

PUBLIC SECTOR AI ADOPTION: SOUTH AFRICA FACTSHEET

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This factsheet draws on findings from the Global AI Adoption Index for Public Services, based on a survey of 3,335 public sector workers across ten countries. This research included a sample of **367 public sector workers in South Africa**, comprising **192** from local or regional government entities, **154** from national government or national government entities.

The index measures how AI is experienced in practice. What is written in government strategies does not automatically translate into real-world impact. Approaches across countries are varied, the index helps explore these differences and make recommendations to improve AI use.

It brings together five indicators that shape real-world adoption: **Enthusiasm** for AI, **Education** and skills, **Empowerment** through clear permission and governance, **Enablement** via access to tools, and **Embedding** into everyday workflows. Together, these provide a practical snapshot of AI adoption in South Africa, set against international peers. Full results are available on the [main index webpage](#).

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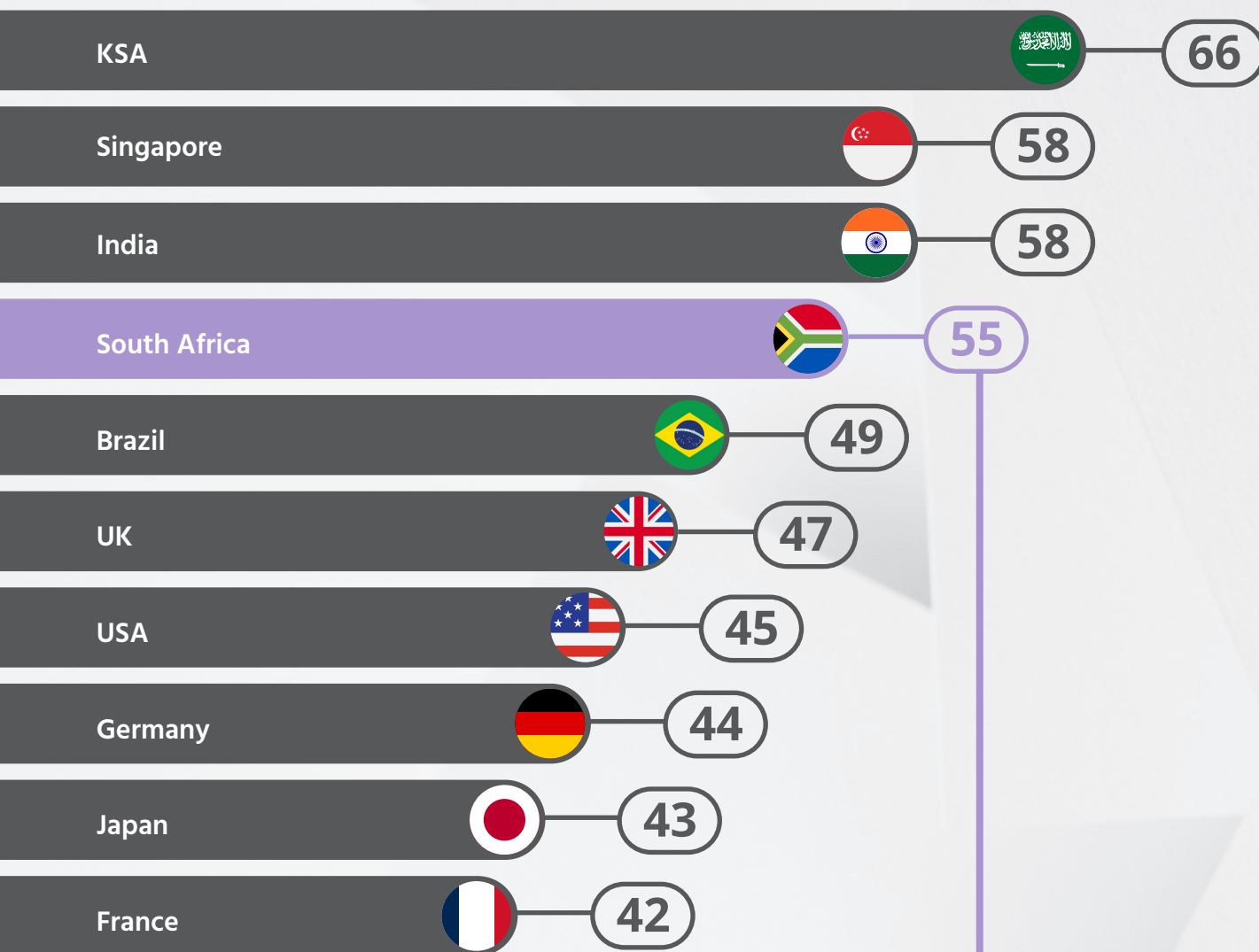
South Africa is at an important inflection point in its approach to artificial intelligence in the public sector. The government has increasingly framed AI as part of its wider Fourth Industrial Revolution agenda, with a focus on using technology to improve service delivery, strengthen state capacity and support inclusive growth.

