

Reflecting Business



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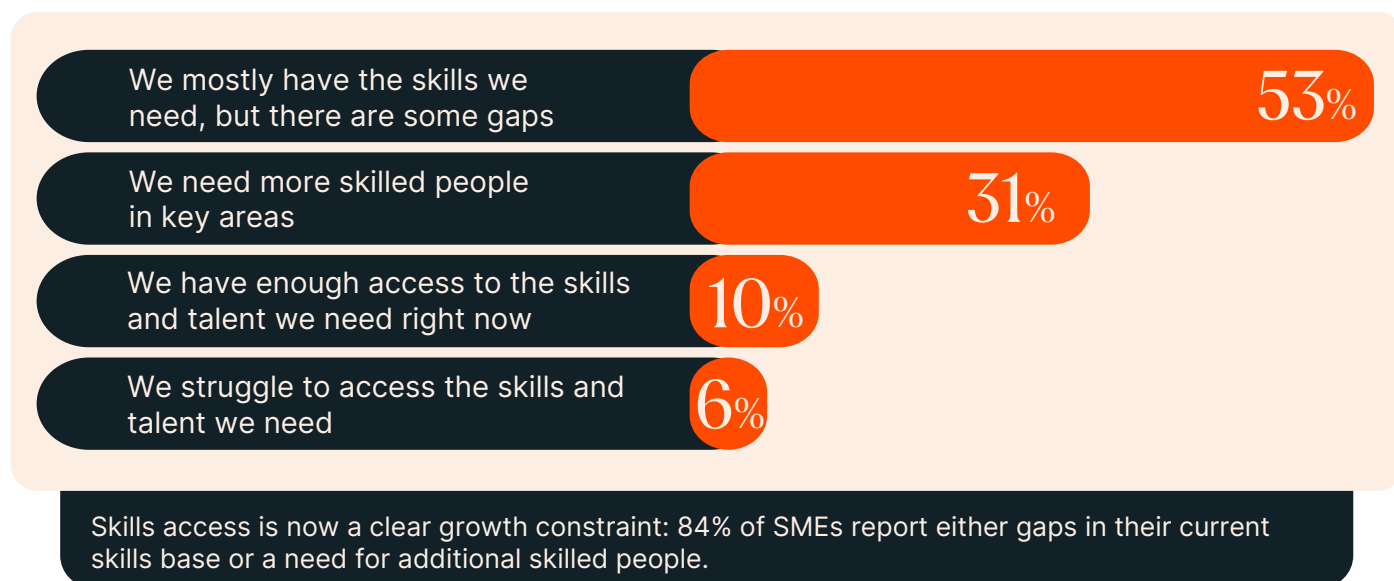
Introduction

Confidence remains strong among Irish SMEs, with many focused on growth and future investment, but the findings show that growth will increasingly depend on access to people, skills and technology. While rising costs and inflation remain the most immediate pressures, talent is becoming one of the defining constraints on business ambition. Only one in ten SMEs say they currently have all the skills and talent they need, while more than eight in ten report either skills gaps or a need for additional skilled people. Against this backdrop, immigration is viewed as an important positive contributor to business growth, helping to expand the workforce, bridge skills gaps and bring greater diversity. At the same time, businesses are broadly positive about AI, seeing opportunities to improve speed, efficiency and productivity, even though adoption remains relatively cautious and concerns remain around human connection, accuracy, data privacy and training.

