverse respondents ranked competitive pay as their top factor, while company health benefits came in second.

Location also plays an important role in what young candidates prioritize, and organizations can use this insight to guide their hiring strategies across regions. See Figure 3 for a detailed view of how next-gen job seekers prioritize workplace factors across regions.

While respondents in every region rated competitive pay as a top three factor, APAC respondents ranked work-life balance higher than others, with over half saying it is their most important factor; competitive pay ranked a close second. EMEA respondents ranked pay and work-life balance equally, with about half of future job seekers naming each as their top factor. In contrast, North American respondents rated work-life balance quite low, instead ranking flexible working hours as the second most important factor after pay. Latin American future job seekers selected pay first, followed by company health benefits.

Figure 3 provides a detailed country-by-country comparison of priorities, giving employers even more visibility into the motivations of their future entry-level talent.

Figure 3: What's most important at work for next gen candidates, by region

	Global	NA	EMEA	APAC	LATAM
Salary/pay is competitive	48%	62%	43%	41%	52%
Work-life balance	38%	18%	43%	54%	35%
Salary/pay is higher than my last job	33%	25%	38%	36%	27%
Flexible working hours	29%	45%	23%	27%	25%
Company health benefits	28%	40%	22%	18%	35%
Job security	26%	25%	25%	25%	32%
Growth & development opportunities	20%	27%	12%	21%	25%
Opportunities to advance/progress	13%	9%	15%	8%	17%
My job title	12%	9%	15%	14%	7%
Company purpose & mission	8%	4%	16%	7%	1%
Inspiring leadership/management	5%	4%	4%	5%	5%
Formal mentorship or coaching	3%	4%	4%	3%	1%

Flex hours and remote work are not dealbreakers

Despite the prevailing market narrative that younger workers demand flexible work schedules, reduced hours and more remote work options, our research reveals that the next generation of talent is not drawing a hard line on these topics. Instead, we found that while under-18 job seekers are the segment most likely to prefer flexible work schedules when they arrive in the workplace, they remain divided; 50 percent of respondents prefer flexible work, while 25 percent prefer standard daytime working hours, and nearly 20 percent have no preference toward any particular schedule. Among the wider group of young job seekers, up to age 24, preferences are more evenly weighted, with 39 percent prioritizing flexibility, 27 percent preferring standard hours, and the remaining respondents divided among a four-day workweek, shift work and no preference. See Figure 4.

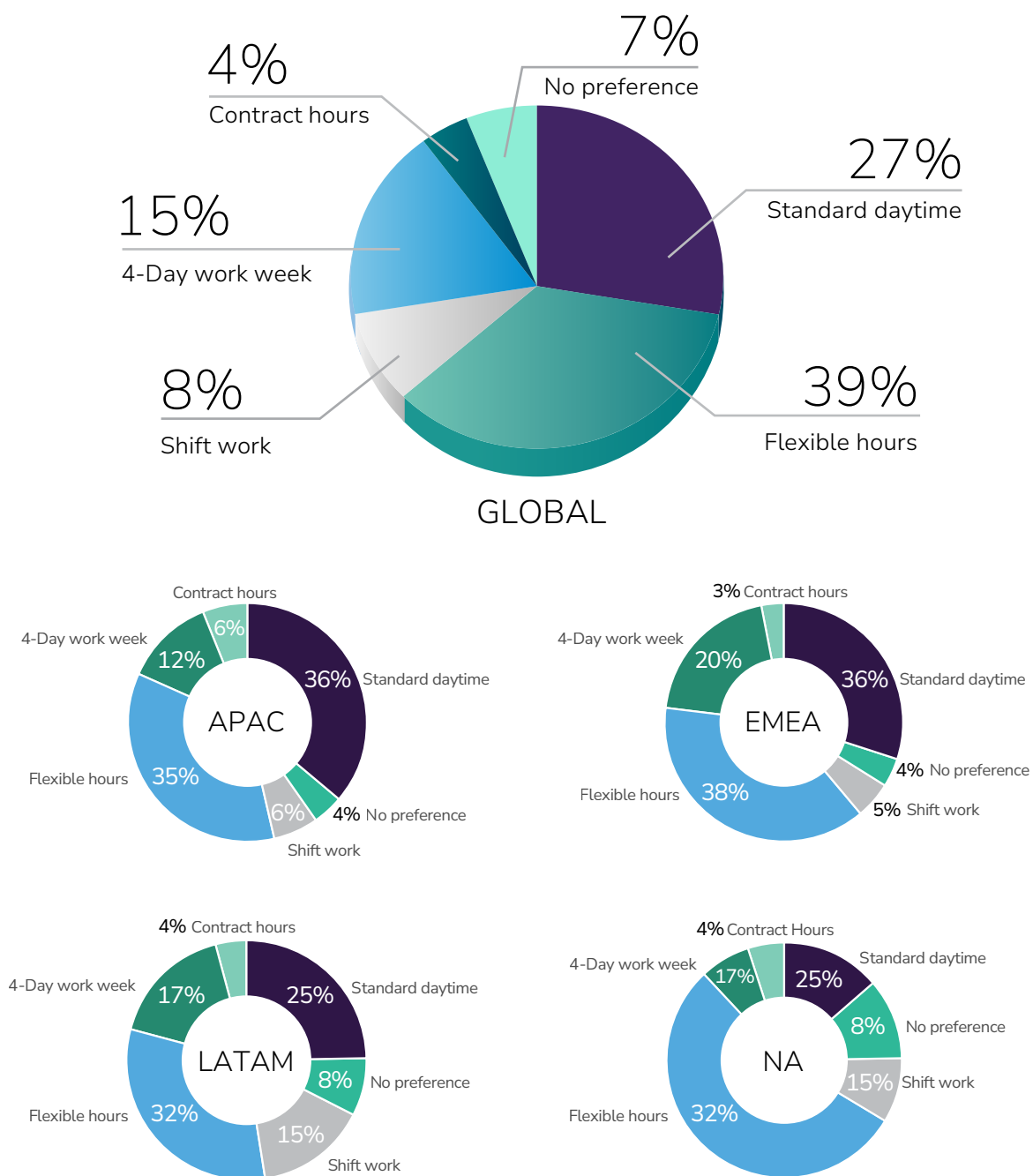


Figure 4: Next-gen work schedule preferences, global and regional distribution

Our data also revealed several country-specific preferences. For example, flexible work arrangements are highly sought-after in the U.S. and Mexico. More than half of future U.S. job seekers (56%) said their preference is for flexible hours, and 66 percent of respondents from Mexico said the same, each around 1.5 times the global average.

In APAC, Japanese respondents are evenly divided between standard daytime and flexible work schedules, while in China, a plurality of respondents (39%) say they would prefer standard hours over any other schedule. Canadian and Brazilian respondents show the highest preference for shift work, while approximately a quarter of job seekers in the U.K., Germany, the United Arab Emirates and Argentina prefer a four-day workweek.

When it comes to remote work, the future generation of workers reflects the patterns of their older peers, with almost half (44%) of our next-gen respondents saying they are looking for hybrid work arrangements and just over a quarter (27%) saying they prefer to be fully onsite. In fact, only 20 percent of this cohort prefer to be fully remote, falling to 10 percent in North America. EMEA respondents reported the highest preference for fully remote work at 28 percent, but across regions, most respondents preferred to be onsite at least some of the time (see Figure 5).

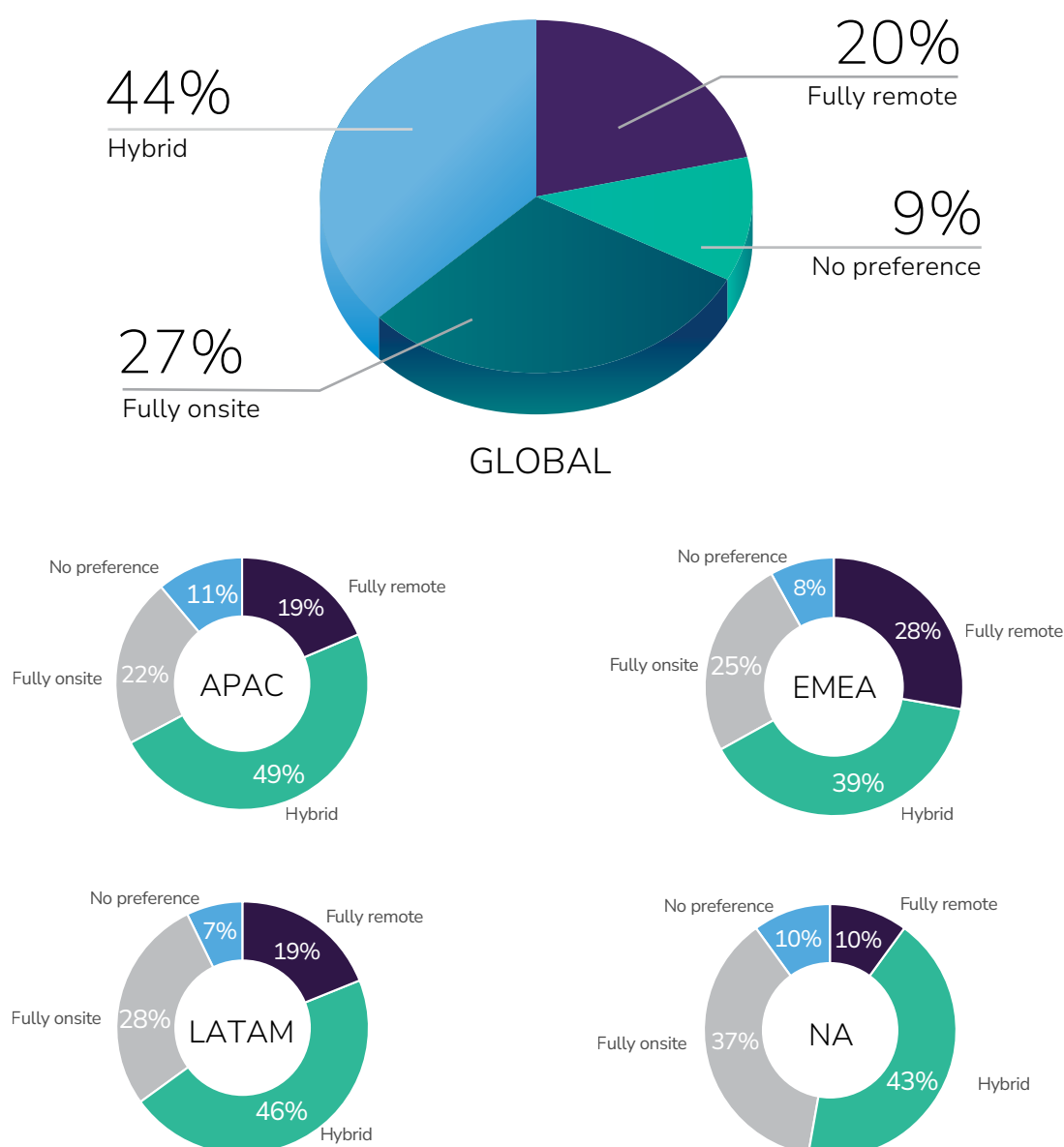


Figure 5: Work location preferences, globally and by region



These findings align with recent research that shows young talent values opportunities to engage with their colleagues, participate in organizational culture and learn informally through onsite interactions with their peers and leaders.⁷ This trend among the future workforce may help offset the challenges of return-to-office mandates that many organizations are grappling with today among their more tenured employees. Companies including Home Depot,⁸ Paramount,⁹ Novo Nordisk¹⁰ and Amazon¹¹ have all reverted to pre-pandemic expectations for their corporate and desk-based workers. However, research on return-to-office mandates has found declining job satisfaction and employee engagement without material productivity gains and, in some cases, attrition among senior employees.¹²

7. Jonas Grafström, "Young Workers Want to Be in the Office: An Investigation Based on Swedish Survey Data," in *The Future of Labour: How AI, Technological Disruption and Practice Will Change the Way We Work*, ed. Anthony Larsson and Andreas Hatzigeorgiou (Routledge, 2025), 119–35, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003391333-10>
8. "Home Depot Lays Off 800 Workers, Says Corporate Employees Will Return to Office 5 Days a Week," CNBC, January 28, 2026, <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/01/28/home-depot-layoffs-return-to-office.html>
9. Reuters, "Paramount to Mandate Five-Day Return to Office Starting January, Memo Says," September 4, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/paramount-mandate-five-day-return-office-starting-january-memo-says-2025-09-04/>
10. Reuters, "Novo Nordisk Tells Staff to Return to Office Full-Time Amid CEO's Revival Effort," September 11, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/novo-nordisk-tells-staff-return-office-full-time-amid-ceos-revival-effort-2025-09-11/>
11. Andy Jassy, "Update from Andy Jassy on Amazon's Return to Office and Manager/Team Ratio," About Amazon, September 16, 2024, <https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/company-news/ceo-andy-jassy-latest-update-on-amazon-return-to-office-manager-team-ratio>
12. David Van Dijke, Florian Gunsilius, and Austin Wright, "Return to Office and the Tenure Distribution," BFI Working Paper No. 2024-56, Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, University of Chicago, May 7, 2024, <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-paper/return-to-office-and-the-tenure-distribution/>; Mark Ma and Yuye Ding, "Return to Office Mandates Don't Improve Employee or Company Performance," Pitt Business, University of Pittsburgh, January 24, 2024, <https://www.business.pitt.edu/return-to-office-mandates-dont-improve-employee-or-company-performance/>

A notable change in sector interest

For several years, and across the last two generational cohorts who joined the global workforce, Millennials and early Gen Z, there has been a relatively stable distribution of sector preferences among early career candidates. Historically, common pathways for desk-based early career workers included professional services and financial services firms, pharmaceutical and life sciences companies and, of course, both Big Tech and smaller tech startups, while deskless junior job seekers focused on health care, education and manufacturing.¹³

As Gen Z continued to flow into the workforce, however, considerable shifts in market conditions, including global conflict, the launch of Gen AI and the focus on sustainability and climate change, began to influence the early career choices of graduating students.¹⁴ As the next generation of job seekers begins to look for work, this pattern is projected to become even more marked. For example, LinkedIn recently reported that, for the first time, real estate is now the second-fastest-growing industry for U.S. career starters.¹⁵ Our data bears this out among future job seekers, showing a clear shift from the traditional early career pathways toward new sectors and roles (see Figure 6).

