IESF · 26 COUNTRIES · 2026

AI across the global IESF network

Where every partner stands today, what is holding us back,
and what IESF can do about it

Stijn van de Groep

Every one of the 26 partners took part in this study

ABOUT ME

A short introduction

Stijn van de Groep

Tio Business School Amsterdam

1

Who I am

A fourth-year International Business Management student, graduating this year.

2

What brought me here

This study is my graduation research, carried out at IESF with Gertjan van de Groep and Wim de Kruijf.

3

Why this subject

Executive search runs on personal judgement. I wanted to find out where technology genuinely helps in that kind of work, and where it does not.

AGENDA

About this presentation

Fifteen minutes, four questions.

1	**Where does IESF stand today?**	What all 26 partners told us about the tools they use and where AI sits in their process.
2	**What is holding some members back?**	The one thing that scores lowest across the network — and what the front-runners do differently.
3	**What could and should IESF do about it?**	A proposal in three phases, built on what already works inside this room.
4	**What does it mean for you?**	Who owns this, and what we would ask of each partner.

Roughly fifteen minutes, then time for questions.

STARTING POINT

What we wanted to know

Nobody had a reliable picture of how AI is actually used inside the network — which tools, in which parts of the search process, and what stops partners from going further.

100%

response rate

All 26 partners completed the survey, one per country. This is the full network, not a sample.

7

partner interviews

UK, India, Chile, Spain, Denmark, Romania and the Netherlands, from front-runners to those just starting.

2

external experts

An AI lead at Berenschot and a recruitment-tech specialist, to test whether the picture holds outside IESF.

THE PICTURE

Where IESF stands today

88%

of partners

already use AI regularly or occasionally in daily work

70%

average maturity

AI has arrived across the network, but it has not settled in

24

different ATS systems

across 26 partners; only Bullhorn and Salesforce appear more than once

15%

have AI guidelines

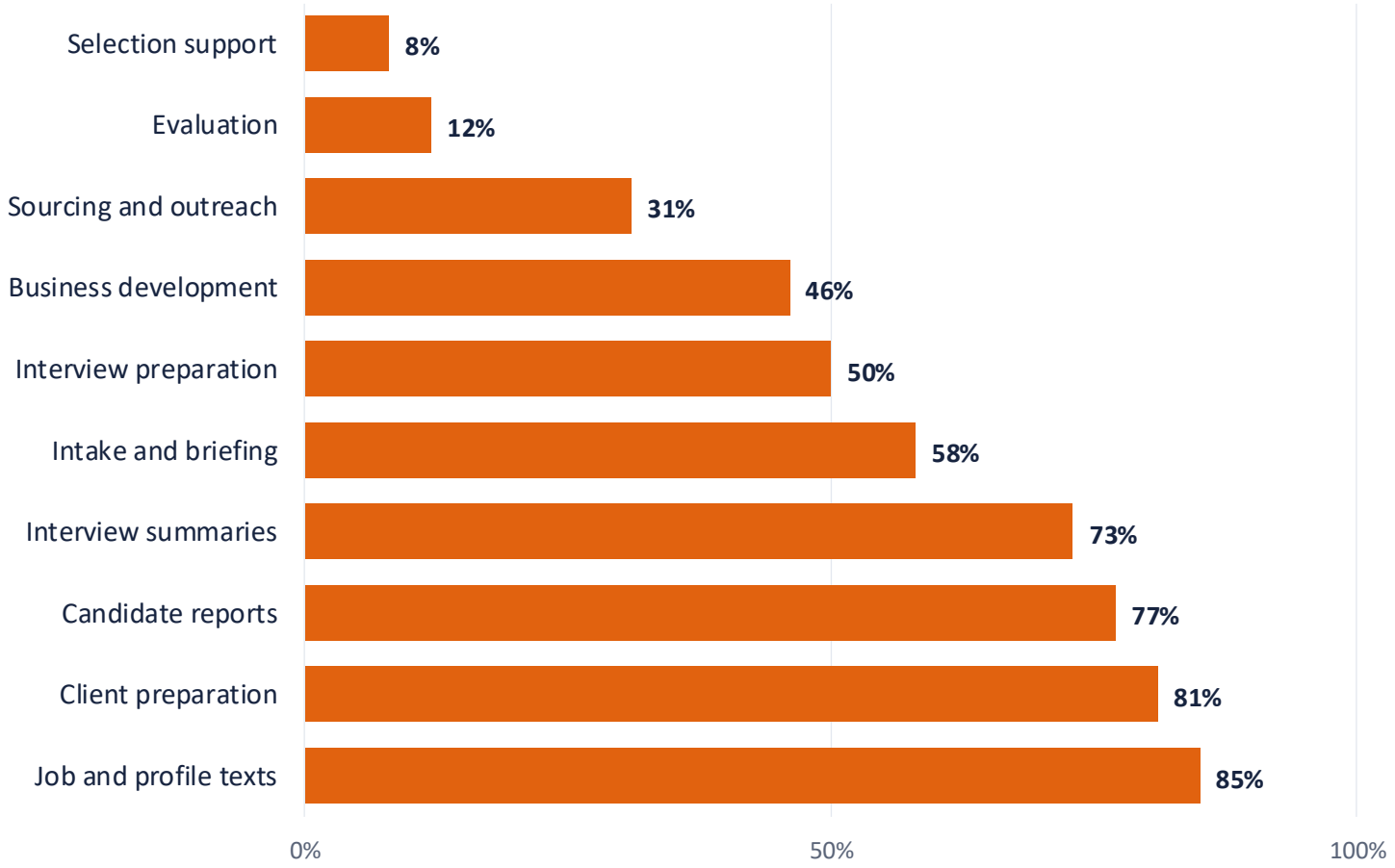
38% have none at all and 46% are still drafting them