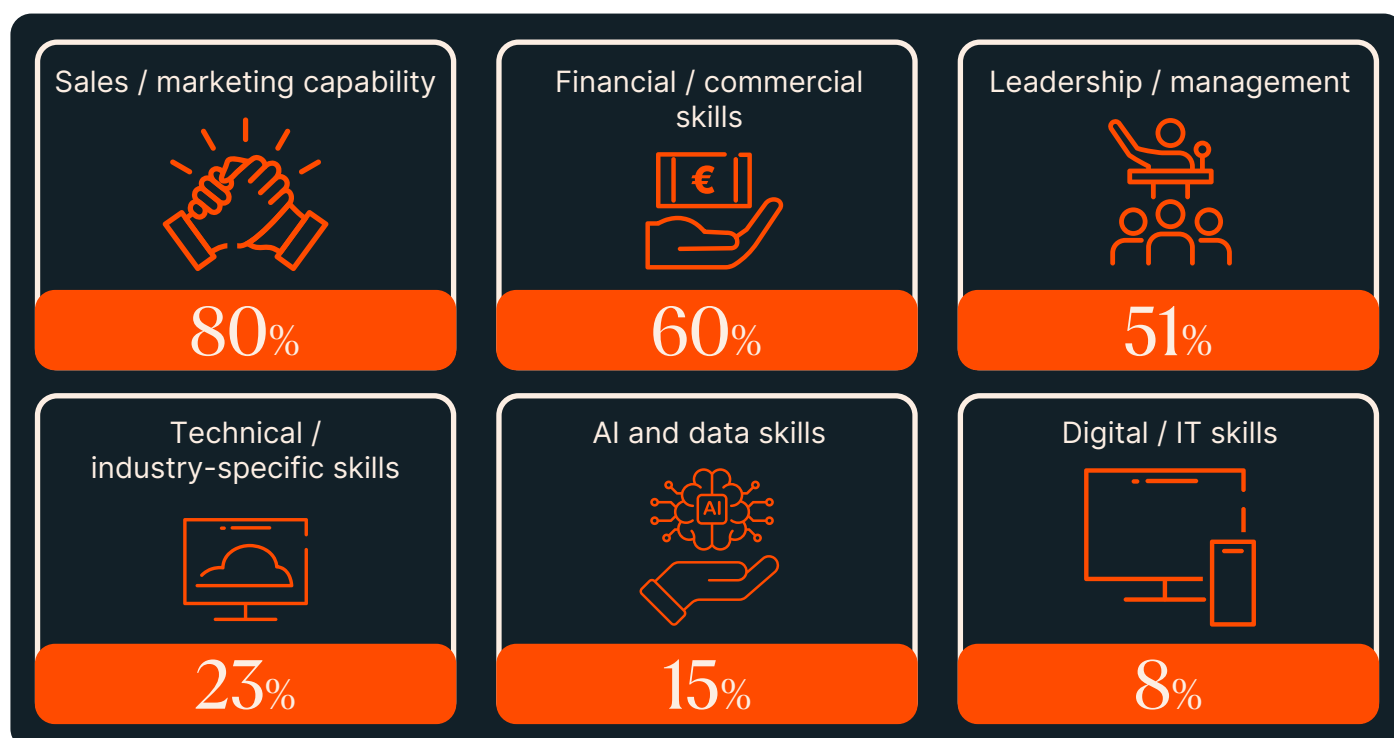


Skills and talent as a growth constraint

Thinking about your current working team, how do you describe your access to the skills and talent your business needs?