	Financial services	Tech & telco	Energy & industrials	Health & life science	Public sector	Prof & bus services	Consumer goods	Retail
Students / future jobseekers	18%	14%	20%	21%	25%	6%	6%	5%
Early career	27%	29%	29%	13%	17%	8%	9%	9%
Mid-career	22%	22%	29%	13%	18%	7%	7%	9%
Late career	8%	16%	10%	16%	13%	11%	11%	11%

Figure 6: Sector preferences by age group

13. Deskless Workers Want to Enjoy Their Work, Too, Boston Consulting Group, Oct 29, 2024, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/deskless-workers-want-to-enjoy-their-work-too>
14. Juliana Kaplan, "Millennials and Gen Zers in Their First Jobs Out of College Might Actually Tell the Story of the Economy," Business Insider, August 2025, <https://www.businessinsider.com/millennial-gen-z-entry-level-job-market-shift-economy-2025-8>
15. Gianna Prudente, "LinkedIn Grad's Guide 2026: Starting Your Career in the AI Era," LinkedIn News, April 15, 2026, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-grads-guide-2026-linkedin-news-svpqe/>

While their predecessors continue to be heavily interested in core sectors, such as financial services and technology, today's students and new job seekers are increasingly looking at different industries to start their careers. For example, 25 percent of future candidates identified public-sector work as a top preference for their first job, while a similar number chose either the energy and industrial or health and life sciences sectors. The next generation of workers is the only segment to show low interest in the tech sector, with only 14 percent of respondents choosing it as a preferred employment industry.

A few reasons may have prompted this shift in interest. First, the adoption rates of technology, including AI, are high for new job seekers and their Gen Alpha peers who are still in their early schooling, but so is their anxiety and skepticism toward these tools. A recent Gallup study found that anger toward AI among 14- to 29-year-olds in the U.S. rose from 22 percent to 31 percent in the past year, while anxiety levels were reported at 42 percent.¹⁶ Given this paradox, the future workforce may likely steer toward sectors and jobs that they perceive to be more purpose-driven, socially responsible and values-based.

A second related factor may be linked to the volume of global headlines linking AI to workforce reductions over the past year. Tech giants like Oracle, Salesforce and Meta reported cuts to their workforce due to the introduction of enterprise AI tools and systems. Similar announcements have come from desk-based employers in finance and insurance, professional services and media.¹⁷

This coverage may influence how future job seekers perceive career risk: they may be hedging against sectors they consider more exposed to displacement and gravitating toward more hands-on roles.



16. Megan Brennan, "Gen Z's AI Adoption Steady, but Skepticism Climbs," Gallup, April 8, 2026,

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/708224/gen-adoption-steady-skepticism-climbs.aspx>

17. Mary Roeloffs, "AI Cost 21,000 Jobs At Oracle This Year—And More Layoffs Could Be Coming," Forbes, April 15, 2026,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/maryroeloffs/2026/04/15/snap-blames-1000-layoffs-on-ai-and-these-companies-have-done-the-same>

The most essential skills are a match... and a mismatch

Skills – and especially behavioral or “soft” skills – are a source of great pride among the next generation of workers. The skills profile reported by the youngest respondents in our dataset is heavily weighted toward interpersonal capabilities (see Figure 7). Indeed, four of the five skills this cohort identifies as their strongest are traditionally labeled “soft skills”: adaptability, emotional intelligence, creativity and communication. AI literacy ranks fifth, although fewer than half identify it as a strength.

Figure 7 shows regional variations in skills profiles across APAC, EMEA, Latin America and North America. APAC respondents were the only group to rank commercial awareness among their top five skills, while AI literacy dropped to eighth place in that region. In contrast, nearly 70 percent of Latin American respondents cited AI literacy as their second-strongest capability, a higher percentage than in any other region.

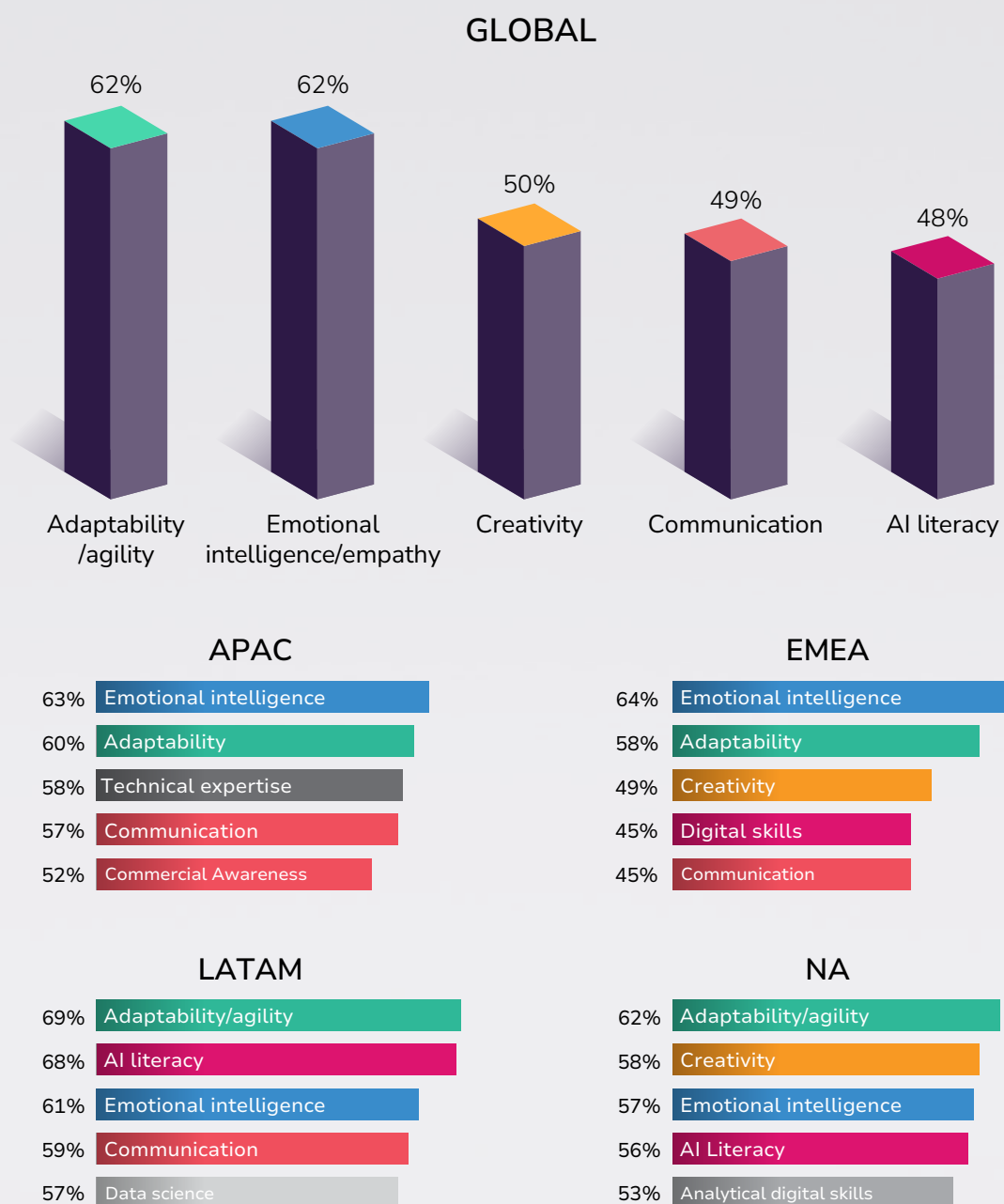


Figure 7: Top five strongest skills as reported by next-gen candidates, by region

The next generation of job seekers is clearly betting on the strength and value of their interpersonal skills as they prepare for work. So are their future employers, according to our data. When we compare these findings with the skills that organizations say they want and expect of their entry-level hires, the results are broadly aligned (see Figure 8). Four of the top five capabilities that organizations seek are behavioral and closely match the profile of future global job seekers. TA leaders ranked problem-solving, adaptability, communication, emotional intelligence and AI literacy as their top five.

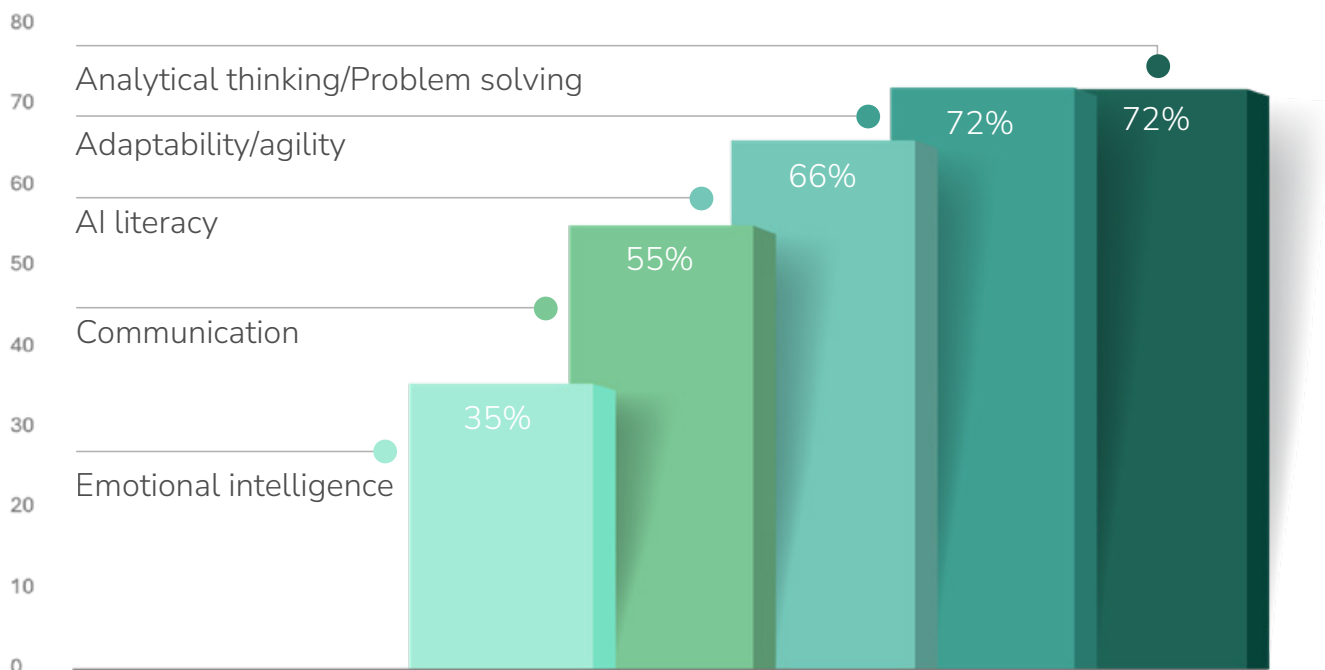


Figure 8: Top five skills that employers seek in early career hires

Figure 9 offers a more detailed picture, expanded to include the 10 most sought-after skills across the organizations we surveyed. The results remain encouraging, though several important differences emerge. First, while employers and the next generation of workers align across the top five skills sought and possessed, the widest gap appears in problem-solving and analytical skills. Employers rank this as their top skill for next-gen hires, yet next-gen respondents rank it much lower in their top ten.

Leadership potential and functional expertise show larger gaps, with only about a third of the future-job seeker population citing each capability as a strength. This gap suggests that organizations must continue investing in development programs that build early career workers' experience and confidence.



Figure 9: Comparing the top 10 skills employers want and respondents say they have

Despite these variances, the picture appears to be generally positive – employers are looking for durable behavioral skills in their early careers hires and the next generation of job seekers claim to have them. Yet external research points to a perception gap that belies the apparent match. In a 2024 survey, only 12 percent of mid-level executives said new entry-level employees were prepared for their roles. Nearly half of executives (49%) cited a lack of soft skills, including communication, collaboration and adaptability.¹⁸

What is behind this deeper disconnect? Why do the next generation of job seekers think that they possess the right behavioral skills, while organizations continue to suggest that new hires enter the workforce lacking these same traits?

One possibility is that candidates and employers define and recognize these skills differently, due in part to the specific ways these core behavioural skills have been learned by the latest early careers candidates. This cohort of young job seekers are drawing on their unique experiences with generative AI and social media along with pandemic-era disruptions such as remote education and social isolation. Likewise, in-person communication was severely limited for this group during regional lockdowns, while digital communication tools exploded. Research is emerging that show communication styles will have been reshaped among this segment by these factors. Indeed, there is clear evidence to suggest that younger students excel at digital communication than previous generations.¹⁹ If employers continue to assess behavioral capabilities through more traditional workplace assessments, the gap will only widen.

As organizations seek these skills to complement technical capabilities and increasing AI deployment, leaders must explore opportunities to bridge the disparities between traditional workplace expectations and the ways that younger workers apply their skills. Some companies are already using reverse mentoring to translate employees' strengths into workplace practice. For example, EY piloted an intergenerational mentoring initiative, allowing younger workers to share their mindset, digital fluency and communication preferences while receiving career guidance from their more experienced colleagues.²⁰ Similarly, the BNP Paribas WeGenerations network connects entry-level workers with experienced managers to transform their native digital communication skills into workplace communication skills.²¹

18. General Assembly, "Are Today's Entry-Level Employees Ready for the Job? Survey Says... Not Quite," November 14, 2024, www.generalassembly.com/blog/are-todays-entry-level-employees-ready-for-the-job-survey-says-not-quite/
19. Saifuddin, Tasneem, Waqas Bin Dilshad, Asma Afzal, and Asia Parveen. "Behavioral Manifestations of the Digital Native and Exploratory Study of Gen Alpha in the Primary Classroom." TPM 32, no. 3 (2025) https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjn6NHlOmV_AxXwkokEHQu-D0c4FBAWegQILxAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Ftpmap.org%2Fsubmission%2Findex.php%2Ftpm%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F4095%2F3085%2F8924&usq=AOvVaw00qHMDU0RswGbQsnx62DL_&cshid=1784822185166500&opi=89978449
20. Emma Burleigh, "Meet Your Gen Z Mentor: Why EY Is Tapping Younger Workers to Bridge the Generational Skills Divide," Fortune, July 23, 2024, <https://fortune.com/2024/07/23/gen-z-mentor-ey-bridge-generational-skills-gap>
21. BNP Paribas, "Intergenerational Collaboration: A Driver of Innovation and Collective Performance," July 28, 2026, <https://group.bnpparibas/en/news/intergenerational-collaboration-a-driver-of-innovation-and-collective-performance>

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings reveal a future talent cohort that is confident, pragmatic and focused on pay, flexibility and security, although priorities vary across markets and demographic groups. Future job seekers and early Gen Alpha candidates are entering the labor market with confidence in their employment prospects, a willingness to consider flexible work arrangements and a skills profile heavily rooted in behavioral capabilities. Yet regional differences, shifting sector preferences and gaps between self-perceived strengths and employer expectations show that organizations cannot rely on existing assumptions about younger workers. To attract, assess and develop the next generation, employers will need to pair data-led workforce planning with more transparent, adaptive and intentionally designed early career experiences that reflect different candidate needs.