THE COMMON THREAD

Most of us use AI alongside our existing systems rather than inside them: only 31% use AI built into their own ATS or CRM. The usage is there; the embedding is not.

WHERE WE USE IT

Where in your process AI is used most



Share of the 26 partners using AI in this step

Fully established

Everywhere text is produced or condensed: profiles, market research, reports and interview notes.

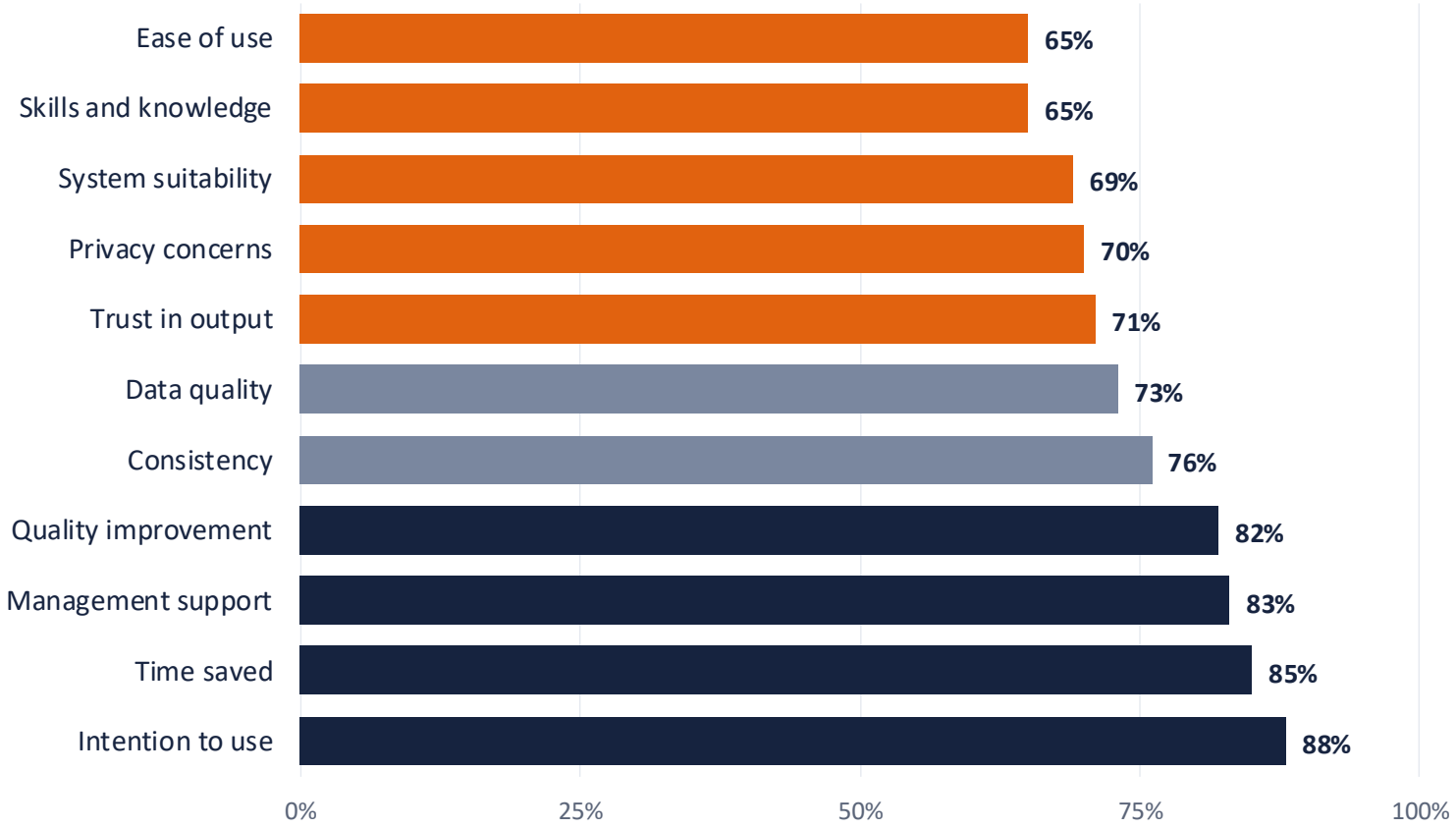
Deliberately held back

Sourcing, outreach and selection stay low. 85% of us say the final selection must remain human. Senior roles are sensitive and every assignment turns on a handful of candidates.

Cultural fit and the final match remain the consultant’s call.

