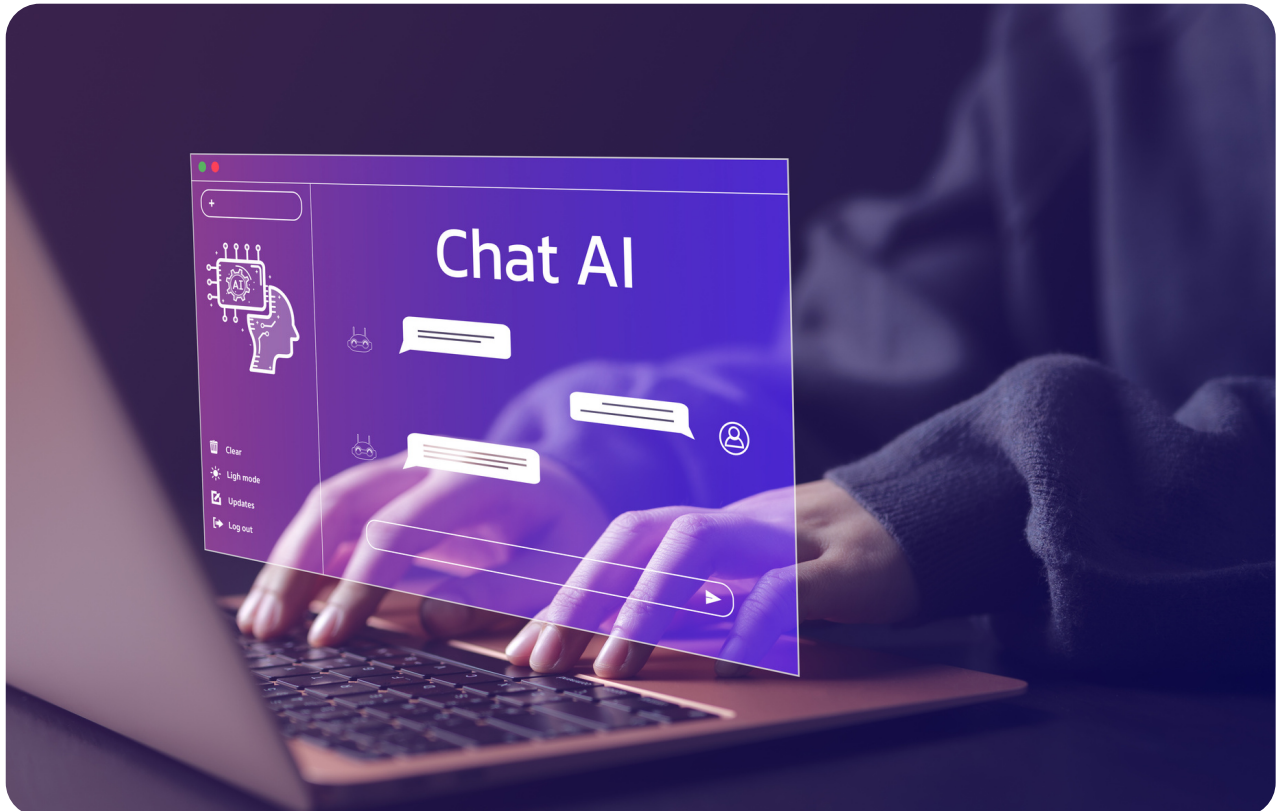




Bridging the **AI** skills gap:

How to leverage global visa and immigration services to future-proof the working world

Abstract



This whitepaper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the rapidly growing AI skills gap, and how global visa and immigration services can be leveraged to mitigate this skills shortage and future-proof the world of work. Due to the general move towards digitisation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, AI has become increasingly incorporated into the world of work. However, businesses are struggling to find workers adequately skilled in this area. By examining key details, factors, and examples and presenting innovative solutions, this document serves as an exploration of one of the most vital issues facing the global business world today.

Move towards digitalisation



The COVID 19 pandemic caused major upheaval in the world of work, with remote work becoming the norm and, as a result, accelerating the move towards digitisation across most industries. As the global marketplace slowly begins to recover from the effects of the pandemic, the specific impacts of such an unprecedented global setback are beginning to come to light. The skills gap amid the rise of AI, is one of such primary consequences. With direct influence on the current employment landscape, it continues to grow more rapidly than businesses are able to keep pace with.