Key takeaways

- **The next generation of workers is confident but not uniform.** Future job seekers are optimistic and open to flexible work, but their confidence, mobility and interest in gig work vary by region and country.
- **Pay is their top priority, but context matters.** Competitive pay ranks first overall when next-gen candidates choose jobs, but work-life balance, flexible hours and health benefits carry different weight depending on their gender and region.
- **Hybrid and onsite work dominate.** Most next-gen candidates favor hybrid or onsite work, challenging assumptions that younger workers expect to work fully remotely.
- **Sector interest has shifted away from traditional pathways.** Technology is no longer the default destination for digitally fluent candidates, while public-sector, energy and industrial, and health and life sciences roles are gaining appeal.
- **Employers need to define what critical skills look like at work.** Next-gen candidates are less likely to identify problem-solving, leadership potential and functional expertise as strengths. Employers can respond with clearer assessment criteria and targeted early career development.

Part 2

Today's talent climate: The macro forces reshaping entry-level work

While the oldest of Gen Alpha prepares to enter the workforce, several external trends are converging: the rapid adoption of generative AI, the enduring talent shortage and the fragile trust between candidates and employers. Together, these pressures are reshaping recruiting and prompting organizations to reconsider how they attract, assess and engage talent.

These forces are highly relevant to early careers because they will shape the first interactions between employers and future entry-level workers. In this section, we explore how these forces could affect hiring and engaging the next generation of talent.

Gen AI has ushered in an era of application inflation and candidate fraud

Job seekers are actively experimenting with the newest AI tools in the job search process. Companies have seen a sharp increase in candidates' AI use alongside a significant rise in application volumes. Organizations are receiving thousands of highly tailored applications, many of which are generated quickly using open-access AI-powered tools. Indeed, since 2022, AMS has observed entry-level application volumes in some cases have tripled or quadrupled. As a practical example, one global professional services firm recently shared that its applications had jumped from 2 million to 4 million in 12 months.



In our candidate research, we asked thousands of active job seekers how many jobs they had applied to in the past 30 days. Respondents reported an average of seven applications per month; 79 percent had applied to up to 10 postings in the previous month alone.

Unsurprisingly, TA teams report that higher application volume has not resulted in a proportionate increase in qualified candidates. Instead, recruiters face heavier candidate screening workloads and have less time to interact with individual applicants.²²

A related concern is the rapid increase in the scale and sophistication of candidate and skills fraud over the last three years. While résumé embellishment has always occurred in recruitment, AI tools have made it easier to generate false information quickly and at scale. Gartner predicts that by 2028, one in four candidate profiles worldwide will be fake,²³ further eroding the reliability of traditional hiring signals.

The result is a decline in trust between candidates and employers early in the hiring process. One sign of that strain is the rising prevalence of “ghosting,” whether from fake candidates or employers overwhelmed by thousands of applications.²⁴ In our research, two-thirds of all active job seekers at all levels of experience reported that an employer had suddenly stopped responding to them during the hiring process.

Application inflation and candidate fraud: The early career perspective

X2

Entry level applications per role have doubled in some sectors and roles since 2022.

76%

of organizations surveyed say that entry-level application volumes have surged.

79%

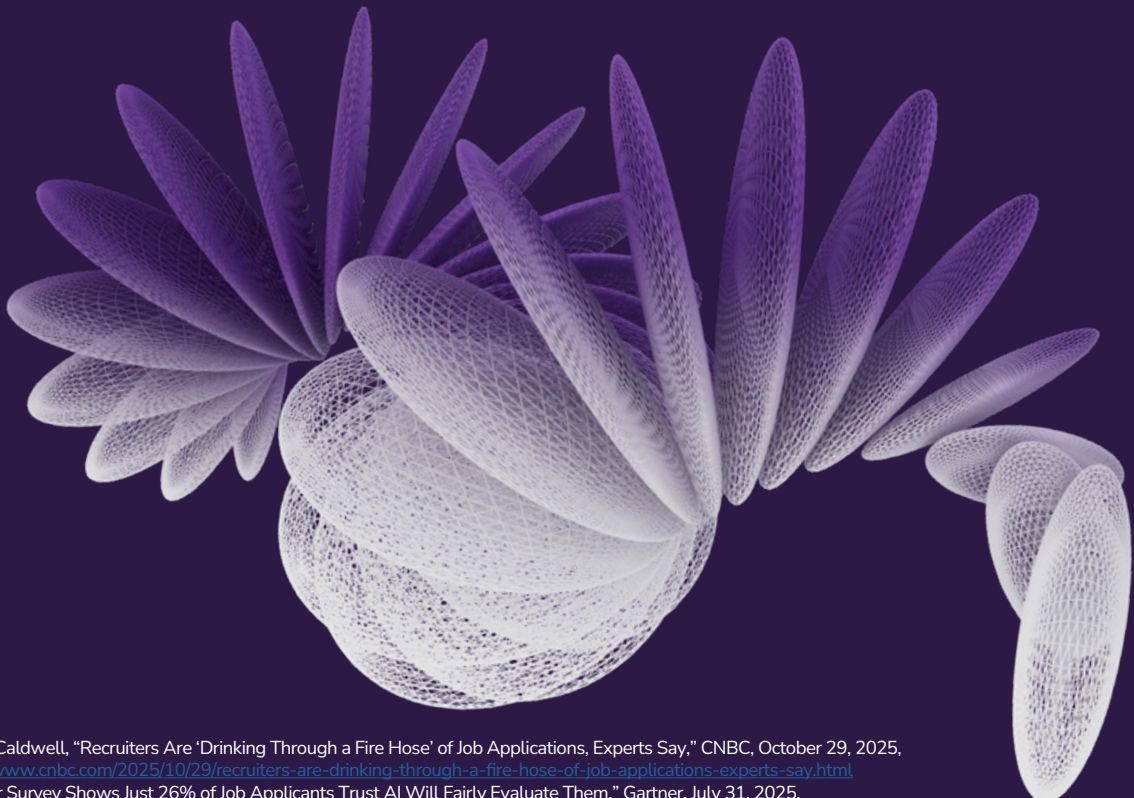
of next-gen candidates applied for up to 10 jobs in the past 30 days.

90%

say they have used AI in their job search.

55%

say they have been ghosted by a potential employer during the application process.



22. Sophia Caldwell, “Recruiters Are ‘Drinking Through a Fire Hose’ of Job Applications, Experts Say,” CNBC, October 29, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/10/29/recruiters-are-drinking-through-a-fire-hose-of-job-applications-experts-say.html>

23. “Gartner Survey Shows Just 26% of Job Applicants Trust AI Will Fairly Evaluate Them,” Gartner, July 31, 2025, <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2025-07-31-gartner-survey-shows-just-26-percent-of-job-applicants-trust-ai-will-fairly-evaluate-them>

24. Scaring Off ‘Ghost Jobs’, Korn Ferry Institute, September 1, 2026, Scaring Off ‘Ghost Jobs’ <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/this-week-in-leadership/a-ghost-jobs-exorcism>

The talent shortage has intensified

While AI's seismic impacts have unfolded quickly, the global skills and talent shortage has been building for more than a decade.²⁵ The World Economic Forum cited the skills gap as the number one barrier to successful business transformation,²⁶ while a recent global trends report found that 75 percent of employers could not find the talent they need to execute their business strategy.²⁷ At the same time, AI and other technological advances are compounding the talent shortage. By 2030, Korn Ferry suggests that the global economy will face a talent shortage of 85 million workers.²⁸

Part of the challenge stems from limited skills visibility within organizations. This challenge manifests in three ways: maintaining an accurate inventory of internal skills, building competitive strategies to find needed skills in the market and predicting the skills they will need in the next 5 years.

The pace of change exacerbates this challenge. The half-life of a skill — the time before a functional workplace skill is rendered largely irrelevant — has shrunk from 10 years a few decades ago to just under 4 years today.²⁹ Highly technical and digital skills can become nearly obsolete in as little as 2 years.³⁰

Global skills and talent shortage: What organizations told us

- “Current skills are evolving, and new unknown skills are continuously being added in the market.” Director of talent acquisition in a U.S. insurance firm
- “Building a future-ready workforce requires us to forecast the skills that are necessary for business outperformance faster than competitors.” CHRO of an Indian manufacturer
- “Our biggest challenge is the rapid obsolescence of skills and the institutionalization of continuous learning to address it.” CHRO of a Chinese energy company
- “Building skills for jobs that do not yet exist under regulatory frameworks that cannot keep pace means planning with significant uncertainty.” CHRO of a U.S. aerospace and defense firm

25. “The Enterprise Guide to Closing the Skills Gap,” IBM Institute for Business Value, accessed August 30, 2026, <https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/en-us/report/closing-skills-gap>

26. World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025.

27. “Worldwide Immigration Trends Report: Challenges and Opportunities for 2025,” Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, LLP, 2025, <https://www.fragomen.com/trending/worldwide-immigration-trends-reports/index.html>

28. “A New Recruitment Strategy for a Multigenerational Workforce,” Korn Ferry, accessed August 30, 2026, <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/featured-topics/workforce-management-articles/a-new-recruitment-strategy-for-a-multigenerational-workforce>

29. Joe McKendrick, “AI Puts the Squeeze on the Shrinking Half-Life of Skills,” Forbes, April 30, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joemckendrick/2024/04/30/ai-puts-the-squeeze-on-the-shrinking-half-life-of-skills>

30. “AI in HR: The CHRO's Role in AI Transformation,” Gartner, February 3, 2026, <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/ai-in-hr>

Trust between employers and candidates remains on shaky ground

While AI, automation and data take centre stage and companies struggle to find and keep the skills they need, CHROs and talent leaders have also been facing a growing divide in the social contract between employer and employee/candidate.

Employers retain an important position in the broader trust landscape. The 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer found that 78 percent of employees trust their employer to do what is right. It also found that employers are better positioned than other institutions to help bridge trust divides.³¹

However, that confidence does not automatically extend to the hiring relationship or AI-enabled recruitment. Our data shows that only 27 percent of all jobseekers trust employers to protect their data during the hiring process. Even fewer, 23 percent, trust employers to be honest about job descriptions, and just 17 percent trust the AI tools used by employers to screen them fairly. Early careers candidates report even lower levels of trust (see inset, below).

Leading organizations are responding by making early career communications more direct and human. For example, a global engineering organization has deliberately shifted its early career attraction activity toward employee, apprentice and graduate stories, authentic social content and face-to-face events like peer networking. Candidates hear directly from career changers, apprentices and graduates rather than receiving only corporate messaging. Likewise, a global pharmaceutical organization has developed an automated content journey for graduate hires between offer acceptance and their first day. The content brings the culture to life by spotlighting real-life career journeys and emphasizing wellbeing.

Trust in hiring: The early career perspective

- Candidates ages 16 to 24 report lower levels of trust in employers than their older peers.
- AI screening tools are the top source of concern for next-gen candidates.
- Only 15 percent of next-gen candidates report a high level of trust in employers' job descriptions.
- Next-gen job seekers are most likely to trust current and former employees when evaluating an employer.

31. Edelman Trust Institute, 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer: Trust Amid Insularity, Global Report (2026), 28, 38, <https://edl.mn/4stbxw32>

Conclusion

The future of early careers work is being shaped by the combined pressures of AI, persistent skills scarcity and fragile trust. These pressures are making traditional screening signals less reliable and candidate engagement more important. Building a strong pipeline for 2030 will require clearer skills intelligence, stronger verification, more transparent communication and a renewed commitment to trust from the very first candidate interaction.

Key takeaways

- **AI is weakening hiring signals.** Higher application volumes and increasingly sophisticated candidate fraud are adding to recruiter workloads and making candidate information harder to verify.
- **The skills shortage is intensifying.** Employers face persistent scarcity, limited visibility into current and future capabilities, and a faster pace of skills obsolescence.
- **Trust begins with hiring.** Low candidate confidence in data protection, AI screening and employer job descriptions makes transparency and fairness essential from the first interaction.

Part 3

Early career work: The great debates

As the Gen Alpha persona develops, the first of the cohort prepares to enter the workforce, and employers respond to multiple external pressures, traditional organizational models for early career and entry-level work are being put to the test. Companies are reconsidering long-standing assumptions about junior talent as they prepare for 2030.

Global headlines offer no clear path. Some reports describe a collapse of the labor market for recent graduates and warn that AI could reduce entry-level opportunities,³² while others point to companies expanding junior hiring as AI changes how work is performed.³³ Remote work presents a similar tension. Earlier research emphasized the flexibility and autonomy it offered workers,³⁴ while newer findings suggest that remote arrangements may make it harder for employers to hire, train and mentor junior employees.³⁵ HR and TA leaders navigating this tension are unsure how to proceed.

We talked with some of the world's most successful companies to understand how they are thinking about the future of entry-level work and the early career workforce of 2030. These organizations are asking important questions about how to restructure, redesign and rethink early careers work in this volatile environment and how to best engage the next generation of workers as they implement a new model.

In this section, we examine three major topics that are under debate today, including the future of entry-level work, the balance between types of early career workers and the optimal location for Gen Alpha candidates.

