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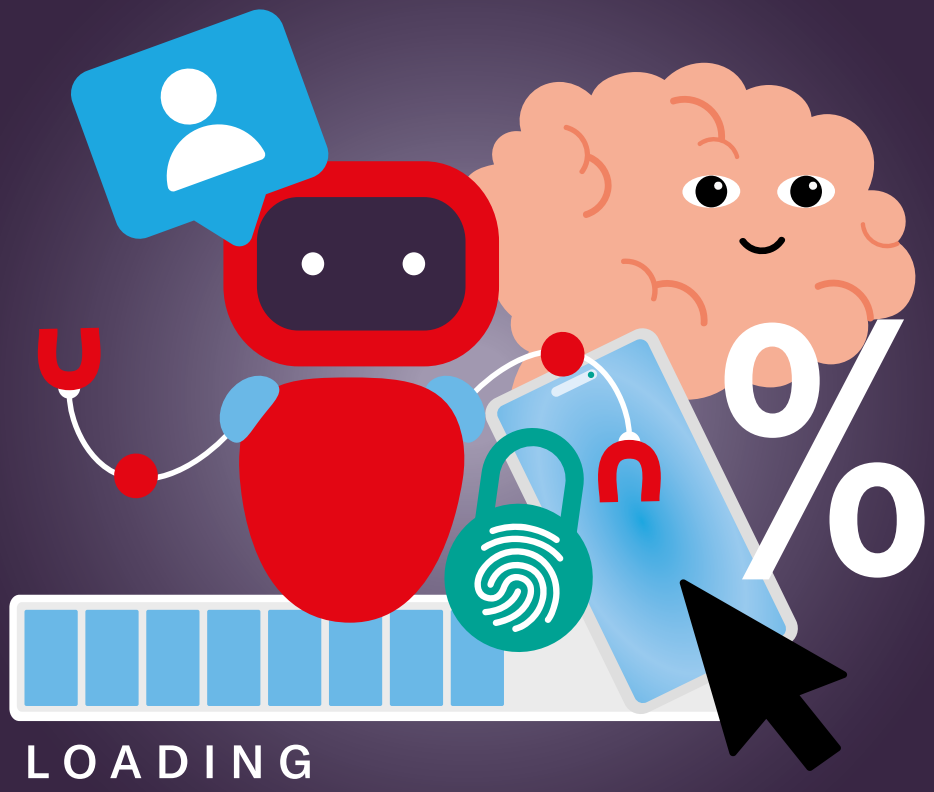
AI in public administrations

Focus report on artificial intelligence as part of the 2025 National eGovernment Study



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Introduction

Digital Public Services Switzerland coordinates the digitalisation activities of the Confederation, cantons and communes. Its implementation activities are based on the Digital Public Services Switzerland strategy for 2024-2027.

The National eGovernment Survey[1] is carried out every three years, with the aim of obtaining up-to-date insights into the use and availability of electronic public services. For the survey, members of the Swiss general public, the business community and public administrations are asked about the use and implementation of digital public services. In the 2025 edition of the National eGovernment Survey, an additional survey was conducted on the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI).

Initial fundamental findings on AI have already been published in the study:

