HOW DO GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES FEEL ABOUT GENERATIVE AI ?

Generative AI (GenAI) is increasingly finding its way into almost all areas of society, including within the government. Its easy access and ease of use gives any government employee, regardless of expertise, the ability to use generative AI for their work. Although GenAI can be used for various tasks (automating tasks, summarising information, etc.), it also requires a critical and responsible approach. In addition to high-performance regulation, it is important that government employees have the right skills, as the use of GenAI can have a direct impact on citizens.

In this brAInfood, we discuss how government employees use GenAI in their work, the systems they deploy, and how skilled government employees feel in using this technology.

This study was carried out by the Knowledge Centre Data & Society in collaboration with Digital Flanders and VVSG, led by imec-MICT-UGent. Would you like to learn more about GenAI within Flemish and local governments? Read the **recently published report** in which we surveyed 576 employees of local and Flemish authorities about their use of GenAI.

FROM WORK TO LEISURE: CHATGPT AS A DIGITAL PARTNER

GenAI has become a **prominent part of the daily lives** of government employees, both at work and in their free time. Although they use these systems in both contexts, they do so slightly more for work (53.1%) than in their free time, where 38.3% of the respondents use these systems at least weekly. ChatGPT and Copilot, based on OpenAI's models, dominate in both contexts. Despite its frequent use, it is striking that there is still a **fairly large group that does not (yet) use GenAI**. In the work context, government employees indicate that this is mainly due to a **lack of skills or knowledge** to use the technology effectively. In a leisure context, they see **no direct benefits** of it.

GENERATIVE AI: USEFUL, BUT NOT PERFECT

GenAI is often seen as a **valuable assistant or 'sparring partner'** in the work process, for example, by checking language errors or summarising texts. In particular, the ability to summarise information, combined with the time savings that generative AI offers, is perceived as very beneficial. At the same time, the use of this technology also comes with its **challenges**. About 8 in 10 see it as disadvantageous that generative AI does not always give the right or desired result. The high energy consumption of generative AI (46.8%) and the use of potentially copyrighted data (46.5%) are considered slightly less disadvantageous.

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SKILLED IN USE, BUT TECHNICAL BACKGROUND REMAINS A BLACK BOX

The use of generative AI entails **various risks,** such as bias in the output, generation of incorrect information (hallucinations) and the spread of misinformation. This is especially worrying in a government context, where decisions and processes can potentially have a direct impact on the lives of citizens and mistakes can therefore have serious social consequences. For this reason, it is important to use generative AI responsibly and critically, which requires specific skills and a certain degree of **'AI literacy'**. We can distinguish generative AI literacy by **five skills**:

1. **Communication skill** (e.g., "I can ask appropriate and goal-oriented questions to generative AI")
2. **Critical skill** (e.g., "I can identify errors in generative AI's responses")
3. **Ethical skill** (e.g., "I can handle sensitive information such as personal data responsibly when using generative AI")
4. **Creative skill** (e.g., "I can use generative AI to generate new ideas or solutions")
5. **Technical skill** (bv. 'I can understand how generative AI works)

Government employees consider themselves the **most skilled or "literate" at communicating with GenAI**. They can use GenAI in a targeted way to generate 'useful' answers. They also assess their **critical skills** similarly, which implies that they feel quite skilled at assessing and evaluating the output generated by generative AI. In contrast, they assess their **technical skills** to a significantly more limited extent: they know how to use GenAI but understand less of the technical background and operation of these systems. So it is important that governments focus future **training or education on strengthening 'technical AI knowledge'**, while less emphasis needs to be placed on communication or critical skills.

NOW WHAT? THE WAY FORWARD

Based on the results, we formulate some concrete recommendations or tools for governments in the further implementation of generative AI below:

1. TARGETED SUPPORT FOR NON-USERS
While many government employees are already working with generative AI, it's important to **also draw attention to the non-users**. It is therefore important to:
- Identify the underlying reasons for 'non-use' (e.g., through a survey or interviews)
- Develop an inclusive AI strategy that also pays specific attention to this group

2. TAILORED AI LITERACY
AI literacy needs **to be approached in a contextual wa**y. Not everyone needs to have the same skills. It may therefore be interesting to:
- To map out which AI skills are needed per role/function and department
- Develop training or education tailored to different groups

3. TAILOR SUPPORT TO NEEDS
The willingness to use generative AI within a work context depends mainly on the belief that it will improve work performance. Although government employees generally experience generative AI as user-friendly and feel little social pressure from colleagues, managers or the organisation to use it, they do indicate a **need for extra support and resources**. It is therefore valuable to:
- Provide concrete examples from their own work environment
- Establish clear guidelines that clarify the use of GenAI
- Organise basic training on the use of GenAI