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Ireland 2036: Realising the AI Opportunity

AI could transform Ireland's economy over the next decade, creating new opportunities for growth and changing how people work and businesses compete. How Ireland responds will help determine how widely the benefits are shared and how successfully the country navigates the disruption that comes with them.

Predicting how artificial intelligence will develop over the next decade is difficult. The pace of change and the emergence of increasingly autonomous and agentic systems mean that the economy of 2036 could be considerably different from today's.

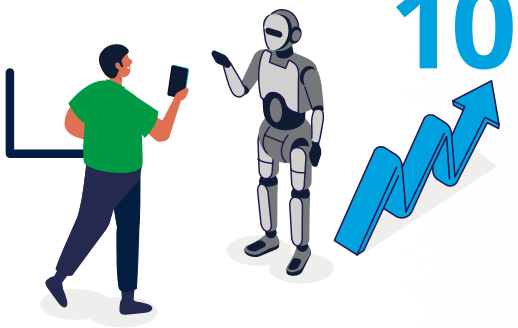
In one scenario, AI drives a substantial increase in productivity and competitiveness, creates new businesses and sources of growth for existing ones, and allows people to spend more of their time on higher-value work.

In another, businesses and workers unable to adapt are left behind, employment is disrupted, the benefits of AI are unevenly distributed and failures in the technology lead to harm, declining trust and increasingly complex regulation.

The scale of the economic opportunity is potentially significant.

IMF modelling published in 2026 estimated that AI-driven productivity gains could increase Ireland's real GDP by between.[1]

2.5% and **10.1%**



At the same time, the IMF warned that Ireland is relatively more exposed to the impact of AI than many other advanced economies because of its concentration in technology, financial services and other knowledge-intensive industries.

This combination of opportunity and exposure makes the choices the country makes over the coming decade particularly important.

Much will depend on how successfully people adapt as work changes; whether businesses use AI to create new sources of value; and whether trust keeps pace as increasingly powerful systems become embedded across the economy and society.

1. IMF modelling published in 2026

A different world of work

Ten years from now, organisations are likely to be operating with an agentic workforce alongside their human one.

AI agents will carry out activities that today sit within individual jobs and teams. Managers will increasingly need to decide how work is allocated across human and agentic workforces and how the two operate together.

Employees will have to understand when to rely on AI agents, when human intervention and judgement are required and how responsibility is shared as systems undertake more activity independently.

Jobs will change as that division of work evolves. Some existing roles may disappear, others will develop and entirely new responsibilities will emerge.

In the more positive scenario, AI augments human capability. Routine and administrative work is increasingly automated, giving people greater capacity for customer relationships, complex problem-solving, innovation and other higher-value activity.

AI may also make knowledge and expertise more accessible. Employees could acquire capabilities more quickly, allowing people earlier in their careers to undertake more complex work and creating new routes for progression.

There is a tension within that opportunity. Research, analysis, administration and first drafts have traditionally helped people develop expertise through experience and repetition. If AI increasingly performs this work, organisations will need to find other ways for people to develop the judgement and experience required for more senior roles.

The alternative is a labour market in which technology develops faster than people's ability to adapt. Significant numbers of workers could find that they no longer have the skills or mindset required to operate effectively in an AI-enabled economy.

Joint ESRI and Department of Finance research published in 2026 provided an indication of the potential disruption in Ireland. In one central scenario, it estimated that around 7% of current jobs could be displaced in the short to medium term. The research also stressed that such modelling cannot capture the new jobs and opportunities AI may create.

The benefits may be uneven during the transition. Productivity and wages could rise for workers whose roles are complemented by AI, while others face disruption or need to move into different roles and sectors.

The shape of Ireland's labour market in 2036 will depend in part on how successfully that transition is managed. Preparing people for it requires more than familiarity with today's AI tools. It requires the ability to keep learning, adapting and exercising judgement as both the technology and the nature of work change.

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2. AI use in Irish firms likely to lead to job losses - ESRI

A different competitive landscape

The businesses operating in Ireland in 2036 will face a very different competitive environment.

As AI becomes more widely available, access to the technology itself will provide less differentiation. The dividing line will increasingly be what businesses do with it.