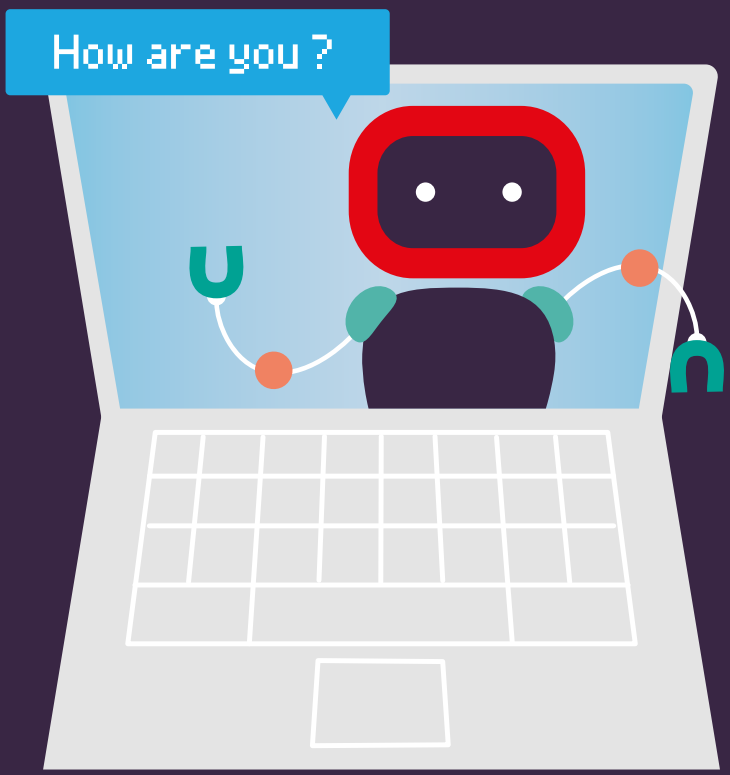
- **Low level of knowledge in all target groups**
  Respondents from the general public, businesses and public administrations assessed their own level of knowledge about AI as low.
- **Limited use of AI**
  In all areas, the use of AI is not very widespread. Two thirds of businesses do not use AI. Use of AI by public administrations is also low.
- **Increased efficiency**
  In both the business community and public administrations, AI is mainly used for internal applications. The aim is to save time and automate processes. In addition, businesses use AI in external service settings, to expand their service offering and improve their image.

In this focus report on AI, we look at the perception and assessment of AI among the general public, businesses and public administrations.

[1] Amberg, H.; Büchler, C.; Buess, M. (2025): National eGovernment Study 2025. The use and implementation of e-government services from the perspective of the general public, businesses and the public administration. DemoSCOPE AG and Interface Politikstudien Forschung Beratung AG, Adligenswil/Lucerne, see → www.digital-public-services-switzerland.ch/en/publications/studies/nationale-e-government-studie-2025, accessed on 16 June 2025

The following description of AI was used as an explanation in the original surveys:

Generative artificial intelligence (AI)
Generative artificial intelligence describes an area of artificial intelligence which focuses on content creation. The most well known of these are so-called large language models (LLM). LLMs include, for example, chatbots such as ChatGTP, Gemini or Midjourney, as well as translation or spellcheck assistants like DeepL or DeepL Write. The main difference between generative AI and earlier models is mainly in their area of application. Although an LLM is still aimed at predicting the next word in a sentence, this capability allows it to be used to hold conversations, rework texts, make database queries or even draw apparently logical conclusions. It is important to note that, despite observable cognitive capabilities, generative AI should be distinguished from artificial general intelligence (AGI). AGI is seen as having been achieved if a model generally exceeds human cognitive capabilities. Image editing programs such as Lensa or Adobe Firefly, which use AI, are regarded as generative AI. In the rest of this report, only the term AI is used for reasons of simplicity; it is intended to always denote generative AI.



Perception and assessment of AI

Below, the survey is used to illustrate how the general public, the business community and public administrations assess the regulation, traceability and transparency of the use of AI.

Regulation and data protection

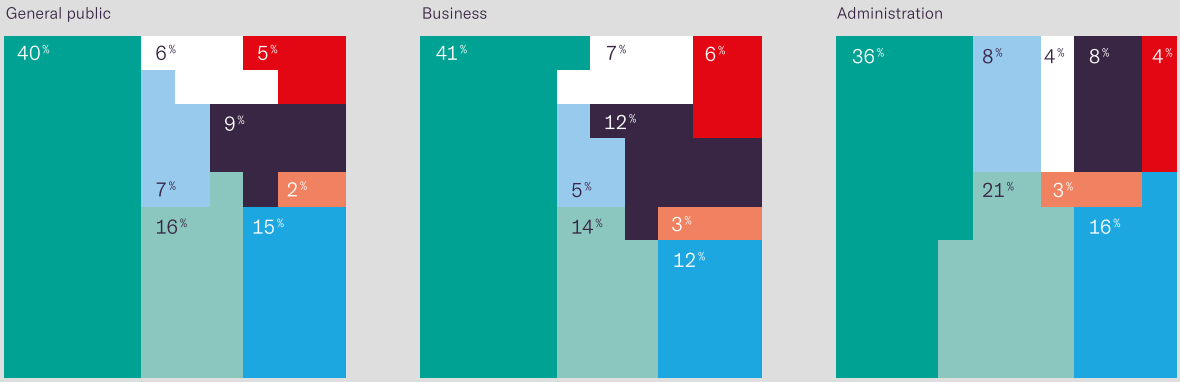
The authorities surveyed at all levels of government consider that regulating the development and use of AI applications and technologies is a task for the state. Seventy-three percent of public service units (tend to) agree with this statement, as did the general population (71 %) and businesses (67 %).