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- 32. Mirielle Eaton, "Entry-Level Hiring Is Tougher Than Ever. How Universities Are Adapting," World Economic Forum, April 1, 2026, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/education-and-skills/universities-prepare-students-entry-level-jobs/>
 - 33. Lindsay Ellis, "These Companies Say AI Is Reviving Entry-Level Jobs, Not Killing Them," Wall Street Journal, May 19, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/lifestyle/careers/ai-entry-level-jobs-graduates-595cee28>
 - 34. Environics Institute for Survey Research, Future Skills Centre, and Diversity Institute, The Shift to Remote Work: How Workers in Canada Are Adapting to Working from Home (Toronto: Toronto Metropolitan University, September 2022), 1–3, <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/The-Shift-to-Remote-Work.pdf>
 - 35. Natalia Emanuel, Emma Harrington, and Amanda Pallais, "Remote Work Leaves Younger Workers Sidelined," Liberty Street Economics, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, June 1, 2026, <https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2026/06/remote-work-leaves-younger-workers-sidelined/>

Eliminate or redesign: What will early career work look like in the AI era?

Headlines began emerging as early as 2023 that generative AI could eliminate entry-level work altogether.³⁶ This message dominated industry and media coverage for several years but has been challenged in recent months as AI becomes more embedded in the enterprise and labor market data begins to present a more balanced picture.³⁷

Several market signals suggest that graduates and early career workers are facing a more difficult employment market than their older peers. The unemployment rate for recent U.S. graduates ages 22 to 27 has risen to 5.6 percent compared with an overall unemployment rate of 4.3 percent. Hiring trends have also weakened in some sectors. In technology, for example, new-graduate hiring has declined by nearly 65 percent in major technology firms and by 75 percent in tech startups since 2019.³⁸ New York Federal Reserve data also shows unemployment rates of 7 percent among computer science graduates and 7.8 percent among computer engineering graduates, placing both among the highest rates reported across college majors.³⁹

Dire warnings from Big Tech leaders have perpetuated this message. In 2025, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei warned that AI could eliminate 50 percent of entry-level white-collar jobs in the next 1 to 5 years.⁴⁰ OpenAI founder Sam Altman shared a similar message a year ago, suggesting that entire classes of work could vanish.

36. Tyna Eloundou, Sam Manning, Pamela Mishkin, and Daniel Rock, "GPTs Are GPTs: An Early Look at the Labor Market Impact Potential of Large Language Models," arXiv, March 17, 2023, revised August 22, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2303.10130>; Suzanne Lucas, "The Disappearance of Entry-Level Jobs," ERE, August 31, 2023, <https://www.ere.net/articles/the-disappearance-of-entry-level-jobs>
37. Josh Bersin, "No, Entry-Level Jobs Are Not Going Away," May 30, 2025, updated June 20, 2025, <https://joshbersin.com/2025/05/no-entry-level-jobs-are-not-going-away>
38. Tawni Cranz and Asher Bantok, "SignalFire's State of Talent Report — 2026," SignalFire, June 22, 2026, <https://www.signalfire.com/blog/signalfire-state-of-talent-report-2026>
39. Federal Reserve Bank of New York, "The Labor Market for Recent College Graduates," updated August 6, 2026, <https://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market>
40. Dario Amodei, quoted in Jim VandeHei and Mike Allen, "AI Jobs Danger: Sleepwalking into a White-Collar Bloodbath," Axios, May 28, 2025, <https://www.axios.com/2025/05/28/ai-jobs-white-collar-unemployment-anthropic>

Emerging to counter this narrative, new evidence points to continued demand for junior talent. Data from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) projects that participating employers will hire 5.6 percent more graduates from the class of 2026, although hiring plans vary considerably by industry.⁴¹ Our research confirms this trend: 76 percent of TA leaders say that entry-level jobs are not disappearing from their organizations, and 81 percent plan to increase early-career hiring over the next 2 years. Indeed, even Altman has walked his earlier statement back as of mid-2026, saying he was “delighted to be wrong” about the pace of disruption to entry-level white-collar work and that he did not expect the “jobs apocalypse” some in the industry had predicted.⁴²

The most successful companies recognize the value of continuing to embrace entry level workers. Our data reveals that pacesetter organizations, defined as companies that outperform their peers in revenue growth and profitability, are 1.3 times more likely than their lower-performing peers to recognize the continued importance of entry-level work and early career talent to their 2030 strategy.

In practice, IBM plans to triple U.S. entry-level hiring in 2026.⁴³ Cognizant announced plans to hire approximately 20,000 graduates in 2026, the same as in 2025.⁴⁴ And McKinsey expects to continue to increase the number of entry-level workers it hires.⁴⁵

However, the discussion extends well beyond the straightforward debate over whether AI will eliminate or expand entry-level roles. Technology is altering what entry-level work looks like and its place in the talent pyramid. The next step for organizations is to examine how entry-level work will change, but for many, the path forward remains unclear.

Pacesetter companies that financially outperform their competitors are more likely to recognize the importance of entry-level work than lower-performing organizations.

41. National Association of Colleges and Employers, Job Outlook 2026: Spring Update, April 2026,

<https://www.naceweb.org/research/reports/job-outlook>

42. Sam Altman, quoted in “‘Intelligence Too Cheap to Meter’ Is AI’s Next Frontier, Sam Altman Says,” Fortune, July 23, 2025,

<https://fortune.com/2025/07/23/sam-altman-artificial-intelligence-too-cheap-jobs/>; Sam Altman, quoted in “Sam Altman Says He’s ‘Delighted to Be Wrong’ About AI’s Impact on Jobs,” Daily Caller, May 26, 2026, <https://dailycaller.com/2026/05/26/sam-altman-open-ai-job-apocalypse-impact>

43. Aili McConnon, “The Bottom Rung Returns as AI Reshapes Entry-Level Jobs,” IBM Think, March 2, 2026,

<https://www.ibm.com/think/news/entry-level-roles-get-reset-ai>

44. Reuters, “Cognizant Forecasts Quarterly Revenue Below Estimates on Cautious IT Spending,” April 29, 2026,

<https://www.reuters.com/business/cognizant-forecasts-quarterly-revenue-below-estimates-cautious-it-spending-2026-04-29>

45. Cadie Thompson and Tim Paradis, “McKinsey Is Doubling Down on Entry-Level Hires — Even in the AI Era,” Business Insider, September 8, 2025,

<https://africa.businessinsider.com/careers/mckinsey-is-doubling-down-on-entry-level-hires-even-in-the-ai-era/lh5sdlh>

In our research, nearly three-quarters of organizations agree that entry-level work will change rather than be eliminated. Yet roughly half say they don't yet know what that change will look like. Meanwhile, some organizations have already begun redesigning junior roles. PwC, Microsoft and other industry leaders show that junior hires are shifting from task execution to work that requires greater judgment.

Table 1 reveals some of the activities that early career candidates in these pacesetting organizations are increasingly being asked to perform.

AI task	What graduates are being asked to do
Use gen AI to research and synthesize information	Research topics, summarize material, identify patterns and produce initial insights
Automate routine workflows	Identify repetitive work and use AI or automation to make it faster
Analyze data and generate insights	Use AI alongside spreadsheets, SQL, BI tools or Python to interpret data
Prompt AI tools effectively	Create, test and refine prompts to produce better outputs
Create or refine content	Generate first drafts of copy, reports, communications, campaign assets and documentation
Build AI agents or chatbots	Configure or develop simple agents that complete defined tasks
Test and evaluate AI outputs	Check accuracy, quality and usefulness, then refine the results
Integrate AI into existing processes and tools	Connect AI capabilities to applications, APIs and business workflows
Support AI adoption	Document processes, teach users and help teams adopt new AI tools
Apply human judgment to AI output	Review, validate and interpret AI-generated work rather than accepting it automatically

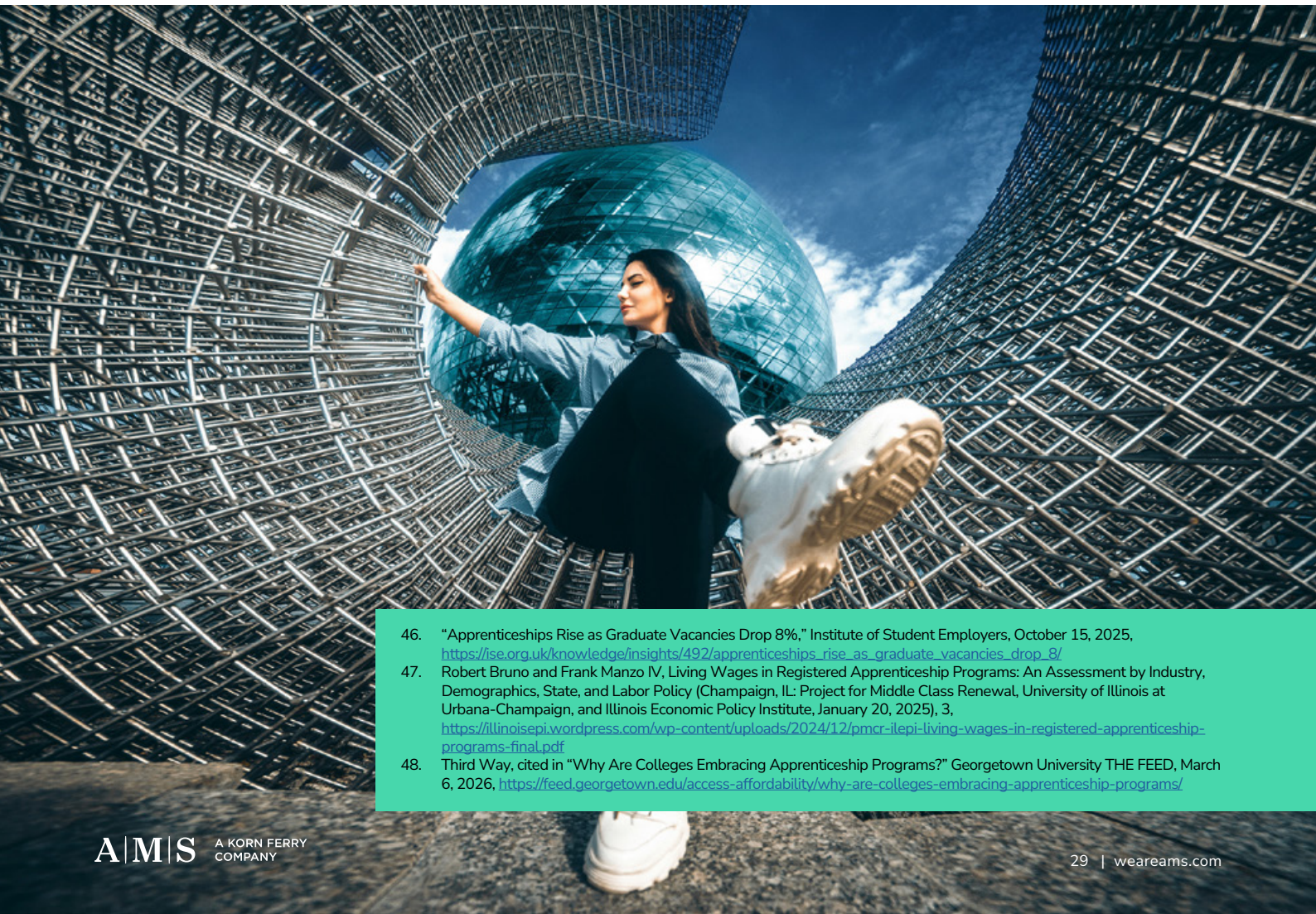
Grads, apprentices and interns: What is the right balance of early career talent?

Graduate hiring has historically been the primary mechanism for bringing junior talent into the organization at scale: in 2024, graduate hires outnumbered apprenticeship hires by a ratio of 2.3 to 1. But there are signs that the balance is shifting. According to the Institute of Student Employers, apprenticeship hiring among major U.K. employers increased by 8 percent in 2025, while graduate hiring declined by the same percentage.⁴⁶

In the U.S., apprenticeships have long been concentrated in the skilled trades in sectors such as construction and manufacturing. They represent a much smaller segment of the workforce at just about 0.3 percent, compared with 2 to 3 percent in Canada, Germany and Switzerland.⁴⁷ But signs of a shift are emerging here as well. Between 2014 and 2024, the number of registered U.S. apprenticeship programs more than doubled, while the number of apprentices increased by 143 percent.⁴⁸

“We plan to start more apprentice schemes to bring through new talent and develop talent internally, rather than relying on external hiring”

— CHRO, U.K. professional services firm



46. “Apprenticeships Rise as Graduate Vacancies Drop 8%,” Institute of Student Employers, October 15, 2025, https://ise.org.uk/knowledge/insights/492/apprenticeships_rise_as_graduate_vacancies_drop_8/

47. Robert Bruno and Frank Manzo IV, Living Wages in Registered Apprenticeship Programs: An Assessment by Industry, Demographics, State, and Labor Policy (Champaign, IL: Project for Middle Class Renewal, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Illinois Economic Policy Institute, January 20, 2025), 3, <https://illinoisepi.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/pmcr-ilepi-living-wages-in-registered-apprenticeship-programs-final.pdf>

48. Third Way, cited in “Why Are Colleges Embracing Apprenticeship Programs?” Georgetown University THE FEED, March 6, 2026, <https://feed.georgetown.edu/access-affordability/why-are-colleges-embracing-apprenticeship-programs/>

Our research shows that companies today are evenly divided on this topic. Half of TA executives say apprenticeships are on the rise in their organizations; the other half plan to maintain their existing graduate recruiting programs and have no plans to expand their apprenticeship initiatives. Differences among countries are limited, with most remaining close to the global average. By sector, manufacturing leads in this regard, with nearly three-quarters (72%) of TA leaders reporting an increase in apprenticeships. Professional services firms follow closely, with 69 percent saying their organizations are expanding their apprenticeship programs. See Figure 10 for a full sector breakdown.

The question remains open: what is the optimal balance of graduate programs and apprenticeships for assembling a future-proof workforce? The answer is not simple. Not only does each pathway serve a different purpose, reach different talent pools and produce different outcomes, but changes in the needs and expectations of the talent entering each pathway are also prompting organizations to review their strategies.

Graduate programs have historically been designed to attract job seekers who have already completed higher education and possess strong theoretical knowledge. Organizations have used these programs to build long-term talent and leadership pipelines while acquiring specialized academic expertise. Highly structured graduate programs often include rotations across the organization, with candidates expected to demonstrate impact and productivity relatively quickly. For example, Unilever's Future Leaders Programme is a well-known source of talent, recruiting graduates directly into its commercial, supply chain, finance, marketing, HR and R&D functions.⁴⁹ Likewise, a global engineering firm created its Enterprise Skills Accelerator programme to develop critical future skills among graduate hires through rotational assignments and real project work before deployment into an agile skills pool.