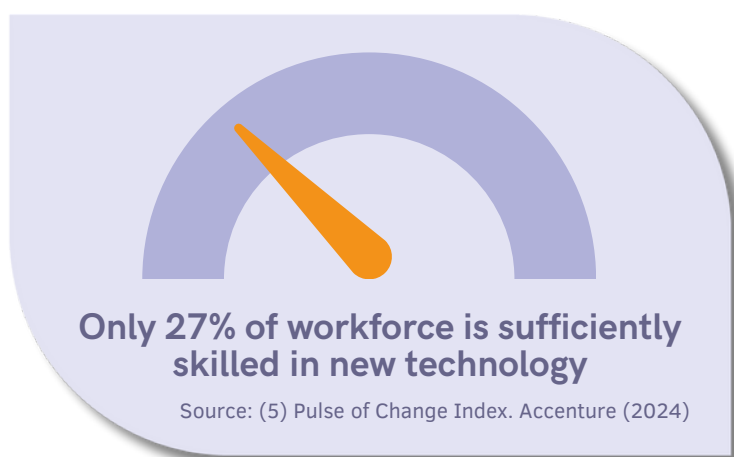
One of the primary consequences influencing the current employment landscape is the rise of AI and the resulting skills gap which has emerged and continues to grow more rapidly than businesses are able to keep pace with.

A paradoxical problem

In 2021, it was reported that 34% of UK organisations had increased their reliance on AI technologies since the pandemic. This was mainly in response to the increasing digitisation of work, due to the pandemic's necessitation of remote working.¹

Over two-thirds of business leaders view AI as crucial to the future of their businesses,² and 93% of organisations in the US and UK organisations view AI as a business priority and are developing organisational goals around it.³ AI continues to develop and spread throughout all areas of business, with CEO of AI company Anthropic, Dario Amodei, stating that "...the single most important thing to understand about AI is how fast it is moving".⁴ As a result, finding workers skilled in the area is posing a consistent challenge across all sectors.

