Unlocking the Potential of AI in Business Support Processes

A new report prepared for the Commission highlights key strategies to encourage AI adoption in business support processes among EU companies and unlock its potential for wider transformation.

StepUp StartUps consortium, 2025

Behind the scenes, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is quietly transforming the everyday processes that keep EU businesses running. A new report sheds light on how these less visible but crucial business support processes (BSPs) are increasingly being transformed by AI. The findings of this report fed the [Apply AI Strategy (https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/apply-ai)](https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/apply-ai) which aims at fostering the adoption and integration of AI in key industries and the public sector.

Companies rely on support processes such as human resources (HR), finance and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to perform their core activities and deliver value for customers. By adopting AI, they aim to increase efficiency and productivity, benefitting both employees and customers.

Several factors are accelerating this transformation, such as the emergence of AI agents that can execute complex tasks and adapt to evolving business needs. Customer service departments, for example, are using chatbots and virtual assistants to handle routine queries instantly, allowing staff to focus on higher-value, more complex issues.

AI Adoption in the EU

AI adoption is growing but remains modest. In 2024, just 13.5% of European enterprises reported using AI technologies, up from 8% in 2021. Larger companies lead the way, with 41.2% already using AI, compared to 21% of medium-sized firms and 11.2% of small ones. Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark are frontrunners, while uptake remains lowest in eastern Europe.

Support functions have emerged as a practical entry point for AI adoption. As AI solutions are increasingly integrated in software services that companies already use, SMEs can access solutions on a par with larger companies in areas such as finance and accounting. In marketing and sales, SMEs already report higher usage of AI than their larger counterparts.

Given they are less complex and easier to automate, and offer quick wins, business support processes provide companies with a smart testing ground for AI. They help organisations build trust in AI solutions and put in place the frameworks, skills and governance needed for wider AI use in core business areas.

Despite such potential, barriers persist. Businesses cite risks related to data accuracy, legal uncertainty and possible ethical, privacy and security concerns. Access to talent is also crucial for companies to understand and implement best use cases. Other obstacles raised include high implementation costs and internal resistance to change. Given these challenges, many European companies are hesitant to make long-term, potentially high-risk investments without a path to tangible business impact and value.

The Role of Startups and Investment

European startups are seizing opportunities in business services. With more than 20,000 companies active in enterprise services, there is a strong foundation for technological innovation. HR, accounting and customer relations management start-ups remain fewer in number. Among these companies, the share that use AI as a core solution is relatively limited. Most investment still flows into non-AI solutions, opening the opportunity to promote innovation in deeper, fundamental AI applications.

The report also highlights a funding gap. Compared to the US, EU AI startups in this space have secured far less investment: 5 times less for those in HR and accounting, and up to 8 times less in Customer Service. This imbalance risks leaving Europe dependent on foreign solutions, with implications for data security, sovereignty, and competitiveness. Strengthening Europe's own startup ecosystem is therefore critical.

Recommendations to Unlock the Full Potential of AI Adoption

To ensure Europe unlocks the full benefits of AI in business support, the report calls for action in several areas:

- **Improving the conditions for greater uptake** of AI in business support by giving companies relevant standards; scaled up access to sandboxes and insights on best practices.

- **Strengthen Europe's AI startup ecosystem** with a dedicated AI Startup Scale-up

Fund and AI Clusters in EU regions.

- **Provide targeted support to SMEs** for shaping AI strategies, developing skills, accessing innovation services and securing regulatory guidance.

Unlocking the full benefits of AI adoption in business support processes creates a foundation for broader transformation among EU companies. It can build the skills, governance, and trust needed to extend AI adoption into other aspects of the business and so drive a new wave of innovation across key EU industries.

Download the report below.