

Could AI create a new 'glass ceiling' in the workplace?

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) could reignite the gender divide in the workplace, with fewer women planning to upskill in AI than men, according to data from specialist recruitment company, Robert Half.

In the firm's Candidate Sentiment Survey, more than a third (38%) of men revealed plans to develop their AI knowledge this year, while just 27% of women intend to do so. With Robert Half's 2025 Salary Guide (<https://www.roberthalf.com/gb/en/insights/salary-guide>) also revealing that 72% of businesses are encouraging employees to explore generative AI for routine tasks, the recruitment specialist has warned that Artificial Intelligence could reverse gender parity progress, unless employers take action.

Matt Weston, Senior Managing Director UK & Ireland at Robert Half commented:

"Artificial Intelligence is often heralded as a great equaliser in the workplace — a transformative tool that holds the potential to break down traditional barriers to inclusion and upward mobility. In theory, AI can help level the playing field by enabling individuals, regardless of their educational background, socioeconomic status, or formal qualifications, to access knowledge, automate tasks, and enhance their productivity. For those from historically underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds, AI offers a chance to bridge longstanding gaps in opportunity, opening pathways to more skilled roles and career progression.

"However, the reality is more complex. While AI presents new opportunities, it also risks entrenching or even exacerbating existing inequalities if its adoption is not handled with care. Our data indicates that without deliberate, inclusive strategies, the benefits of AI may not be evenly distributed — and in some cases, progress in areas like gender equality could even be reversed.

"Employers are increasingly expecting their workforce to adopt AI tools as part of day-to-day operations. Yet, if this expectation is not supported by comprehensive, accessible training and a clear framework for responsible usage, it can lead to disparities in who benefits most from the technology. Early trends suggest that fewer women, in particular, are actively planning to upskill in AI. The reasons for this are likely multifaceted, including differences in access to time, confidence in technical environments, and wider cultural perceptions about who 'belongs' in tech-driven roles.

"If left unaddressed, this could pave the way for a new iteration of the 'glass ceiling' — one where digital fluency and AI competency become gatekeepers for progression, leaving many talented individuals behind.

"Ultimately, AI's impact on workplace inclusion will depend less on the technology itself and more on how we choose to implement it. Done right, it can be a catalyst for unprecedented opportunity. Done poorly, it risks reinforcing the very barriers we are trying to dismantle."

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