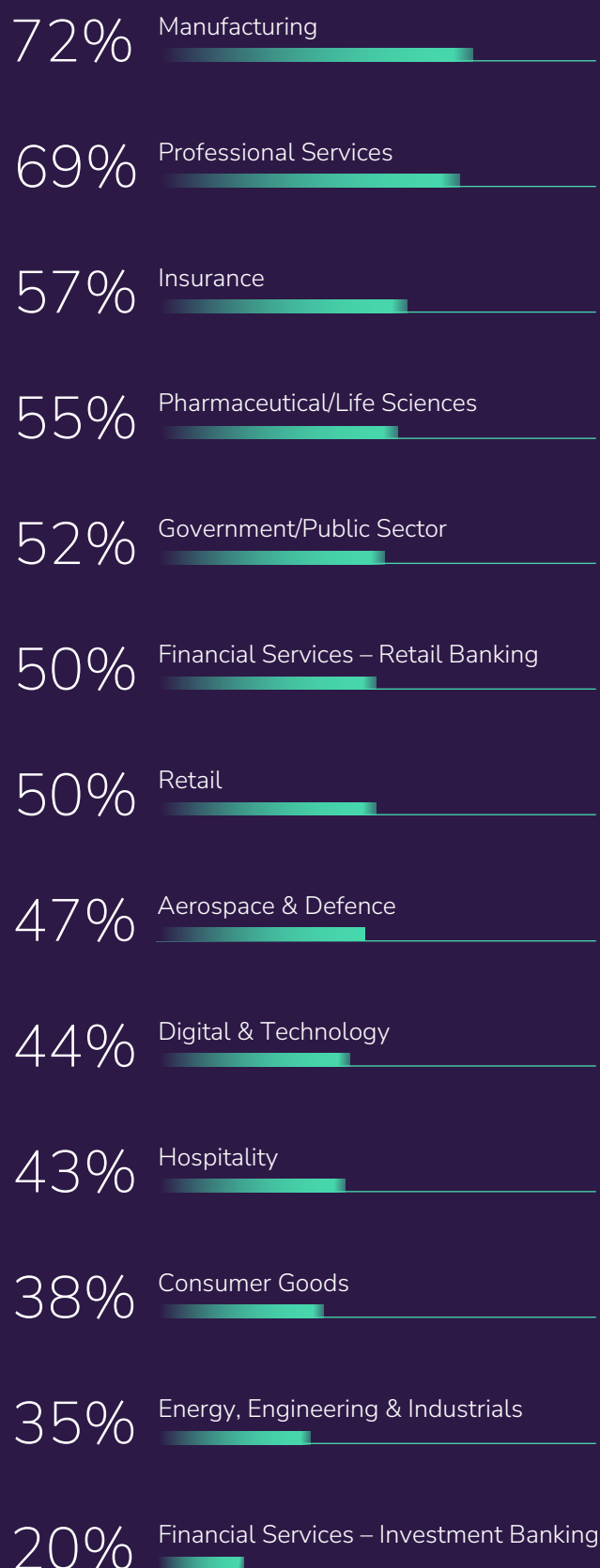


Figure 10: Organizations planning to increase apprenticeship programs, by sector

49. "Unilever Future Leaders Programme (UFLP)," Unilever Careers, accessed August 30, 2026, <https://careers.unilever.com/uk-graduates>

Companies have long relied on graduate programs to bring in large cohorts of high-potential candidates. However, questions are emerging about whether today's graduates are as prepared for work as previous cohorts. In a 2026 Yale survey of 100 college and university presidents, only 10 percent said their graduates were sufficiently or very well prepared for AI-enabled workplaces.⁵⁰ An April 2025 commercial survey of 1,000 U.S. managers involved in entry-level hiring found that more than half considered recent graduates unprepared for the workforce. Among respondents whose companies had hired recent graduates during the previous year, only 17 percent said all those hires had been successful.⁵¹

Apprenticeship programs, unlike graduate programs, emphasize learning and development alongside work experience. These initiatives typically combine paid employment with formal training and development, enabling organizations to develop specific skills aligned with their proprietary technologies, processes and culture from the outset. Companies can use apprenticeships to address skill shortages, strengthen technical and operational capabilities and expand access to career opportunities for people from underrepresented populations.

These programs, in contrast to graduate hiring, tend to rely heavily on experienced employees to dedicate time to coaching and assessment. Organizations must also devote resources to meeting regulatory requirements, which vary by jurisdiction. Apprenticeships may therefore require a longer investment horizon. However, evidence from Switzerland demonstrates their potential financial value.

About 60 percent of Swiss employers break even or turn a profit by the end of an apprenticeship, with an average ROI of approximately 8 percent.⁵²

IBM was an early proponent of the apprenticeship model, introducing its New-Collar Apprentice Program in 2017. Nearly a decade later, the program has expanded to 35 registered job roles, including cybersecurity, data science, AI and cloud computing.⁵³ Likewise, AstraZeneca launched its U.K. apprentice program in 2015 and has grown from 80 to over 300 apprentices that span the company's U.K. sites.⁵⁴ More than 80 percent of its apprentices have remained with the company.

50. Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld et al., "The Real Job Destruction from AI Is Hitting Before Careers Can Start," Yale Insights, May 4, 2026, <https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/the-real-job-destruction-from-ai-is-hitting-before-careers-can-start>

51. "Recent College Grads Are Hard to Manage and Always on Their Phones; Many Managers Avoid Hiring Them," [ResumeTemplates.com](https://www.resumetemplates.com), May 2025, <https://www.resumetemplates.com/recent-college-grads-are-hard-to-manage-and-always-on-their-phones-many-managers-avoid-hiring-them>

52. Annelies Goger, "What the US Can Learn from Switzerland About the Business Case for Apprenticeships," Brookings Institution, January 6, 2026, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-the-us-can-learn-from-switzerland-about-the-business-case-for-apprenticeships/>

53. "IBM on Skills-First," CSWire, accessed August 30, 2026, <https://cswire.com/press-release/ibm-skills-first>

54. "Apprenticeships: AstraZeneca," Science Council, January 5, 2026, <https://sciencecouncil.org/apprenticeships-astrazeneca>

Remote or onsite: Can early career work thrive outside the shared workplace?

Before 2020, remote work was less common and often treated as an employee perk rather than a business strategy. Work-from-home policies were concentrated in the tech sector and certain knowledge-worker roles. Organizational culture and innovation were generally expected to benefit from co-location and collaboration in shared spaces.

Of course, the global pandemic changed that model for most companies nearly overnight, with S&P Global figures suggesting 80 percent of organizations implemented work-from-home policies within the first three months.⁵⁵ Since then, executive teams and workers have grappled with changing workplace attendance policies, questions about productivity and performance and the effects of remote work on long-established organizational culture.

The cycling of remote work has perhaps been felt most keenly in the entry-level workforce. Before its widespread adoption, employers generally expected early career hires working onsite to benefit from physical proximity to their colleagues and leaders. Formal training programs brought graduate cohorts together to learn and build skills, while the shared workplace created opportunities for informal development, coaching, networking, participation in organizational culture and access to leadership. Reported engagement and wellbeing were high among new hires.



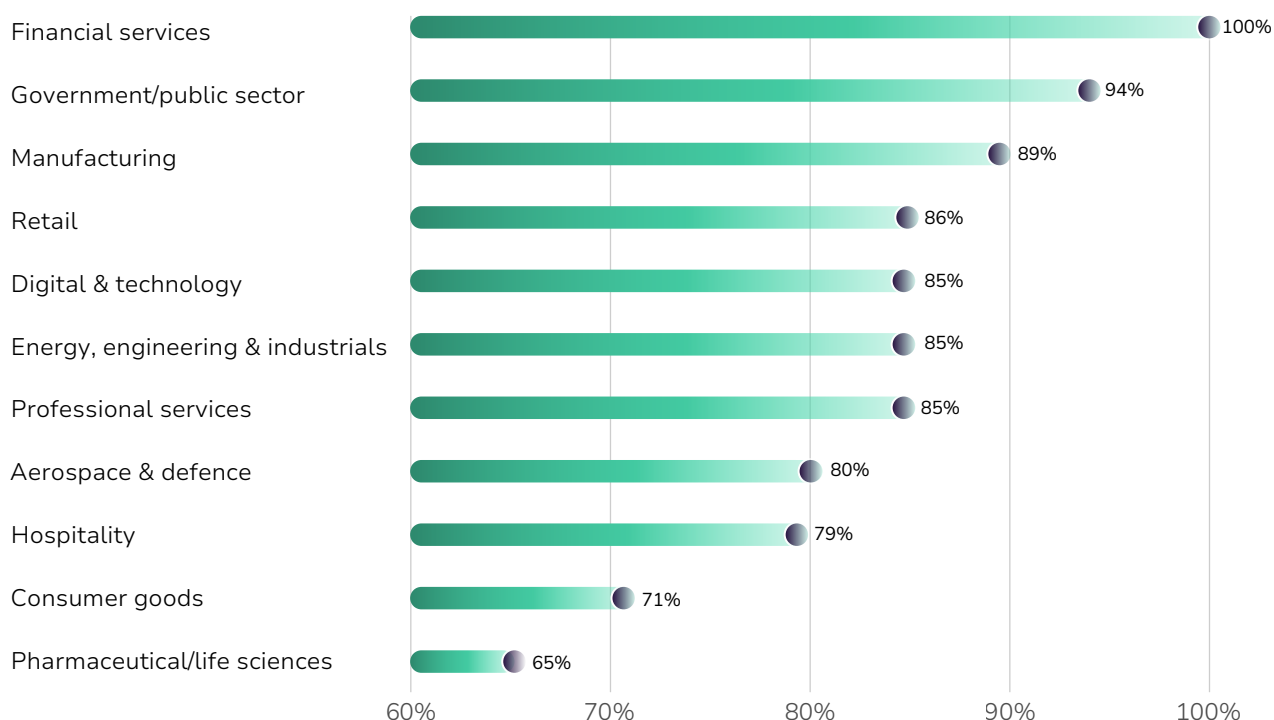
55. "COVID-19 Shakes Up the Future of Work," S&P Global Market Intelligence, June 18, 2020, <https://press.spglobal.com/2020-06-18-COVID-19-Shakes-Up-the-Future-of-Work>

Today, as companies continue to determine their long-term approaches to workplace attendance, the onsite-versus-remote debate remains a key consideration for entry-level work. The questions are many. Should an organization establish a separate policy for their younger hires, or should the same rules apply across the workforce? Should leaders expect all junior workers to be onsite? Under a hybrid model, how should organizations design and apply attendance schedules while mitigating proximity bias, digital fatigue and compliance risks?

Our data lends two perspectives to this debate. First, 85 percent of respondents agreed that new graduate hires should work onsite from day one. However, results varied by sector, company size and region (see Figure 11). For example, pharmaceutical companies are least likely to expect onsite attendance from their junior hires, while financial services firms and public-sector organizations are among the most likely to do so. Results also varied by country. Organizations headquartered in the U.S., China and Mexico were less likely to expect early career workers to begin onsite, while companies headquartered in the U.K., Japan and Argentina were more likely to hold that expectation.

When it comes to company size, revenue influences this debate more than headcount. Results by company size generally remained close to the global average, with one notable exception: companies reporting more than \$10 billion in annual revenue were more likely to expect their early career hires to work onsite from day one.

By sector



By company revenue

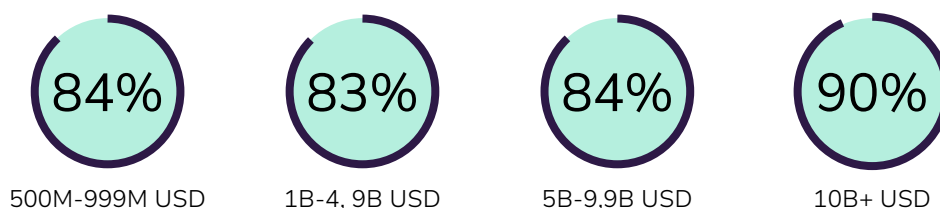


Figure 11: Expectation that early career employees be onsite from day one

The second perspective from our research comes from early career candidates themselves. Only 20 percent of next-generation job seekers prefer a fully remote role (see Figure 5). By comparison, 27 percent prefer to be fully onsite, and 44 percent favor a hybrid model. Although these respondents are somewhat less likely to prefer fully onsite work than employees aged 55 to 65, 31 percent of whom selected that option, hybrid and onsite arrangements remain the leading choices among the next generation of workers and job seekers. Preferences also varied across demographic groups. Women and nonbinary respondents were more likely than men to prefer fully onsite work. Nearly one in three women selected fully onsite work as their first choice, compared with one in five men. Among nonbinary respondents, 38 percent preferred this arrangement.

North American respondents also stood out. Thirty-seven percent of future job seekers in the U.S., Canada and Mexico selected fully onsite work as their preferred arrangement, the highest proportion among the regions surveyed.

Finally, onsite preference generally increased with education level. Only 10 percent of respondents with a secondary school education selected fully onsite work. As education level rises, candidates appear to be more inclined to prefer fully onsite work arrangements, peaking at 40 percent of graduate hires. Trade school graduates were an exception to this pattern, aligning with the realities of hands-on work for this cohort.



Conclusion

These debates show that early career work is undergoing fundamental change. AI is reshaping entry-level roles, and apprenticeship models are gaining ground alongside graduate pathways. Both employers and candidates continue to see a role for onsite work in learning, connection and culture-building.

Employers need to be intentional about where junior talent creates value, which pathways will build the skills they need and how to structure work to support their development, productivity and long-term growth.

Key takeaways

- **Entry-level talent remains important as roles evolve.** Most TA leaders expect early career hiring to continue or increase, even as AI changes the work assigned to junior employees.
- **AI is placing greater emphasis on judgment and oversight.** Early career hires will increasingly need to evaluate AI-generated work, interpret information and use human judgment alongside automated tools instead of performing repetitive tasks.
- **Graduate and apprenticeship pathways serve different workforce needs.** Graduate programs support leadership and specialist pipelines, while apprenticeships combine practical experience with targeted skill development and broader access to opportunity.
- **Onsite work remains part of the early career model.** Most future job seekers prefer hybrid or onsite arrangements, while employers widely expect new graduates to begin their roles onsite.