In recent years, South Africa has moved from high-level strategy towards more concrete policy development. The establishment of a **National AI Policy Framework** and the creation of **dedicated institutions and research programmes** signal growing intent to apply AI across government, while positioning South Africa as a regional leader in responsible AI governance.

However, public sector AI adoption remains uneven. Currently, AI use is often driven by individual teams rather than embedded systems. The central challenge for South Africa is now to convert this momentum into consistent, well-governed deployment — ensuring public servants have access to the right tools, training and organisational support to use AI confidently and at scale.



SOUTH AFRICA IN THE GLOBAL INDEX



South Africa is at an important inflection point in its approach to AI in public services, with growing national ambition and strong early momentum. The next phase is about converting this recent uptake into consistent, well-governed use across government.

- Public servants in South Africa are broadly optimistic about AI's potential and adoption has accelerated rapidly in recent years. AI use is driven less by long-established institutional maturity and more by enthusiasm and experimentation, placing South Africa in the upper-middle tier of the global index.
- Access to tools and organisational support are relative strengths. **Just over half of public servants (52%)** say their organisation has **invested in AI tools**, and many report access to approved systems that support regular, practical use. A majority also report receiving some form of workplace training, putting South Africa ahead of many peer countries on education and enablement.
- However, adoption remains uneven and often team-led rather than embedded across organisations. While confidence and optimism are high — with **63%** of public servants saying they feel **optimistic** about AI in the public sector — governance, role-specific training and system integration are less consistent, limiting the ability to scale use reliably.

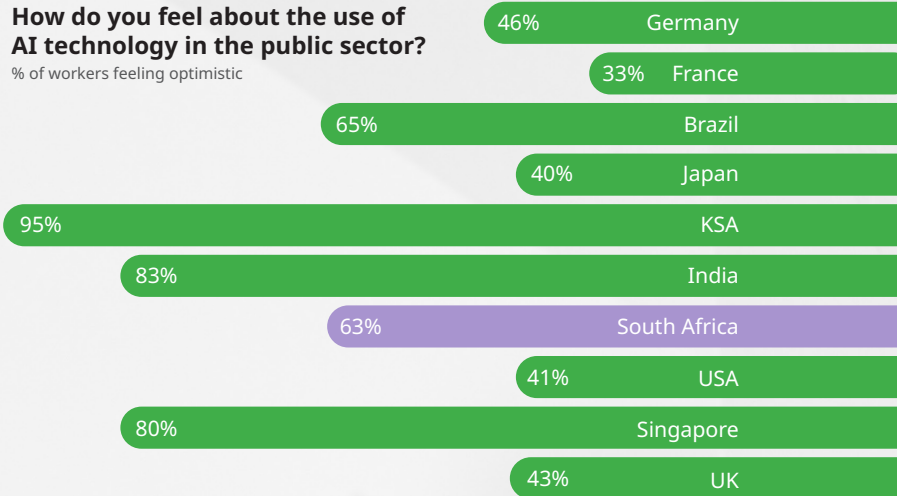
This creates a clear opportunity. With stronger standardisation around governance, more structured training and clearer organisational expectations, South Africa is well placed to turn high enthusiasm and access into secure, scalable AI use that strengthens public service delivery

WHAT OUR RESEARCH SHOWS

Our research indicates that South Africa sits in the upper-middle tier of the Index, with AI adoption in the public sector driven by optimism and rapid recent uptake rather than long-established institutional maturity. Public servants are broadly enthusiastic about AI's potential, with over 50% expecting it to significantly change how their job works and expressing a desire for AI to play a more transformative role in day-to-day work.

How do you feel about the use of AI technology in the public sector?