AI-native companies will compete with established organisations carrying legacy systems, structures and processes. The cost of entering some markets could fall, while new products, services and business models are likely to be developed and tested considerably more quickly.

For established organisations, this creates pressure to rethink parts of their businesses that were designed for a different technological environment. Some will make that transition successfully. Others may survive in a substantially different form or fail to make it at all.

Organisations themselves could also look different

AI could shorten the time it takes employees to acquire knowledge, develop capabilities and undertake increasingly complex work. People earlier in their careers may be able to take on greater responsibility sooner, with implications for career progression, management structures and how organisations develop their future leaders.

How businesses use the capacity created by AI will also help shape the economic outcome.

Automation can release time currently spent on routine activity. That capacity can be redirected towards customers, innovation, growth and new products and services. Organisations can also choose to use productivity gains primarily to reduce labour requirements.

These choices, made across thousands of organisations, could have consequences for employment, incomes and the wider economy.

Ireland starts this transition with considerable ground still to cover. CSO figures show that around one in five Irish enterprises were using AI in 2025, rising to almost 58% among large enterprises. By 2036, the more important measure will be what this adoption has produced.

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58% **among large enterprises.**

By 2036, the more important measure will be what this adoption has produced.[3]

Has AI contributed to new economic activity and stronger businesses across the enterprise base, or have its benefits remained concentrated among a smaller group of organisations with the resources and capabilities to exploit it?

3. CSO figures show that around one in five Irish enterprises were using AI in 2025, rising to almost 58% among large enterprises.

Trust in a more autonomous world

Over the coming decade, AI will become more deeply embedded in organisations and increasingly capable of acting with greater autonomy. This raises a fundamental question: how do people maintain meaningful control as the technology becomes more powerful?

Organisations will need to determine where human intervention remains non-negotiable, how individuals retain the ability to challenge or override AI-generated outputs and where accountability sits as systems undertake more activity independently.

The principles underpinning trustworthy AI are likely to remain familiar: accountability, transparency, explainability, security, privacy and meaningful human oversight. Applying those principles to technology that continues to evolve will require governance to evolve with it.

In one future, trust, social impact and responsible design become routine considerations in how AI is developed and deployed. Regulation remains important, but the principles it seeks to protect are already embedded in the technology and the organisations using it. Regulators shift from firefighting to stewardship.

This environment could strengthen Ireland's competitive position. Trust can influence speed to market, customer and client relationships, talent and investment. The country has an opportunity to demonstrate that rapid technological innovation and high levels of trust can develop together.

The alternative is a future characterised by repeated failures and harm, followed by an increasingly complex regulatory response as authorities attempt to deal with problems after they emerge. Rules continually lag behind capability and trust is gradually eroded.

People could remain formally accountable for decisions while becoming increasingly passive in practice, accepting AI-generated recommendations without the ability or confidence to challenge them. Unequal levels of AI literacy could compound those risks, leaving some people considerably better equipped than others to navigate an AI-enabled world.

For Ireland, the direction is clear: an economy capable of moving at the pace of AI while maintaining the trust required for people and businesses to embrace it.

The economic choice

The difference between these versions of 2036 could be substantial.

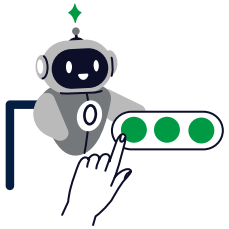
AI offers the prospect of a significant productivity dividend, stronger competitiveness and new sources of economic activity. The same transition could create significant disruption.

How those gains are distributed will be as important as their scale. If productivity increases while employment remains resilient, the benefits could extend to household incomes and the public finances. More substantial displacement would create a very different outcome.

Reskilling, retraining and redeployment will therefore form an important part of how the transition is managed.

There is no predetermined version of 2036.

Ireland has many of the foundations required to succeed - talent, technology, international investment, indigenous enterprise, research capability and an increasingly developed policy and regulatory framework.



The decisions being made now will determine much more than how quickly the country adopts AI. They will influence how people work alongside it, how businesses compete and grow, how the economic gains are shared and how much confidence people have in increasingly autonomous technology.Collectively, they will determine how much of Ireland's AI opportunity is ultimately realised.

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