WHAT HOLDS US BACK

The will is there; ease of use and know-how are the barriers



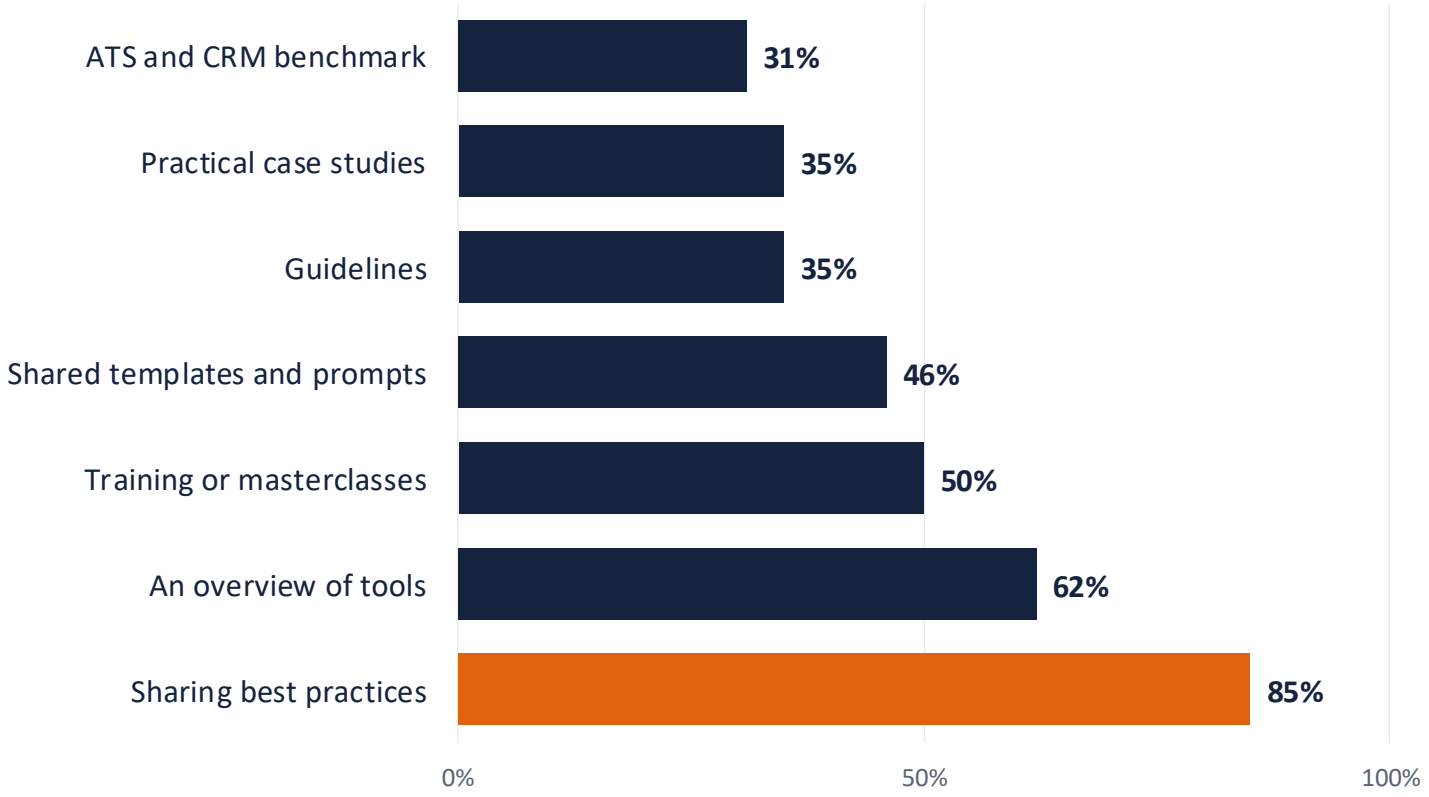
Average score across all 26 partners, shown as a percentage of the maximum score

WHAT THIS MEANS

- 92% intend to use AI more, and not one partner disagrees.
- The value is not in doubt — nobody disputes the time it saves.
- Ease of use scores lowest of everything measured; 62% sit on the fence.
- Lack of know-how is the most cited barrier, named by 58%.