Part 4

Hiring early career talent: Emerging recruiting strategies of leading companies

As we have explored, early career hiring and work continue to evolve rapidly. Candidates are emerging from educational institutions with new expectations about work, varying levels of confidence in their skills and low levels of trust in employers' hiring processes. Meanwhile, AI, economic uncertainty and geopolitical factors are prompting organizations to review and redesign entry-level work, early career hiring volumes and recruitment processes.

One point remains clear: organizations still view junior talent as a critical part of their 2030 workforce. Eighty-one percent of organizations plan to increase hiring of this cohort over the next two years. Leaders recognize the value and impact of this essential talent segment even as they rethink how graduates, apprentices, interns and junior workers fit into their long-term business strategies.

So how are organizations attracting, hiring and retaining this next generation of talent? What practices are most effective in attracting, hiring and retaining the next cohort of entry-level workers? What is the relationship between these practices and business performance? Our data shows that the answer is not found in simply doing what's always worked, nor is it wholly advantageous to dismiss all traditional hiring activities simply because of AI. Instead, companies who are focused on an intentional blend of practices also report stronger performance across four measures: financial performance, customer retention, employer brand and innovation.

In this section we reveal the strategies that are proving to be most effective in this uncertain market and show how each are linked with improved business outcomes.



Skills-first hiring

The most widely used strategy in early career recruitment programs is skills-first hiring. This is not surprising, as applying a skills-first lens has increasingly supplanted more traditional early careers screening measures such as academic scores or degrees.

NACE recently reported that in North America, use of grade point average (GPA) has declined in the last three years, with less than half of organizations still using graduate grades as a screening criteria, while skills-based hiring has risen in popularity with 70 percent using skills in job descriptions, as a core screening tool, and in interview rubrics.⁵⁶

Our research similarly shows a steady increase in this practice, with 29 percent of companies reporting that they deploy a skills-first hiring model across most of their early-career roles. Another 54 percent report that they have begun to apply the practice. Taken together, this suggests that 82 percent of organizations have some form of skills-first hiring in place within the early careers recruitment process. This pattern holds true across all regions, though we note some differences by sector and company size.

For example, aerospace and defence, energy and engineering and consumer goods companies report high levels of maturity in adopting this practice, while manufacturing, pharmaceutical and retail are still establishing their approaches. Figure 12 shows how adoption of skills-based hiring in early careers programs varies by region, sector and company headcount.

Our analysis found that strong execution of skills-first hiring is associated with better performance across three of the four outcomes that we studied. Companies that report executing this approach well are 14 percent more likely to report both exceeding their financial targets and being viewed as an employer of choice. They are also 16 percent more likely to report stronger performance in driving growth through innovation.

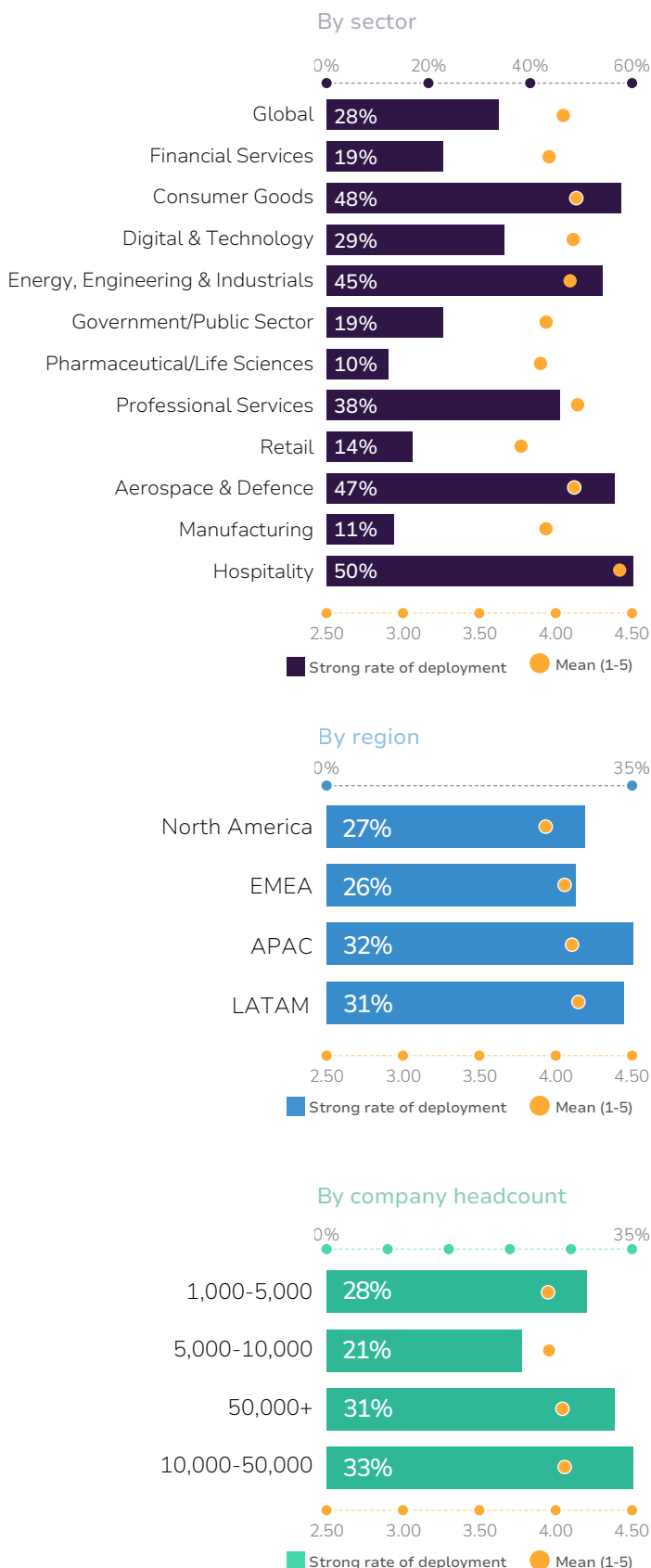


Figure 12: Rate of adoption of a skills-first model by sector, region and size

56. Kevin Gray, "Employer Use of Skills-Based Hiring Practices Grows," National Association of Colleges and Employers, January 12, 2026, <https://www.nacweb.org/job-market/trends-and-predictions/employer-use-of-skills-based-hiring-practices-grows>

AI in the recruitment process

AI is a clear priority for the HR leaders we surveyed, with 60 percent identifying it as the most important factor shaping recruitment this year. However, AI adoption in entry-level hiring remains relatively nascent. Only 13 percent of organizations report mature use of AI in their entry-level recruitment processes, while another 37 percent say they are beginning to embed it. Overall, only half of organizations we surveyed report that they have deployed some form of AI into their early careers programs, with the bulk of leaders acknowledging that use of this practice remains limited.

Strong adoption of AI does not vary significantly by region (see Figure 13), but there is differentiation across sectors. Interestingly, digital and technology firms report among the lowest levels of maturity (6%), though another 35 percent of these organizations have begun to apply AI into their early career hiring processes. Hospitality, aerospace and defence and energy and engineering companies are surging forward, with more than one fifth of respondents reporting they have embedded AI successfully across most of their early career recruitment workflows.

While AI deployment remains limited in early careers hiring, it does appear to be linked with business performance. Among the four practices examined, effective AI adoption showed the strongest association with reported business outcomes. Organizations that report strong adoption of AI in early career hiring programs are 20 percent more likely to exceed their financial targets and nearly twice as likely to report being viewed as an employer of choice. Customer retention follows a similar pattern: 40 percent of organizations with mature AI adoption report high retention, compared with 17 percent of all other organizations.

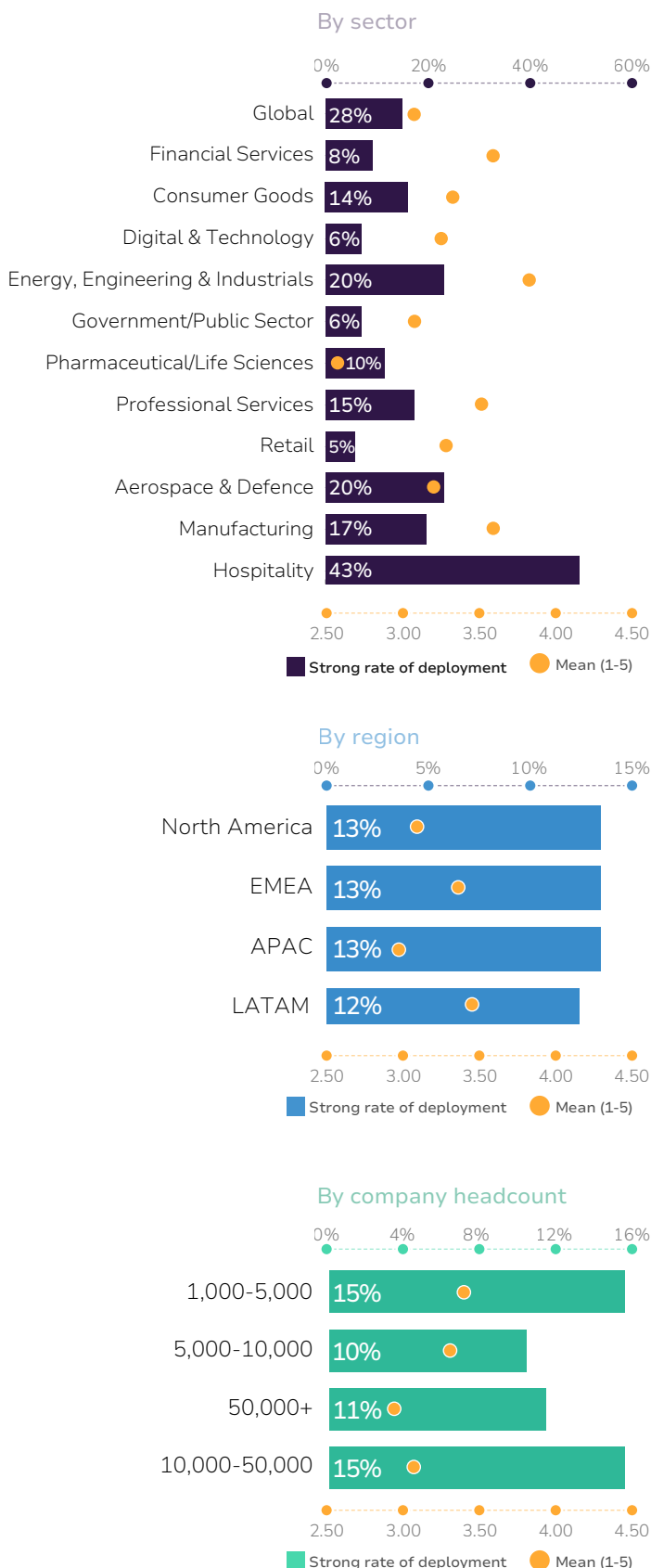


Figure 13: Rate of adoption of AI in early career recruiting by sector, region and size

Always-on recruiting

While seasonal recruiting cycles remain a cornerstone of early-career hiring, a growing number of companies are adding an always-on component that allows them to fill entry-level roles as business needs arise throughout the year.

Expedia introduced this approach in 2025 to complement its high-volume seasonal hiring of interns and graduates.⁵⁷ The company currently applies its always-on model to technology roles that arise outside its core intake periods. Recruiters draw first on talent pools that often include former interns and graduate candidates, then source externally as needed.

Several factors may be contributing to this emerging trend:

- Business needs often arise outside typical early-career recruitment cycles, creating demand for individual hires or small cohorts during the year.
- Scarce and emerging skills may need to be recruited when suitable candidates become available rather than during a fixed seasonal window.
- Candidates following different academic calendars or non-traditional education and career pathways may not fit established graduate recruitment cycles.

In our study, nearly two-thirds of organizations report that they have begun building year-round recruitment into their entry-level hiring programs in some form, though only 7 percent claim they are doing this consistently today. Overall adoption varies considerably by industry and region (see Figure 14). The sectors reporting the highest levels of maturity include professional services, manufacturing and hospitality. North American organizations are leading their peers, while APAC employers report a clear trend toward increasing maturity.

Our analysis suggests that this tactic is serving organizations well when executed in the right way. Companies using always-on recruiting to complement their existing seasonal hiring cycles are 13 percent more likely to report exceeding their financial targets than their peers that have not yet adopted the strategy.

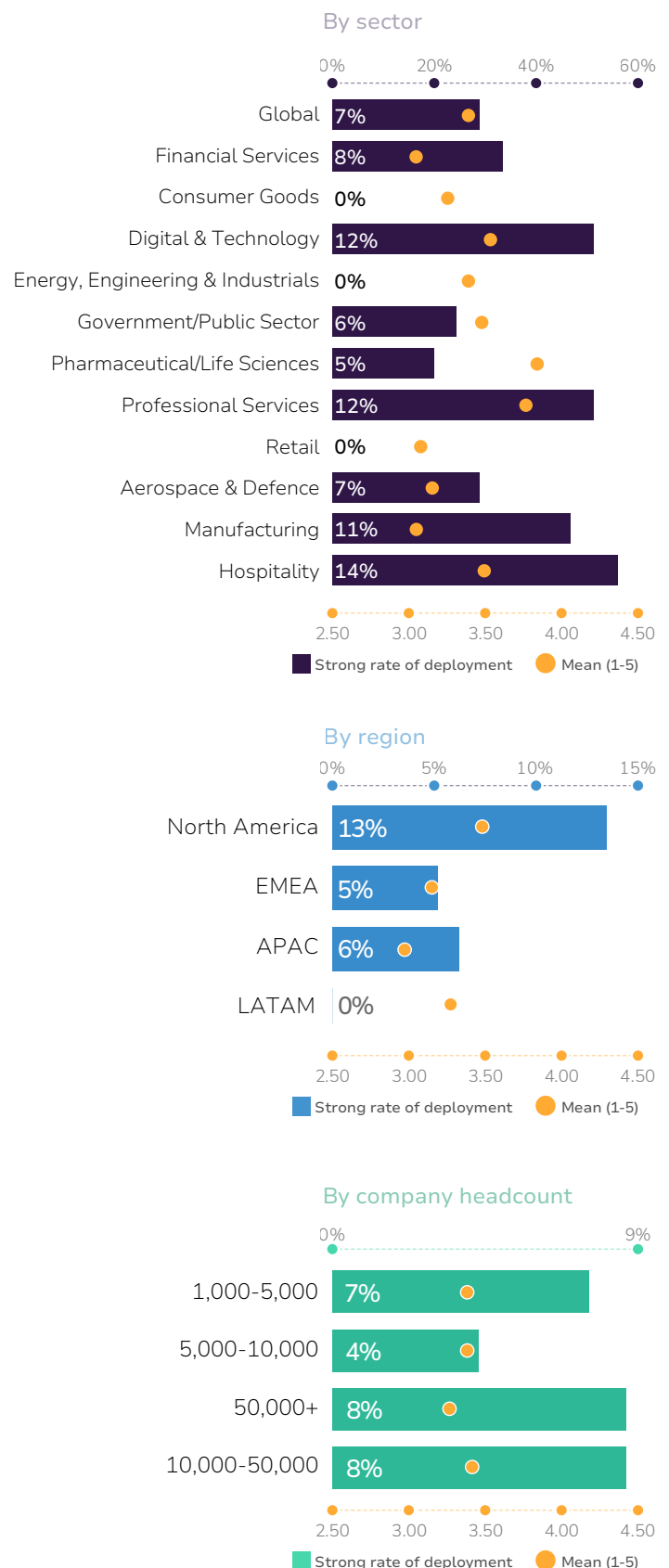


Figure 14: Companies that have added always-on hiring to early career programs by sector, country and size

57. Hayley Bowd, quoted in "Expedia Group Adds an 'Always On' Edge to Seasonal Hiring," Institute of Student Employers, September 3, 2025, https://ise.org.uk/knowledge/insights/470/expedia_group_adds_an_always_on_edge_to_seasonal_hiring/.