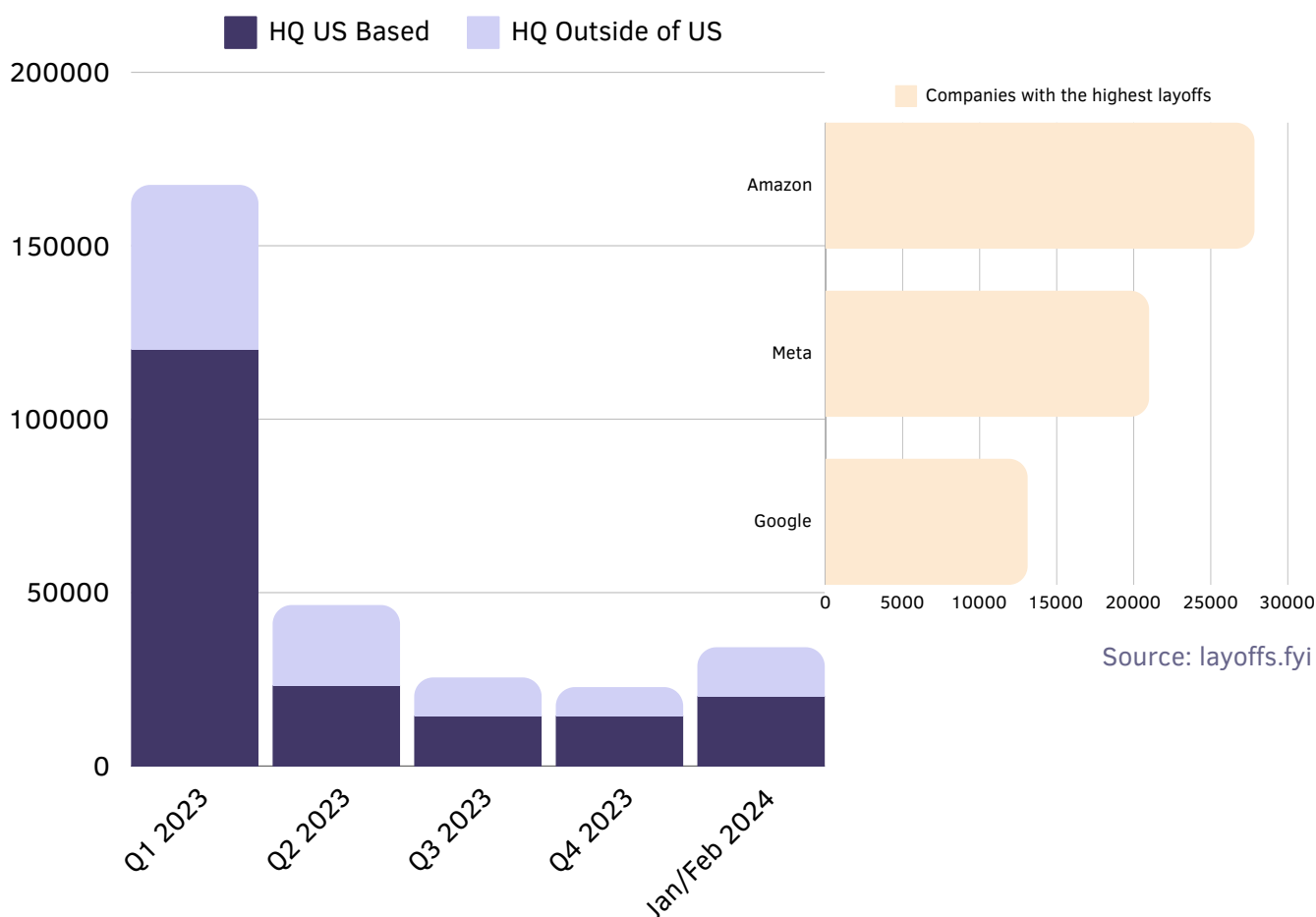
The current skills gap is so great that just 27% of business leaders are confident that their non-technical workforce is sufficiently skilled in using new technology,⁵ and an estimated 40% of the workforce will be compelled to reskill in the next coming three years as a result of the rise of AI.⁶ But only half of workers are seen to have access to adequate training opportunities today.



40% of the workforce compelled to reskill

Source: (6) World Economic Forum. (2023). Future of Jobs Report 2023

This situation presents an interesting paradox, when considering that the pervasive skills shortage is set against a backdrop of mass unemployment in the tech sector. A staggering 260,000 tech jobs were lost in 2023⁷ – with a further 50,000 layoffs occurring at the start of 2024, a significant jump of over 50% from the same time in 2023. With tech giants such as Apple, Amazon, Meta, Zoom, Microsoft, Salesforce, and PayPal among the organisations implementing these cuts,⁸ the current tech landscape is rife with uncertainty.



A key example of this paradox at work can be seen in the construction industry. Aside from the global AI skills shortage, there is also a general skills gap within the construction sector. With 35% of those working in construction aged 50 years and over, workers are ageing out of an industry which is rapidly losing popularity with younger generations and would need 937,000 new recruits over the next decades to solve the shortage.⁹

AI has been posited as a solution to this problem, as it can help to reduce the size of teams needed to accomplish tasks through automation and process streamlining, and optimising schedules and project planning.⁹ However, this comes with the further issue of a lack of workers skilled in the area of AI.

Leveraging global mobility

As the working world looks toward solving this increasingly intensifying issue, global visa and immigration services present a viable, long-term solution.



Global visa and immigration services support clients to comply with visa, immigration, and residency rules when working abroad. Availing of these services mean that organisations can benefit from in-country expertise, worldwide networks, and advice on the best immigration routes. Being able to rely on the service provider to carry out their corporate work permit, global visa, and residency applications, means the guarantee of quick and compliant transfers of new staff, visitors, existing employees, and their dependents.