Moreover, 60% of all respondents think that, as regards the use of AI applications, stricter rules should apply to the authorities than to the business sector.

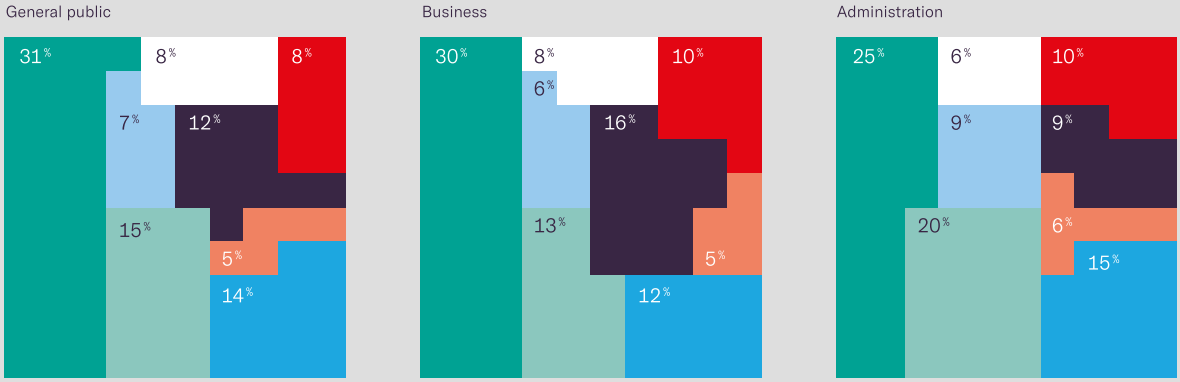
Around 62 % of those surveyed from the general population and the business community also have serious concerns about data protection in connection with the development and use of AI systems by the authorities. The surveyed authorities hardly share these concerns (34 %). Among public authorities, employees of the Confederation and cantons are much more sceptical than commune employees.

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the use of AI?

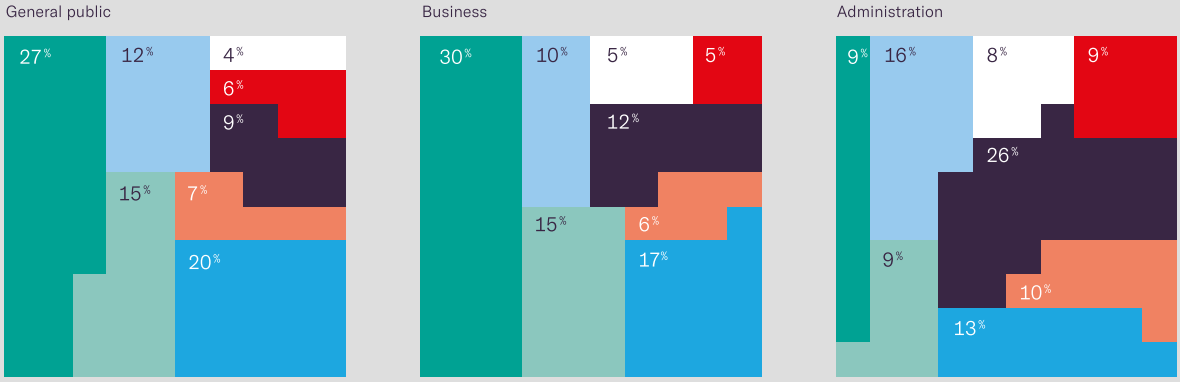
It is a mandatory government task to provide clear rules and regulations on the development and use of AI applications/technologies by authorities and businesses.



The use of AI applications/technologies by the authorities should be subject to stricter rules than the use of corresponding AI applications/ technologies by private companies.



I have significant concerns about data protection in connection with the development and use of AI systems by the authorities.