% of workers feeling optimistic



Empowerment and **Enablement** are relative strengths, supporting widespread engagement. **52%** of South African public servants say their organisation has **invested in AI tools**, well above most mid-tier peers. Access to approved tools is relatively broad, reducing reliance on personal workarounds and supporting regular, practical use. Many organisations encourage AI use, have formal policies or are in the process of developing AI policies, which supports experimentation.

A majority of public servants also report receiving some form of workplace training on AI, placing South Africa ahead of most countries. However, learning is often informal and self-directed, and peer-to-peer diffusion is less institutionalised than in the most mature markets.

Strong momentum and confidence in South Africa must be matched by standardised governance, training and embedding to deliver consistent, secure and scalable public sector impact.



Enthusiasm
63/100

Perceptions of AI are mixed, with recognition of potential benefits but limited enthusiasm or inconsistent experiences. Engagement exists but remains cautious, episodic, or uneven across roles.



Education
59/100

Training is available in some form, but it is often introductory, inconsistently delivered, or insufficiently tailored to specific roles and use cases, limiting its practical impact. Understanding is partial, with persistent gaps.



Empowerment
54/100

Emerging but not fully formalised governance around AI use, with expectations shaped by informal guidance or team-level practices rather than being codified or consistently applied across the organisation. This limits confidence in appropriate use across contexts and constrains adoption beyond basic tasks.



Enablement
49/100

Broad access to approved AI tools that are well matched to work requirements, supported by enterprise licences, integrated tools or platforms, and technical assistance. Organisational provision meets or exceeds personal-use capability, limiting the need for workarounds.



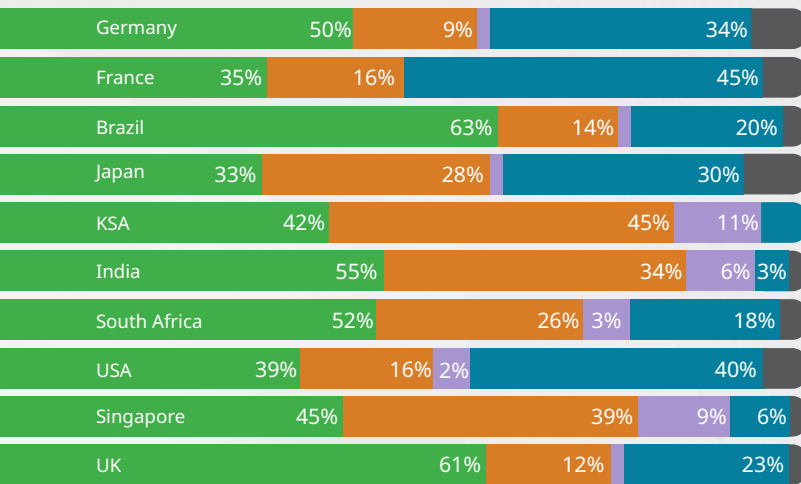
Embedding
50/100

Early or uneven institutionalisation, with some structures in place but limited consistency across teams or functions. AI use remains dependent on local initiative rather than systemic support.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF SOUTH AFRICA

When did you first start using AI tools at work?

● This year/within the last year
 ● 2-3 years ago
 ● 4 years ago or more
 ● N/A - I have never used AI tools
 ● Don't know



South Africa's public servants are primed for AI adoption, recording high levels of enthusiasm and empowerment. Unlike other countries recording high levels of AI maturity, South Africa's adoption is a more recent development, with **over half** of public workers saying they **only started using AI tools at work this year** and **one in five** saying they have **yet to use AI tools**, suggesting there is further potential to increase efficiencies as adoption continues.

What sets South Africa apart is a pronounced appetite for AI training. Despite already feeling that AI training is well-integrated into the workplace, public servants are eager to improve their AI capabilities and usage. They were by far the most likely to disagree with the sentiment that AI training they receive feels like a **tick-box exercise (37%)** and were the most likely to indicate that **training or upskilling support tailored to the public sector** would encourage them to use AI tools more frequently (**50%**). This is reflected in their higher education score.