SURVEY OUTCOME

What members ask and expect from IESF



Share of the 26 partners; up to three answers each

THE GOOD NEWS

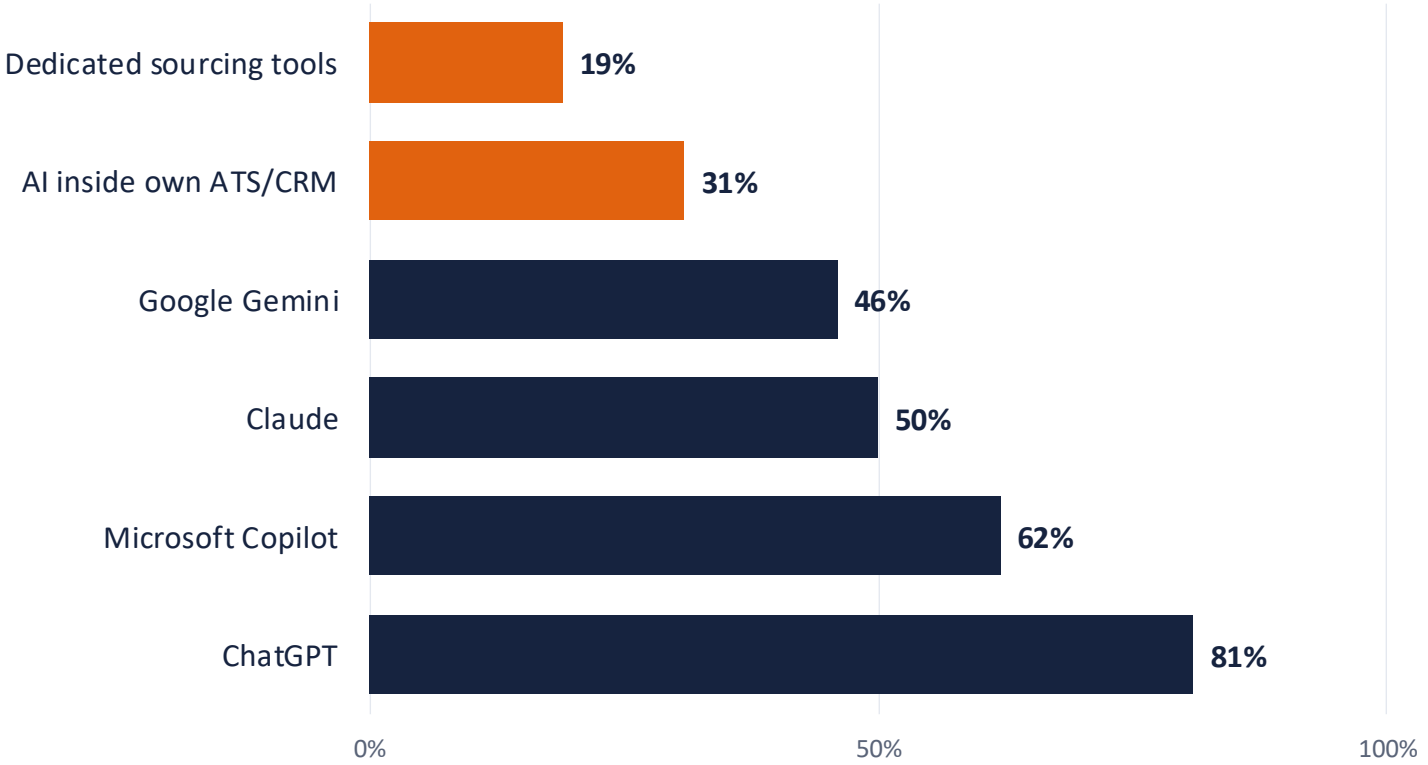
The answer was near-unanimous, and all seven interviews said the same thing.

The knowledge you are asking for already exists inside this network — in the Netherlands, Spain, Chile and Romania. It is simply not organised anywhere.

And because we are not competitors, there is nothing stopping us from sharing it.

OUR TOOLKIT

Which AI tools we use



Share of the 26 partners; multiple answers possible

THE PATTERN

Almost all of us rely on general, publicly available tools. Only 31% use AI built into their own ATS or CRM and 19% use dedicated sourcing tools.

The toolkit is nearly identical in every process step, which means AI has not been chosen per step but applied generically.

IN PRACTICE

What the network actually runs

Every tool below was named by partners in the survey or the interviews.

General AI assistants

- ChatGPT — 21 of us (81%), the most widely used by some distance.
- Microsoft Copilot — 16 (62%), usually because it already sits in the Microsoft licence.
- Claude — 13 (50%) and Google Gemini — 12 (46%), mostly used alongside the other two.
- Perplexity — 4 (15%), named for market and company research.
- LinkedIn AI features — 10 (38%).

Smaller support tools

- Transcription and meeting notes — 7 of us (27%), including HiDock, Wudpecker and Wispr Flow; HeyGen for AI video.
- Gamma — for building presentations.
- Bullhorn Amplify — AI inside the ATS itself.
- Gemini inside Google Workspace — used for drafting and searching email.
- One partner built its own AI cockpit on top of Claude.
- Dedicated sourcing tools — 5 (19%); AI inside their own ATS or CRM — 8 (31%).