5 Fully agree | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 Do not agree at all | I cannot say | Do not know/no answer

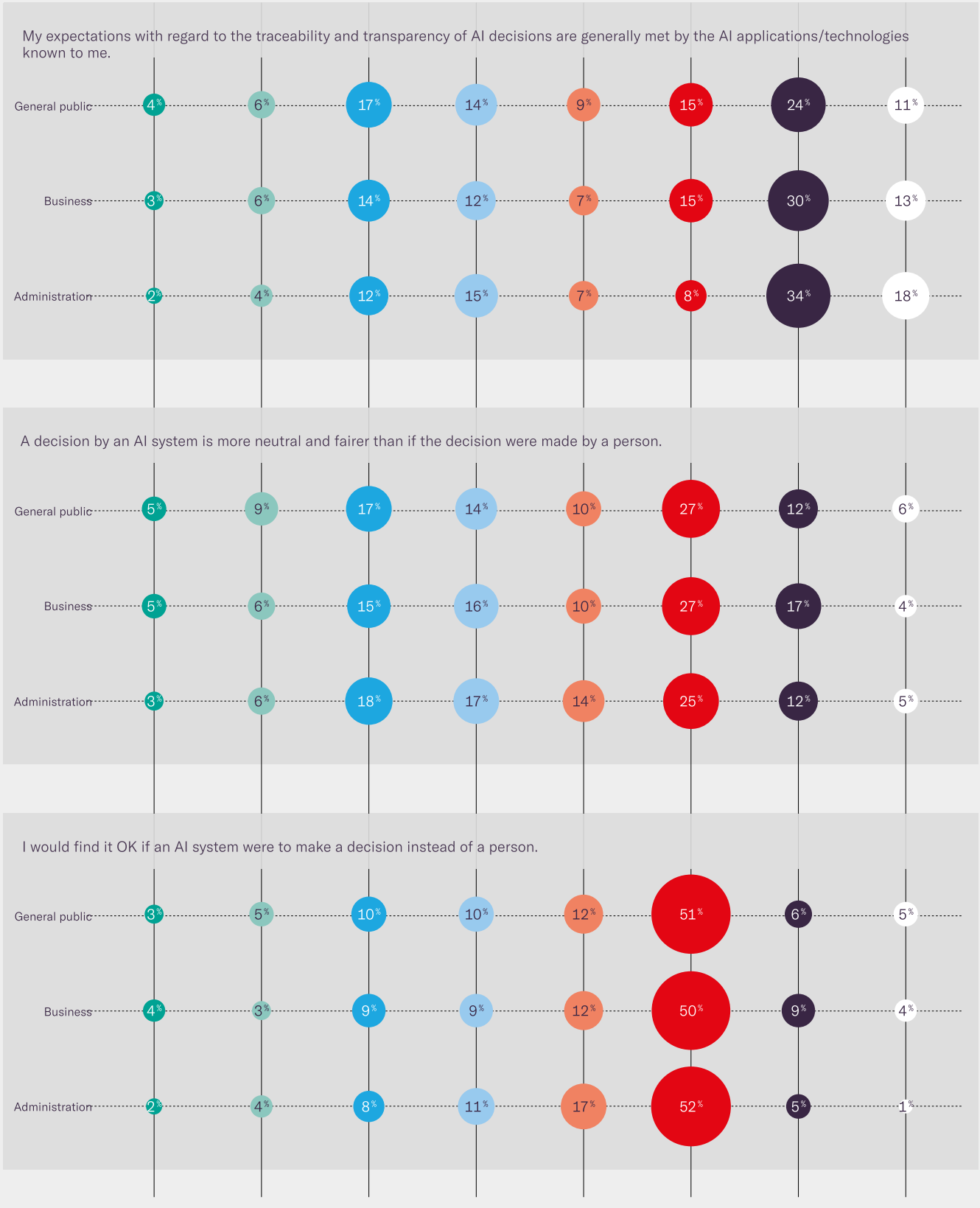
Key Based on all surveyed persons who use the internet (n = 2'106), all those surveyed in businesses (n = 1'415) and in public administrations (n = 1'492). Due to rounded figures, the percentages do not always add up to exactly 100%. Individual figures have therefore been slightly adjusted. The exact figures can be found at → onsurvey.demoscope.ch/WebProd/Resources/NEGOV25/Datensatz_Codebuch_egov25.zip.