Hyper-personalized candidate experience

Candidate experience emerged as a formal talent acquisition focus about two decades ago, alongside the rise of online employer reviews, increased competition for talent and the entrance of Millennials into the workplace. It encompasses the full range of interactions a job seeker has with a potential employer throughout the recruitment lifecycle.

Measuring the candidate's experience is now well-accepted as a core practice. Our data shows that it remains among the top five metrics that TA teams track today, with 70 percent of organizations reporting that they assess it alongside time to hire, cost per hire, source of hire and internal hiring rate. Evidence of its longer-term effects helps explain why employers track it so closely. Exceptional candidate experiences are often linked to offer acceptance, clearer job expectations, stronger cultural connection and greater job satisfaction.⁵⁸ On the flip side, other research suggests that poor experience during the application and hiring processes can damage an employer's reputation and customer relationships.⁵⁹

Over the past 20 years, the elements that shape a positive candidate experience have changed with job market conditions, prevailing technologies and candidate expectations. Today's job seekers, particularly in younger generations, expect employers to offer consumer-grade digital recruitment experiences, 24/7 communication channels and transparency throughout the recruitment process.⁶⁰

- 58. Andy Kemp, "The Lasting Impact of Exceptional Candidate Experiences," Gallup, October 16, 2024, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/651650/lasting-impact-exceptional-candidate-experiences.aspx>
- 59. Survale, The 2025 Business Impact of Candidate Experience: 2025 Candidate Experience (CandE) Benchmark Research (April 2026), <https://survale.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/2025-Survale-CandE-Research-The-Business-Impact-of-Candidate-Experience.pdf>
- 60. Craig Hunter, "The Consumerisation of Talent Acquisition—A New Era of Candidate Experience," AMS, October 9, 2024, <https://www.weareams.com/expert-insights/the-consumerisation-of-talent-acquisition-a-new-era-of-candidate-experience>; Roy Maurer, "Research Reveals Candidates' Frustrations with Hiring Process," SHRM, April 9, 2024, <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/candidate-experience-talent-board-research-candes>



Today, organizations vying for early career candidates are exploring another dimension, enabled in part by AI: hyper-personalization. In our research, just over half of surveyed organizations report deploying or beginning to deploy highly personalized candidate journeys for their entry-level hires. Among pacesetter organizations, this number jumps to 65 percent, suggesting that outperforming companies may see greater value in creating highly tuned candidate experiences.

The practice is taking hold in several sectors and regions (see Figure 15). Consumer goods and aerospace and defence organizations lead in maturity of hyper personalization, with each industry reporting that one third (33%) use this approach successfully today. The pharmaceutical and energy and industrial sectors are close behind, with around a quarter reporting high level of adoption. In contrast, retail and manufacturing show signs of experimentation, but remain well below the global average.

Regionally, organizations in EMEA are behind their peers in applying highly personalized candidate journeys for their most junior hires, with only 1 in 10 reporting this practice is well adopted. However, another 42 percent say they have begun to focus their attention here.

Hyper-personalization is associated with stronger performance on two of the four business outcomes that we studied. Companies that deploy personalization at scale in their early career hiring programs are 1.2 times more likely to report exceeding their financial targets. They also report modestly stronger performance in driving growth through innovation.

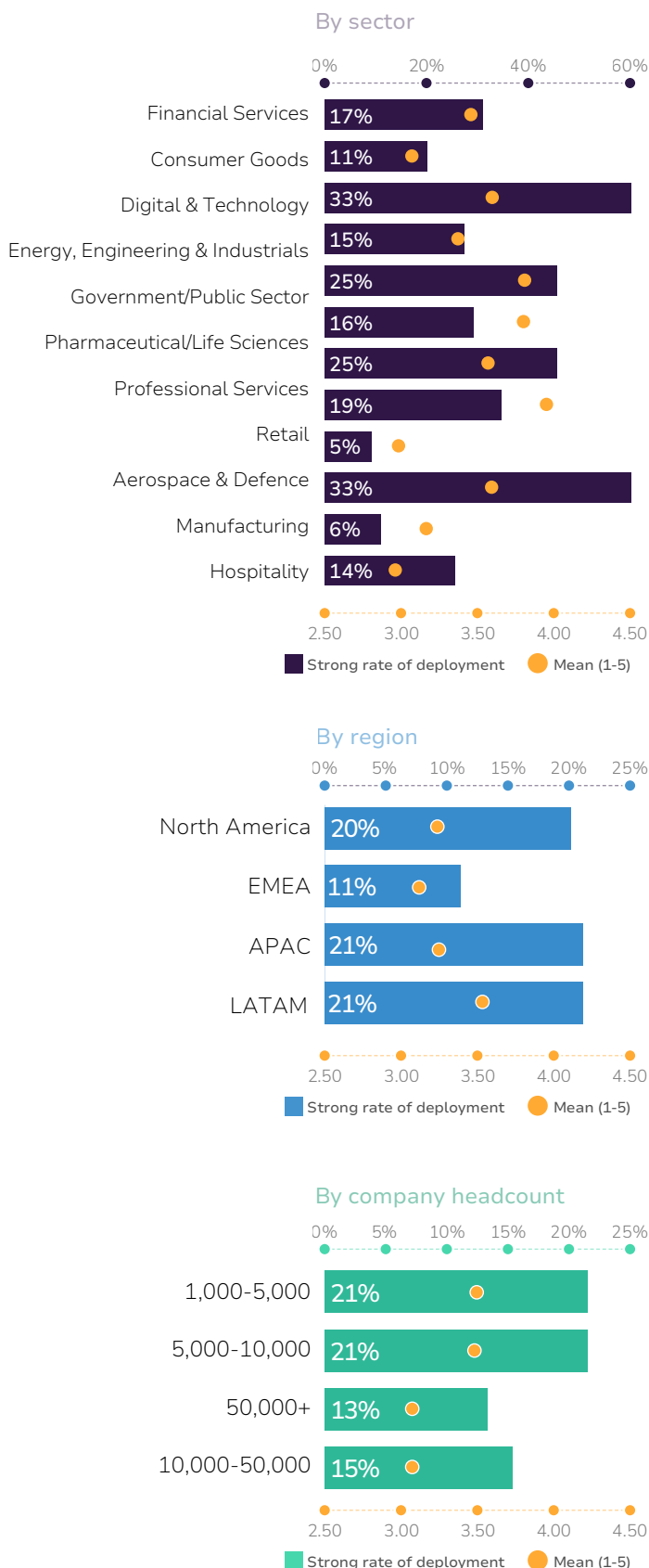


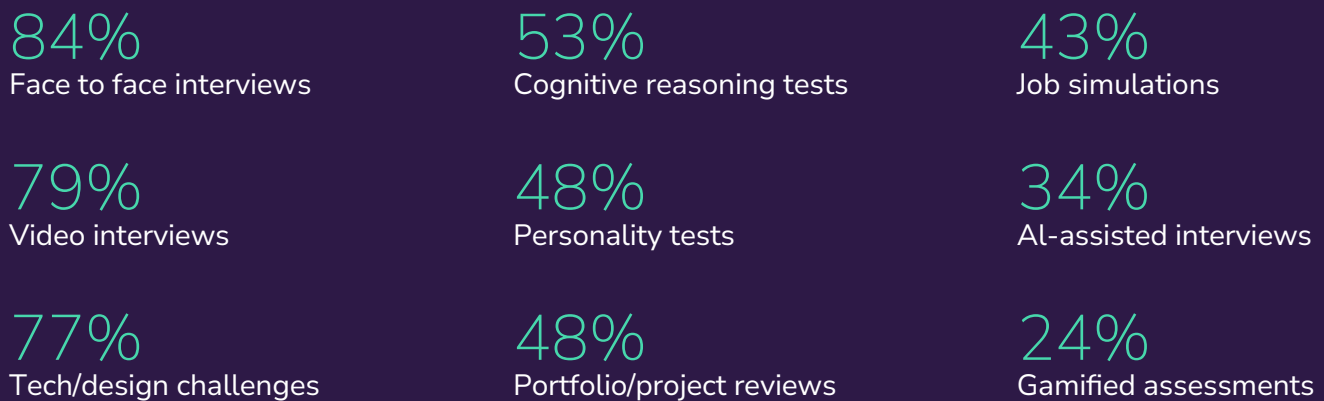
Figure 15: Rate of adoption of candidate hyper-personalization in early career programs

The changing face of assessment in early career hiring

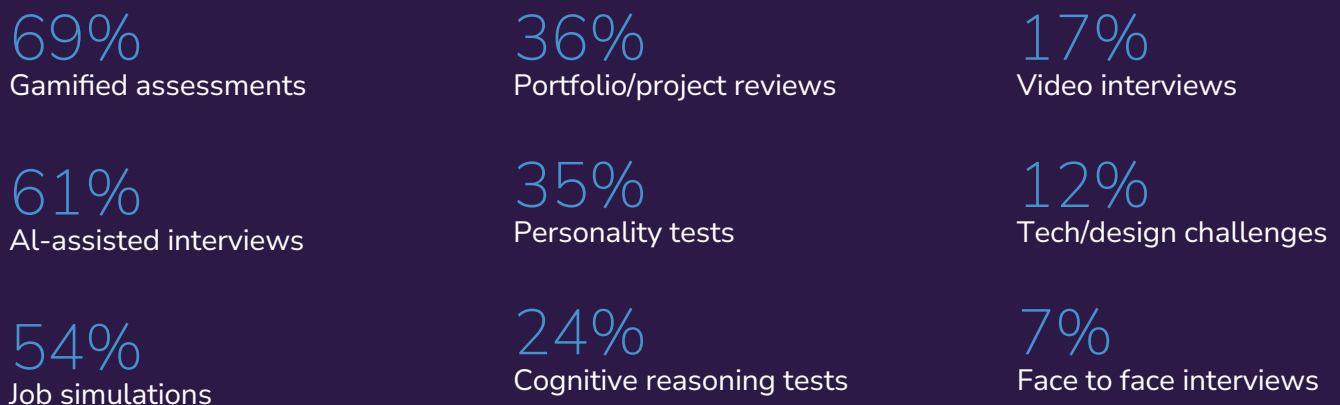
As discussed earlier, applications from young job seekers are rising. Organizations that recruit entry-level talent at scale are responding by rethinking the tools and techniques they use to screen candidates efficiently.

We asked TA executives which assessment approaches they use and which they plan to adopt by 2030. Their responses point to growing interest in new approaches that can manage higher application volumes and engage entry-level candidates fairly and responsibly.

Used today



Plan to adopt by 2030



Conclusion

Together, these findings show that early career hiring is becoming more precise, responsive and candidate centered. Skills-first hiring models, thoughtful AI adoption, always-on recruiting and hyper-personalized candidate experiences each address a different pressure point in the market and are correlated with stronger reported business outcomes.

The opportunity for employers is to bring these practices together in a coherent recruitment strategy, using technology to reinforce human judgment, transparency and trust. Integrated, data-led and engaging recruitment models can help distinguish pacesetters from those still relying on legacy approaches in an increasingly complex talent market.

Key takeaways

- **Skills-first hiring has entered the mainstream.** Most organizations now apply skills-based practices across their early career roles, although complete implementation remains less common.
- **Mature AI adoption shows the strongest differentiation.** Organizations that report using AI well in early career recruitment are more likely to exceed their financial targets, be viewed as an employer of choice and report high customer retention.
- **Always-on recruiting adds flexibility.** Year-round recruitment can help employers respond to off-cycle demand, emerging skill needs and new education pathways without weakening seasonal hiring programs.
- **Candidate experience is becoming more personalized.** Hyper-personalized journeys are gaining traction, especially among pacesetters, and are associated with stronger financial and innovation outcomes.
- **Integration is an advantage.** A coherent early career model connects skills-first hiring, responsible AI, always-on recruitment and personalized candidate experiences with human judgment, transparency and trust.

Part 5

Preparing for 2030 talent: Actions for talent leaders

Our research shows that early career talent and entry-level hiring are critical to the 2030 talent agenda, yet companies remain divided over how best to respond. Insights from thousands of students, young workers and future job seekers, together with the practices reported by pacesetter organizations, provide a solid foundation for action.

But preparing for the Gen Alpha workforce requires more than refreshing early career programs. It demands a strategic reset in how organizations define entry-level value, understand future job seekers, design work, assess skills and build trust. The actions below give executives a practical starting point for turning the report's findings into action and building an early career model for 2030.



1.