What would encourage you to use these tools more frequently? Select all that apply

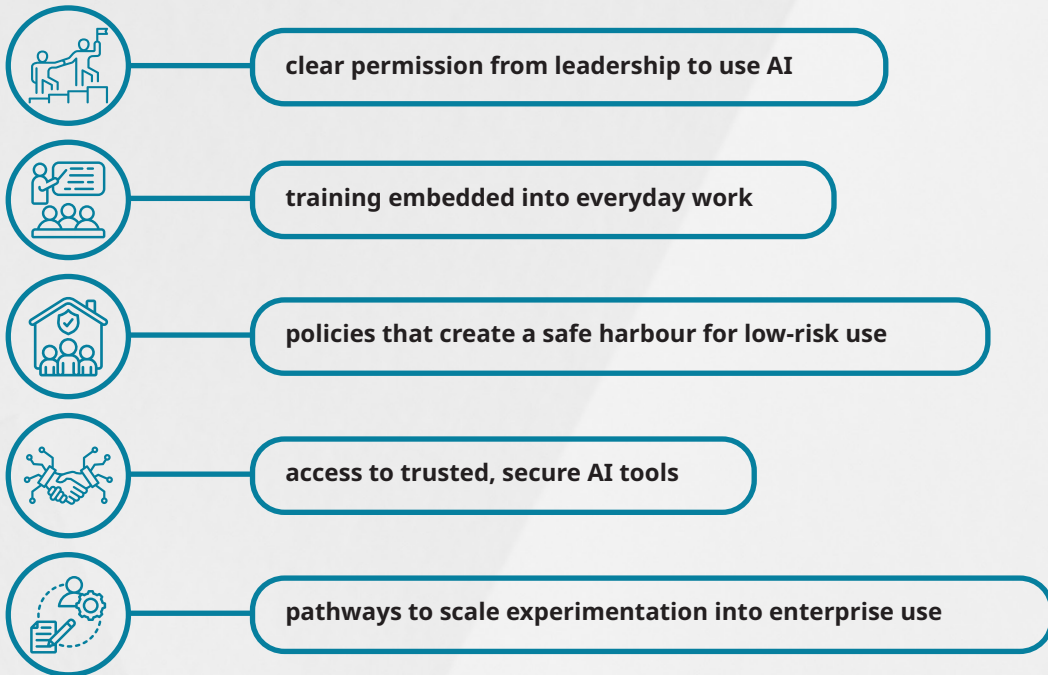
Enthusiasm is high in South Africa, 63% of South African public sector workers report feeling at least somewhat optimistic about the use of AI in the public sector. At the same time, South African public servants are among the least likely to expect AI-driven staff reductions (54%) and are less inclined to view AI as an equivalent collaborator to a human colleague.

Together, this points to a form of optimism grounded less in automation and substitution, and more in the belief that AI can be harnessed as a supportive tool rather than feared as a replacement. It also highlights a gap between public servants' ambitions for AI and their current ability to use it effectively, one that targeted training will be critical to closing.

Enablement is South Africa's **weakest area**, shaped by the **regulatory environment**. While data protection and digital governance are gaining attention, including through POPIA, guidance on practical AI use remains limited, leading many departments to default to caution where sensitive data is involved.

HOW TO ENHANCE AI USE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Our research points to five actions that consistently support stronger AI adoption across countries:



Together, these create the conditions for public servants to move from basic experimentation to confident use that can prepare the ground for significant public sector transformation.

WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR SOUTH AFRICA

For South Africa, the priority is to turn **strong momentum** into **consistent, embedded use** across the public sector. Enthusiasm is high and access to tools is comparatively strong, but adoption is still uneven and often driven by individual teams rather than organisational expectation. Three steps stand out:

1

Make AI part of everyday work through clear leadership signals

South Africa has an opportunity to drive the next wave of uptake by making expectations explicit. Clear directives from senior leaders that AI use is **encouraged** and increasingly **expected** as part of daily work would help **normalise adoption** and reach those who have not yet engaged. Reinforcing that AI is a supportive tool, aligned with public service values, will help move adoption beyond early adopters.

2

Formalise training and AI use policies to support confident use

While many public servants have received some AI training, learning is often informal and uneven. More structured, role-specific training paired with clear AI use policies that encourage responsible experimentation would help convert awareness into confidence. Formalising training and guidance will ensure AI use is safe, consistent and scalable across organisations.

3

Channel enthusiasm through sandboxes and routes to scale

High enthusiasm creates an opportunity to build a culture of learning and innovation. Creating governed sandboxes and clear pathways to scale successful use cases would allow experimentation to happen safely and visibly. With the right support, South Africa can turn individual initiative into shared learning and sustained, system-wide impact.