Expectations on traceability and transparency of AI applications

Transparency, traceability and explicability of AI are prerequisites for trustworthy AI, according to the Confederation's guidelines for artificial intelligence.[2] Only 27 % of surveyed members of the public, 23 % of businesses and 18 % of administrations stated that expectations with regard to the traceability and transparency of decisions were met. Only a few respondents consider the decisions of an AI to be more neutral or fairer than those made by a person (public 31 %, business 26 %, administration 27 %). All respondents are even more sceptical about completely transferring public service decision-making from people to an AI system. This idea is rejected by all respondents (62 % to 69 %).

[2] Federal Council (2020): Guidelines for artificial intelligence. Framework for using artificial intelligence at the Federal Administration. Bern, p. 49 et seq.

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the transfer of decision-making to AI?



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Trust in AI and ethical questions

Besides expectations on the traceability and transparency of AI applications, the survey also asked about trust in the use of AI. In the view of the respondents, insufficient attention was paid to ethical questions when developing and using AI – around 50% of those surveyed in all target groups share this view.

The survey also showed that businesses are less trusting of public sector AI developments than the general public: 42% of citizens surveyed are more likely to trust an AI application if it is developed and used by the authorities (businesses: 36%). By contrast, around 40% of businesses and the members of the public surveyed stated that they have more trust in AI applications and technologies if they are developed or operated by private companies.

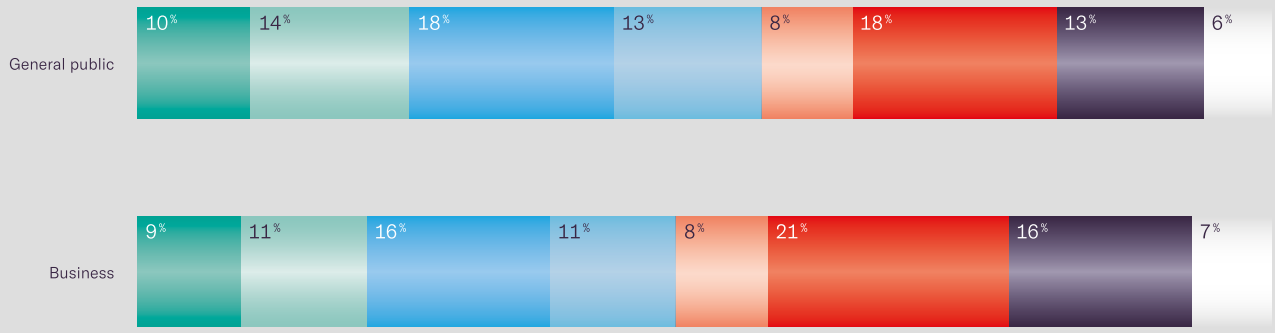
As already highlighted in the 2025 National eGovernment Study, with regard to the use of AI systems by the authorities, all target groups feel the need to be actively involved. The cantons and the Confederation already have mechanisms in place for this. More transparency could also strengthen trust in the systems and demonstrate the added value of AI applications.[3]

[3] Buess et al. 2025, p. 40.

3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding trust in AI?

To date, not enough attention has been paid to ethical questions in the development and use of AI applications by the authorities.

I have more trust in an AI application/technology developed/used by the authorities than I do in one developed/used by private companies.



5 Fully agree | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 Do not agree at all | I cannot say | Do not know/no answer

Key Based on all surveyed persons who use the internet (n = 2'106), all those surveyed in businesses (n = 1'415) and in public administrations (n = 1'492). Due to rounded figures, the percentages do not always add up to exactly 100 %. Individual figures have therefore been slightly adjusted. The exact figures can be found at → onsurvey.demoscope.ch/WebProd/Resources/NEGOV25/Datensatz_Codebuch_egov25.zip.

AI in public administrations

Below, we present the survey responses of public sector representatives from all administrative levels.