Global mobility is crucial to building, maintaining, and growing international talent pools. A key example can be seen in pre- and post-Brexit Britain. In the lead up to Brexit, a report into the benefits of EU membership on UK science found that EU membership was important for the continued maintenance and improvement of the UK's environmental science sector. The report noted that easily transferring personnel to different countries was crucial for this and warned that leaving the EU could have a negative impact on the sector's talent pool.¹⁰ In the wake of Brexit, the environmental science sector, among many others, has seen a skill shortage – with demand outstripping supply, in part due to barriers to movement as a result of visa and immigration issues.¹¹

A report from the European Parliament further supports the argument that global mobility bolsters the international workforce and can address skills shortages. The report notes that between 2010 and 2018, total employment in the EU rose by 6%, while during the same period, the number of “intra-EU mobile citizens”, meaning EU citizens moving easily between EU nations, rose by 50%. The report concludes that “the increase in employment of mobile EU citizens contributed to the overall increase in employment by 25 %, a remarkable share.”¹²

By facilitating global mobility, global visa and immigration services have the power to bring local workforces into the future by addressing their limitations.

In an article for Mercer, Meier notes: “There are objectively not enough jobs of a certain level available in every single country. International assignments tend to increase the skillset of international employees and in some case accelerate promotion.”¹³

Allowing employees to work abroad with ease not only allows them to upskill by availing of local training and knowledge sharing, but can also be utilised to address AI skills gap by securing short-term work permits for workers skilled in AI, enabling them to work abroad; training local workforces in the relevant skills; and leaving behind an upskilled workforce, ready to leverage the new AI technologies which business leaders are eager to implement.

6%

Increase in employment throughout the EU

50%

Increase in “intra-EU mobile citizens”

Mobile EU citizens made up 25% of the overall increase in employment



Source: (12) European Parliament. (2019). The impact of the free movement of economically active citizens within the EU.

Focus on key sectors

Sectors such as telecommunications and construction could benefit hugely from upskilling programmes reliant on visa and immigration services, as these sectors generally involve short-term projects; wherein workers are seconded overseas for set periods of time. Both of these sectors are areas in which AI technology is fast becoming embedded.

Telecommunications is a sector in which the AI skills shortage is having a serious impact. The quick move to SDN/NFV in areas such as 5G and IoT requires a skillset that the average worker lacks – including knowledge of cloud, virtualization, Open RAN, big data, analytics, among other technologies.¹⁴

Infosys EVP and global head of communications, media and technology Anand Swaminathan notes that “The need to leverage these new age technologies and security considerations have gone up multi-fold. The traditional talent supply often does not have the appropriate level of base knowledge on both new wireless 5G and new age technologies at an appropriate level”.¹⁵

The telecommunications sector already frequently involves workers travelling overseas to work on projects and, therefore, global visa and immigration services area already heavily in use in this sector. As a result, it makes sense that these services should be employed to facilitate skilled workers travelling to regions, in which their skills are lacking, and training these workforces in AI technologies.

As previously noted, AI is seen as something of a solution to the construction industry’s skills shortage and is already firmly in use in the pre-construction project stages, as well in the areas of predictive maintenance, site safety, robotics, project management, quality control, and building.¹⁶

Supporting the secondment of workers skilled in this area to regions where there is a severe lack of knowledge around AI, would allow for these skills to be imparted to the local workforces – therefore, bridging the gap and simultaneously helping to solve both the overall and AI-related skills shortages.



Looking towards the future

AI technology is now in use across the spectrum of industry, growing at a pace that businesses and talent pools are struggling to match. Global visa and immigration services provide a potential long-term, effective global mobility solution to the issue – enabling businesses to quickly upskill their global workforces.

As AI continues to grow, the technology contributes to huge societal shifts such as the rise of ‘smart cities’ - places “where traditional networks and services are made more efficient with the use of digital solutions for the benefit of its inhabitants and business,”¹⁷ - as well as changes across all industry sectors. So, it is crucial for businesses to ensure their workforces are adequately skilled in order to thrive and excel in an increasingly digitised world.

Global visa and immigration services can serve as a vital tool to support the essential bridging of the AI skills gap, by supporting organisations to leverage global mobility as a means to share knowledge and upskill their workforces, thus helping to carry the global workforce into the future.

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