Embedded AI by partners

- The Netherlands: Copilot integrated across Microsoft, plus Maya (Mysolution) inside Salesforce. Consultants build their own agents.
- Spain: an AI-supported CRM built in-house, with everything routed through a walled Copilot.
- Chile: Team Tailor as ATS and Pipedrive as CRM, with a weekly AI meeting driving internal tools.
- Romania: no CRM at all; works in Google Suite and tests new tools together every month.

The systems underneath: 24 different ATS systems across 26 partners; only Bullhorn and Salesforce (including Mysolution) appear more than once. Also named: Vincere, Loxo, Manatal, Zoho Recruit, Team Tailor, Altamira, Datacruit, Jarvi, Recman, Logic Melon, Deskflow, Hireify, Niloosoft, Starhunter, Galactica and Bubble. Four partners built their own system; one uses Google Sheets. CRMs named: Salesforce, HubSpot, Pipedrive and Voyager Infinity.

LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

Who is ahead — and what to learn from them

Three partners have already solved problems the rest of us are still facing. None of it needs a new system.

The Netherlands

Van de Groep & Olsthoorn

AI sits in almost every process step, with consultants building their own agents linked to Microsoft and Salesforce — plus a range of smaller support tools alongside.

For example: the Copilot course and workshops. They measurably widened use — including among senior consultants who had not touched it before.

Spain

Victor Carulla

Building an AI-supported CRM in-house, and keeping up through AI expert sessions and conferences.

For example: routing all work-related information through a walled Copilot environment. It settled the EU privacy question once, instead of case by case.

Chile

Cecilia Jiménez

A weekly AI meeting and a small innovation team, with AI use covered inside the existing ISO certification.

For example: the meeting rhythm. It cut report writing from about two hours to thirty minutes — the largest single time saving anyone reported.

And Romania shows the potential: earlier support from IESF already raised confidence and practical use inside the team, without any new software.

RECOMMENDATION

IESF as a knowledge-sharing platform

The willingness is there and the knowledge is in the room. We do not need a heavy programme to gain the first ground.

PHASE 1

Organise the sharing

Recurring online sessions where a partner shows how they work, recorded so other time zones can watch later. Plus a shared space for cases, prompts and templates.

Can start within months · mainly coordination time

PHASE 2

Targeted support

An AI basics module for consultants, a toolkit per process step built on what already works here, and a model AI policy each partner adapts to local law.

Largest expected impact · needs a budget

PHASE 3

System orientation

A benchmark of the ATS and CRM systems we use and shared experience on system choices — for partners already facing a replacement.

Runs in parallel · the choice stays yours

This is what you asked for: 85% named shared best practices as the most valuable support IESF could offer.

Training or masterclasses (50%) and shared templates and prompts (46%) came next; a systems benchmark was named by 31%.

THE ASK

This topic needs an owner and a taskforce

The strongest predictor in the entire study is not company size, budget or software choice. It is whether one person owns the AI topic.

Appoint a subject owner

One partner in the Leadership Council, appointed as subject owner:

- Holds the calendar and the rhythm of the sessions.
- Assigns one partner to own the content of each session.
- Keeps the shared library of cases, prompts and tools current.
- Reports progress to the Leadership Council each quarter.
- Leads the annual plan of speakers and webinars, and shares best practices across the network.

Advice to every partner: appoint one person in your own office who owns the AI topic.

NEXT STEPS

What does this mean for you?

1	**You are already further than you think**	88% of partners already use AI. The gap is not ambition; it is that partners hardly share what works.
2	**The quickest win is not a new system**	It is seeing a colleague's workflow. Chile, Spain, the Netherlands and Romania have solutions you can learn from and copy this quarter.
3	**Bring one case to the first session**	One thing that works for you, however small. If four partners each share one AI example, the first two or three sessions are already filled.

The full report, including the maturity level of every country, is available to all 26 partners.

Thank you

To all 26 partners who completed the survey, and to those who made time for an interview. A 100% response is rare — this picture exists because of you.

Questions?

Stijn van de Groep · IESF