Training and knowledge exchange on AI in public administrations

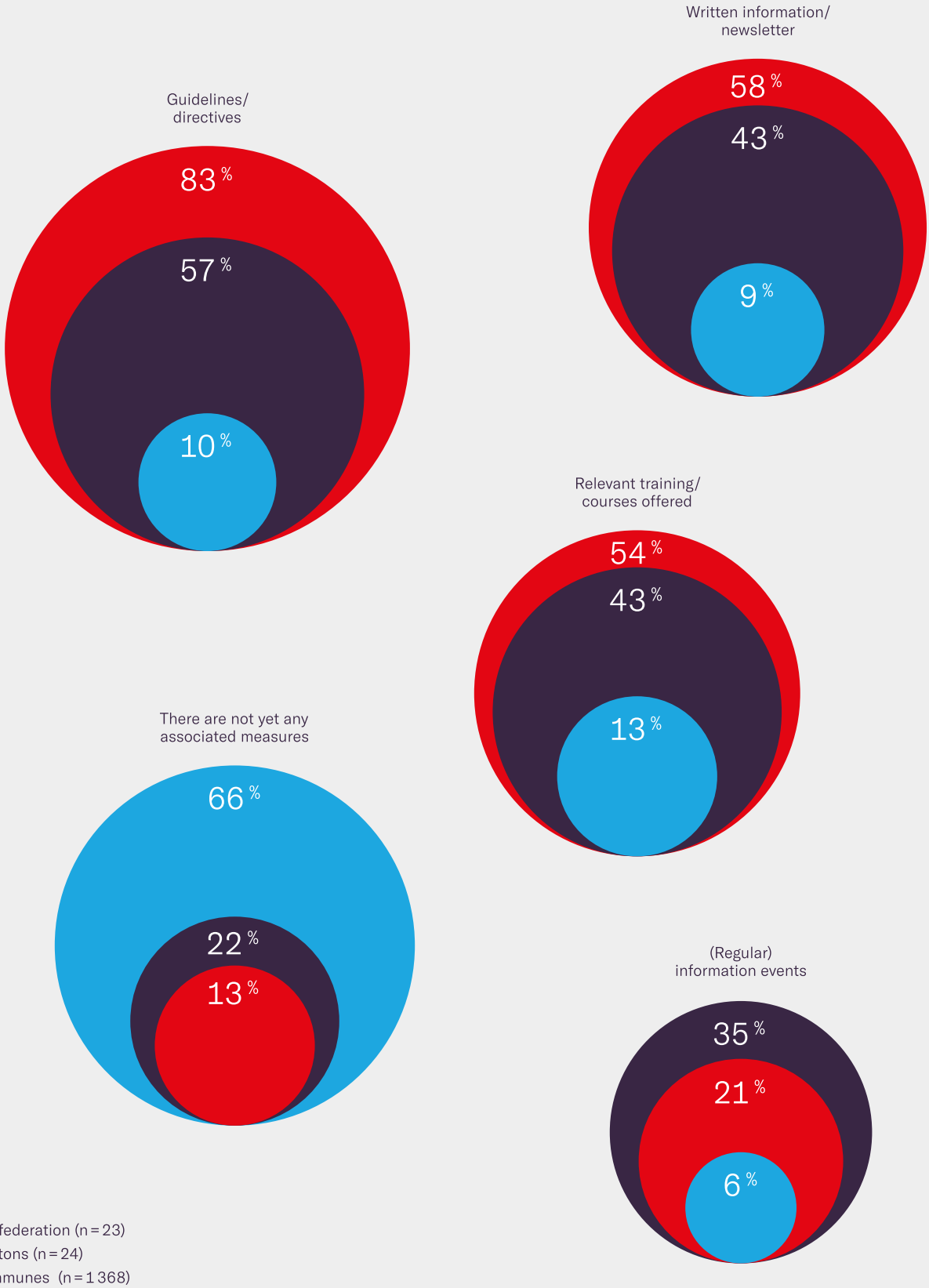
Based on the study results, the Confederation, cantons and communes have taken measures to varying degrees to provide public sector employees with information and training on the potential uses and impacts of AI. The cantons (87 %) and the Confederation (78 %) are actively engaged in training and information activities. Guidelines, directives and other written information or newsletters are the medium most often used. Courses and training seminars are also commonly used measures. Among the communes, there has been less engagement with this topic. However, communes that already have a range of training and knowledge exchange formats for AI also hold courses and training events often. Regular information events are mainly offered at federal level.

Administrative offices have various opportunities for exchanging insights on developing and using AI applications: 61 % of federal respondents and 62 % of cantonal respondents stated that, in principle, internal or external opportunities for knowledge exchange exist. Examples of internal public sector discussion groups can be found at the Confederation and at the cantons. For instance, the DPSS has set up a committee to coordinate and exchange information between the cantons and the Confederation: the Data Science & AI Committee. In a project between the cantons of St Gallen, Graubünden, Appenzell Innerrhoden, Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Thurgau and the Principality of Liechtenstein, the participants are conducting a joint evaluation of the potential of AI.[4] The cantons of Bern and Vaud each have interdepartmental working groups on AI.[5] In other, smaller cantons or communes, such institutionalised forums are less common. Around three quarters of municipal representatives stated that they did not know of any opportunities for knowledge exchange at municipal level.