Make early careers a board-level workforce priority

Integrate early careers into strategic workforce planning and review it as an ongoing business discipline. With 81 percent of organizations planning to increase early career hiring over the next two years, executive teams need a clear view of how junior talent will support future capability needs as AI, automation, demographic change and the green transition reshape demand. HR, talent acquisition, finance and business leaders should work together to identify which roles will remain critical, which tasks will be automated or augmented and which capabilities should be built internally or acquired externally.

A practical first step is to create a quarterly early career dashboard for the board that tracks hiring demand, conversion, current and future skills gaps, graduate and apprenticeship mix, retention, candidate trust and productivity by business unit. Use each review to test whether hiring volumes, role designs and development investments remain aligned with changing business priorities.

2.

Build a Gen Alpha intelligence engine

Employers need a current, evidence-based view of emerging Gen Alpha expectations rather than relying on broad assumptions about younger workers. The data in this report shows meaningful variation by region, gender, education level and sector preference, including differences in confidence, willingness to relocate, pay expectations, work location preferences and interest in gig work. These differences should inform decisions at the market and candidate-segment level.

Build an intelligence engine that combines candidate surveys, application behavior, offer-decline reasons, social listening, school and

university partnerships and early attrition data with internal recruitment data and live labor-market signals. Use this intelligence as a feedback loop to identify where candidates disengage and adjust attraction, assessment, offer design and onboarding accordingly. For example, if candidates in North America place higher value on flexible hours while Latin American candidates emphasize health benefits, recruiting messages, offer design and onboarding support should reflect those priorities in each market.

3.

Redesign entry-level work before AI redesigns it for you

AI is already changing the work that has traditionally trained junior employees. Organizations should redesign entry-level roles deliberately now, before automation removes important learning experiences by default. For example, in recruiting, AI can already absorb interview scheduling, reminders, first-pass screening and candidate FAQs, which means junior recruiters need earlier training in candidate engagement, hiring-manager advisory, assessment calibration and trust-building.

The same patterns hold in finance, legal, healthcare, technology and operations: routine drafting, data gathering, note preparation, coding support and workflow monitoring are increasingly AI-assisted, while human value shifts to judgment, exception handling, relationship management and responsible oversight. Each function should audit entry-level roles by task; classify activities as candidates for automation, augmentation or protection as learning opportunities; and rewrite job descriptions, rotations and manager expectations accordingly.

4.

Turn skills-first from a slogan into an operating model

Skills-first hiring must go beyond removing degree or grade thresholds. It needs to become the operating logic for job design, assessment, development and mobility. This report shows that employers and future job seekers broadly agree on the importance of adaptability, communication, emotional intelligence and AI literacy but diverge on problem-solving, leadership potential and functional expertise.

Employers should translate each early career role into a small set of observable skills, then build structured assessments that test those skills through realistic work samples, AI-generated output review exercises, scenario-based judgment tasks and collaborative problem-solving. Once hired, graduates and apprentices should see that same skills language carried through onboarding, manager coaching, progression criteria and internal mobility pathways, so that skills-first becomes a practical talent system, not just a recruitment message.

5.

Build trust into every candidate interaction

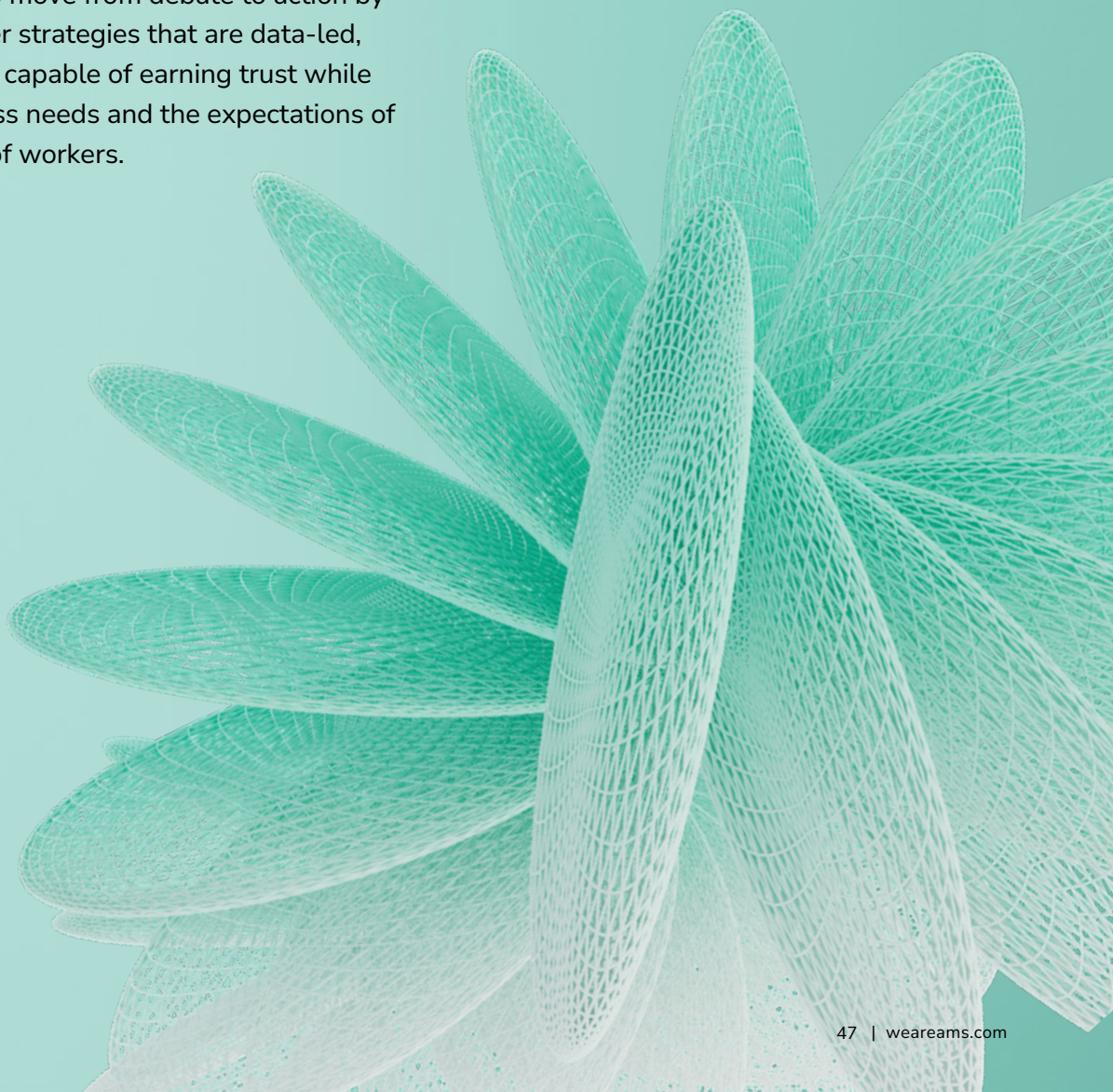
Trust should be built into the candidate journey with the same discipline as speed, cost and conversion. Our research shows that only 27 percent of job seekers trust employers to protect their data during the hiring process, and only 17 percent trust AI screening tools to assess them fairly. These low levels of trust present real risks for employers seeking early-career talent.

Employers should disclose where they use AI, explain what data they collect, give candidates accessible ways to ask questions or request accommodations and provide timely status updates so automation does not feel like a black box. Practical steps include publishing a candidate AI and data promise, training recruiters to explain assessment decisions, auditing selection outcomes for bias and creating human escalation points for candidates with fairness or accessibility concerns.

Closing

The arrival of Gen Alpha will not simply add another generation to the workforce; it will test whether organizations are ready to rethink how early career talent is understood, hired and developed in an AI-powered labor market. The evidence across this report shows that entry-level work is not disappearing, but the assumptions, processes and experiences that have traditionally supported it are no longer sufficient. Future job seekers bring confidence, pragmatism and valuable behavioral strengths, but they are entering a market defined by application inflation, skills volatility and fragile trust. Employers that continue to apply legacy models will struggle to compete for and develop this talent effectively.

The organizations best positioned for 2030 will be those that treat early careers as a strategic workforce priority rather than as a cyclical recruiting activity. The opportunity now is to move from debate to action by designing early career strategies that are data-led, human-centered and capable of earning trust while meeting both business needs and the expectations of the next generation of workers.



Methodology

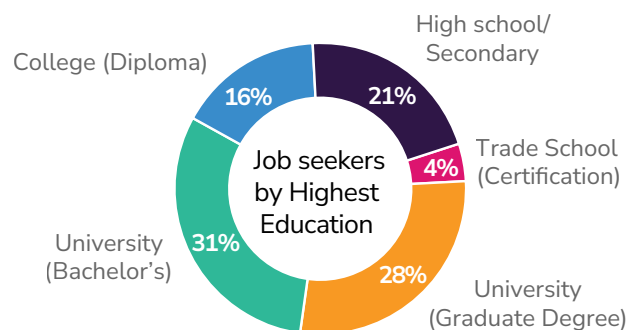
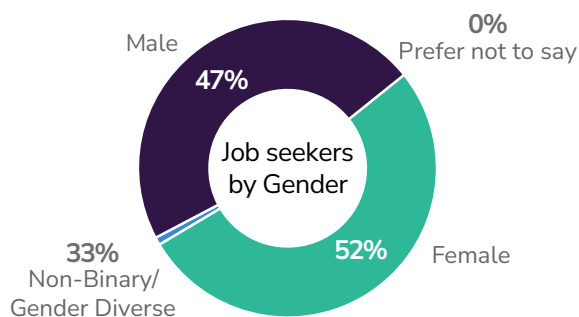
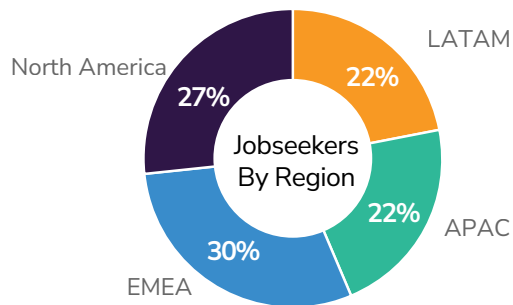
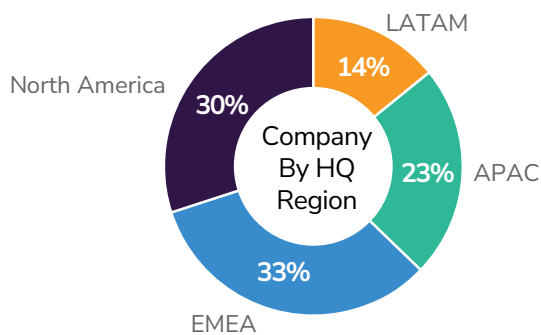
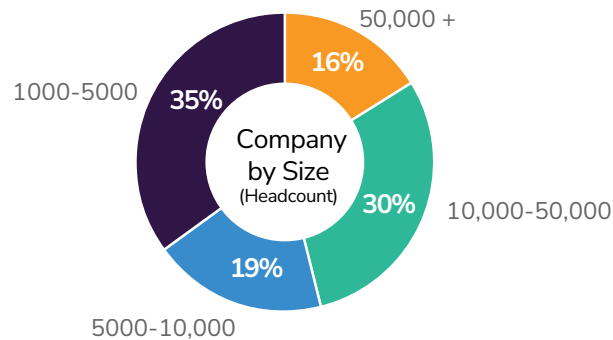
This report is based on a two-survey research program designed to compare the expectations of future workers with the priorities and practices of employers preparing for the workforce of 2030. The research draws on two primary quantitative surveys conducted in collaboration with Phronesis Partners. One surveyed employees and job seekers, including students and early career candidates, and the second surveyed CHROs, talent acquisition leaders and senior HR executives responsible for workforce and early career strategy. Together, these surveys provide a dual perspective on how future job seekers are approaching work and how organizations are redesigning entry-level hiring, skills strategies and early career programs in response to AI, talent scarcity and changing candidate expectations.

The employee and job seeker survey included more than 5,000 respondents across 13 countries. Respondents included current employees, active job seekers, students and early career workers, with analysis focused particularly on respondents ages 16 to 24 and on students or young job seekers preparing to enter the labor market. The survey explored confidence in finding work, willingness to relocate or pursue freelance and gig opportunities, preferences for pay, flexibility and work location, sector interests, self-reported skills, trust in employers and perceptions of AI in the hiring process. Results were analyzed globally and, where sample sizes allowed, by region, country, age group, gender, education level and employment status.

The employer survey included more than 500 CHROs, talent acquisition executives and senior HR leaders from organizations across 13 countries and 14 industries. Respondents were asked about their current and future early career hiring plans, use of graduate and apprenticeship pathways, adoption of skills-first hiring, AI in recruitment, always-on recruiting and candidate experience personalization. The survey also examined self-reported business outcomes, including financial performance, employer brand, customer retention and innovation, to identify practices associated with higher-performing organizations. Where relevant, the analysis compares the views of employers with those of job seekers to highlight alignment, mismatch and opportunity.

Survey data was supplemented by market analysis, publicly available research and examples from leading organizations to provide context for the findings and to illustrate how early career strategies are evolving in practice. Percentages in the report have been rounded to the nearest whole number unless otherwise stated. Comparisons are presented where they indicate notable differences by segment, region, sector or organizational maturity. The findings are intended to identify directional trends and practical implications for employers rather than to predict outcomes for any single company, market or demographic group.

Demographic data



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Susan Major is a leading voice in early careers and talent acquisition, bringing more than 30 years of experience helping organisations rethink how they attract, engage and develop emerging talent. As Global Managing Director of Early Careers and Campus at AMS, she brings deep industry expertise to the evolving relationship between employers and the next generation of talent. Her perspective bridges the needs of businesses with the ambitions of young people, offering valuable insight into how early careers must evolve to meet the demands of a changing world of work.



Janet Mertens is the Managing Director, AMS Research, and studies the intersection of work, technology and talent. Her current areas of study include the future of talent acquisition, the global skills shortage and the evolution of the employer-employee relationship in the age of AI. Janet has more than 25 years of experience advising organizations in strategy and management, human resources and leadership. She has worked with companies in multiple industries around the world, helping CHROs and their teams build flexible organizational structures and next-gen operating models. Before joining AMS, Janet led global talent research at the Josh Bersin Company and at IBM's Institute for Business Value, where she published landmark studies on skills, talent and technology. Her research has been cited in premier publications including Time, Forbes, Business Insider, Bloomberg and Fast Company.

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