[4] Canton of St Gallen (2025): Künstliche Intelligenz (KI), see → Ostschweiz und Liechtenstein prüfen KI in Verwaltung | sg.ch, accessed on 16 June 2025.

[5] Canton of Bern (2025): Künstliche Intelligenz (KI), see → www.sta.be.ch/de/start/themen/digitale-verwaltung/kuenstliche-intelligenz--ki-.html, accessed on 24 April 2025.
Canton of Vaud (2025): Künstliche Intelligenz (KI), see → www.vd.ch/actualites/actualite/news/25171-intelligence-artificielle-la-deleguee-au-numerique-publie-le-rapport-dun-groupe-de-travail-interdepartemental, accessed on 16 June 2025.

4. What measures have been taken by your authority to ensure that your colleagues are informed about and trained in the functioning and potential impacts of AI?



Key Number of people surveyed in brackets.

Obstacles to the use of AI in public administrations

According to the survey, the authorities face three major challenges when using AI. Across all administrative levels, a lack of staff resources poses the greatest challenge: for 65% of respondents from the Confederation, 75% of those from the cantons and 38% of those from communes, the lack of staff is the largest obstacle to the use of AI. The second-biggest hurdle is procurement: 48% of Confederation respondents, 50% of cantonal respondents and 25% of municipal respondents stated that complex and time-consuming procurement procedures presented difficulties.

The third most common problem is the lack of infrastructure such as insufficient processing power. This obstacle is often cited by federal (39%) and cantonal representatives (42%), while for communes (17%) this aspect plays a less prominent role. This could indicate that many communes are not (yet) at the stage where there is a specific need for technical infrastructure for AI or general strategies for the use of (generative) AI.[6]

Overall, the evaluation of the findings reveals that the use of AI in public administrations is mainly being held back by a lack of personnel and infrastructure as well as administrative hurdles. Finally, legal issues are also likely to be a deciding factor in the use of AI in administrations.[7] The differences between the administrative levels indicate varying degrees of maturity and pressure to act as regards AI.

According to the authorities surveyed, resistance or objections from the general public or the business community regarding the use of AI systems tend to be rare. Cantonal representatives reported most often (12%) that they faced objections when wishing to use AI. The Confederation and communes recorded few objections – however, both groups use AI less often than the cantons. It is striking that 40% to 60% of those surveyed did not mention objections. This could be because they have had little active contact with AI to date.

[6] Buess et al. 2025, p. 39 et seq.

[7] Binder, N.; Spielkamp, M.; Egli, C.; Freiburghaus, L.; Kunz, E.; Laukenmann, N.; Loi, M.; Mätzener, A.; Obrecht, L.; Wulf, J. (2021): Use of AI in public administration: legal and ethical questions (in German). Final report of 28 February 2021 on preliminary project IP6.4. University of Basel and AlgorithmWatch CH, Basel/Zurich, p. 21

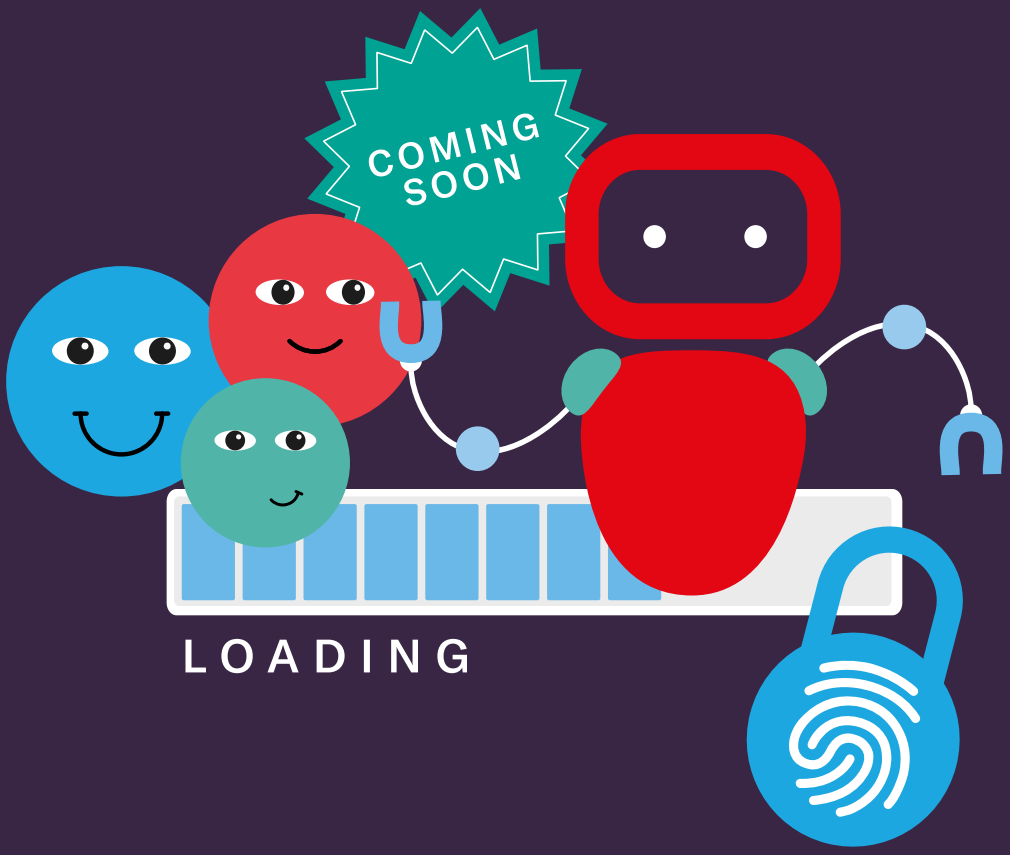
Conclusions and need for action

Based on the survey responses to the 2025 National eGovernment Study presented here, we can draw the following conclusions for public services and formulate the associated action points with regard to the use of AI:

- **Position the topic**
  Although a large number of those surveyed were unable to provide information on many of the questions about AI, the relevance of this topic appears to have been generally recognised by respondents from public administrations.[8] However, to date, the majority of administrations, businesses and the general public have made little or no use of AI solutions. A coordinated approach with strategic priorities is also currently lacking.
- **Establishing guidelines**
  Respondents from all three target groups considered the regulation of AI to be an essential task. There is a consensus that the rules for authorities should be stricter than those for businesses. Data protection concerns are high among the general public and the business community, whereas public administrations voiced fewer concerns overall.
- **Building trust and addressing ethical questions**
  The picture is more varied as regards the issue of trust: businesses tend to trust privately developed AI systems more, while the general public places greater faith in state-developed applications. All groups consider that too little attention has been paid to ethical questions.
- **Question decision-making**
  The majority of respondents' expectations regarding the traceability and transparency of AI systems have not yet been met. Equally, those surveyed were unable to formulate their expectations in this regard. At the same time, a decision made by an AI system is rarely viewed as fairer than one made by a person. Respondents reject the idea of completely handing over decision-making to AI.
- **Involvement of target groups**
  Those surveyed wished for there to be greater consultation about the use of AI in public administrations. Involvement of target groups is currently low, especially in areas where AI systems and applications are not very widespread.
- **Encourage training and knowledge exchange**
  To date, training and information measures, and the exchange of knowledge and experience on AI have mainly been introduced at federal and cantonal level. There has been significantly less activity on the part of the communes.
- **Strengthen implementation**
  The largest obstacle to the use of AI is a lack of staff resources, time-consuming procurement procedures and insufficient infrastructure. To date, there have been few objections from the target groups about the use of AI, which is probably also due to the limited proliferation of AI systems in practice. It can be assumed that questions of data protection or ethics are relevant obstacles to the greater use of AI by the authorities. These concerns are likely to become more pronounced as the use of AI increases.

[8] This situation must be borne in mind when interpreting the survey results

In summary, it is clear that the opportunities offered by AI are recognised. At the same time, however, the use of AI in public administration is still in its infancy. In public administrations, the business community and the general public, ambivalent perceptions, expectations and reservations about AI prevail. There is a need for regulation and rules for public administrations. Data protection concerns suggest that, in future, responsible and transparent communication of the framework conditions will bolster trust in the use of AI. To date, infrastructural and staff-related restrictions, and probably also legal uncertainty (linked to data protection), have hampered the widespread use of AI in public services.



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