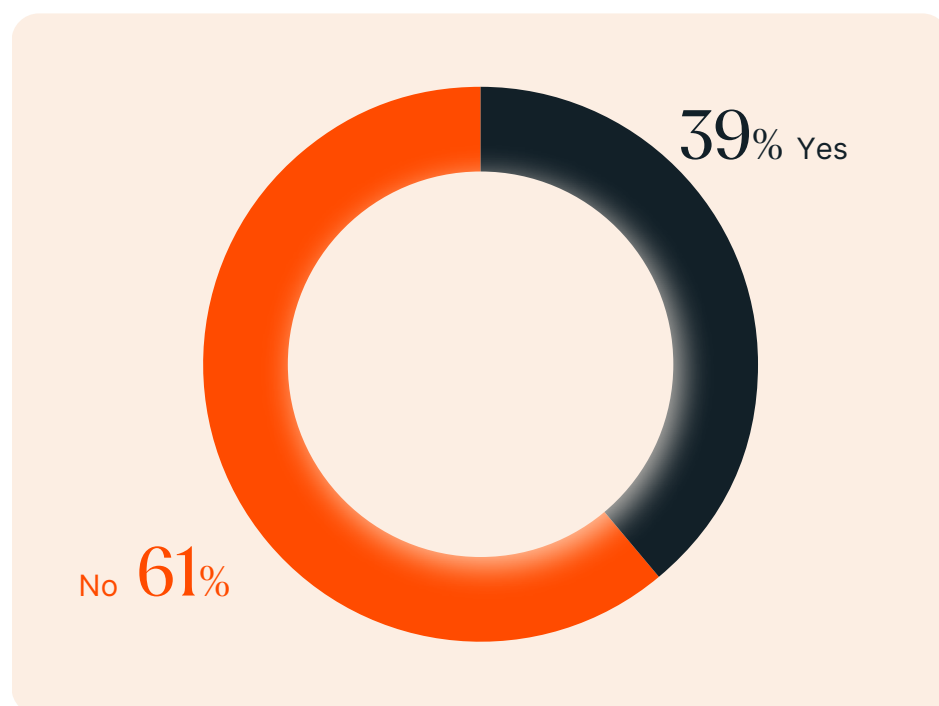


What is currently the biggest skills gap limiting your growth?



The most pressing skills gaps are commercial rather than purely technical, with sales and marketing, financial capability and leadership all emerging as key limitations on growth.

Are you planning to recruit more skilled talent in the next 1–2 years?

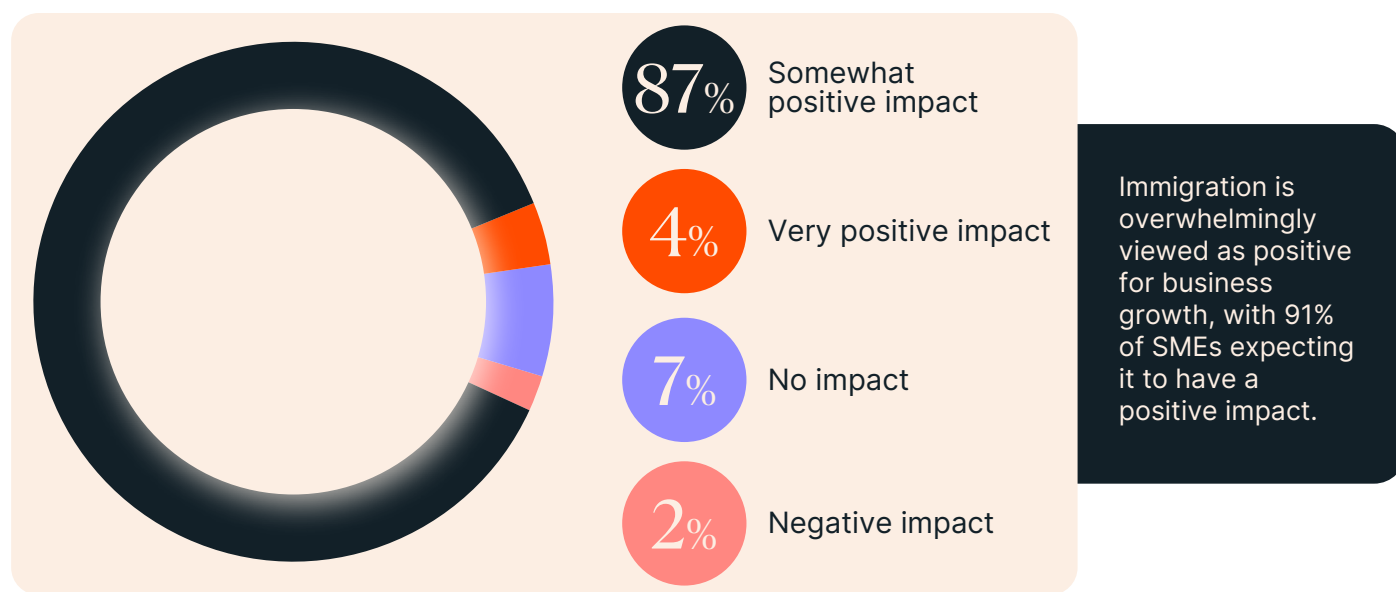


Recruiting skilled talent is the most commonly planned growth initiative, underlining the importance of people capability to SME expansion.

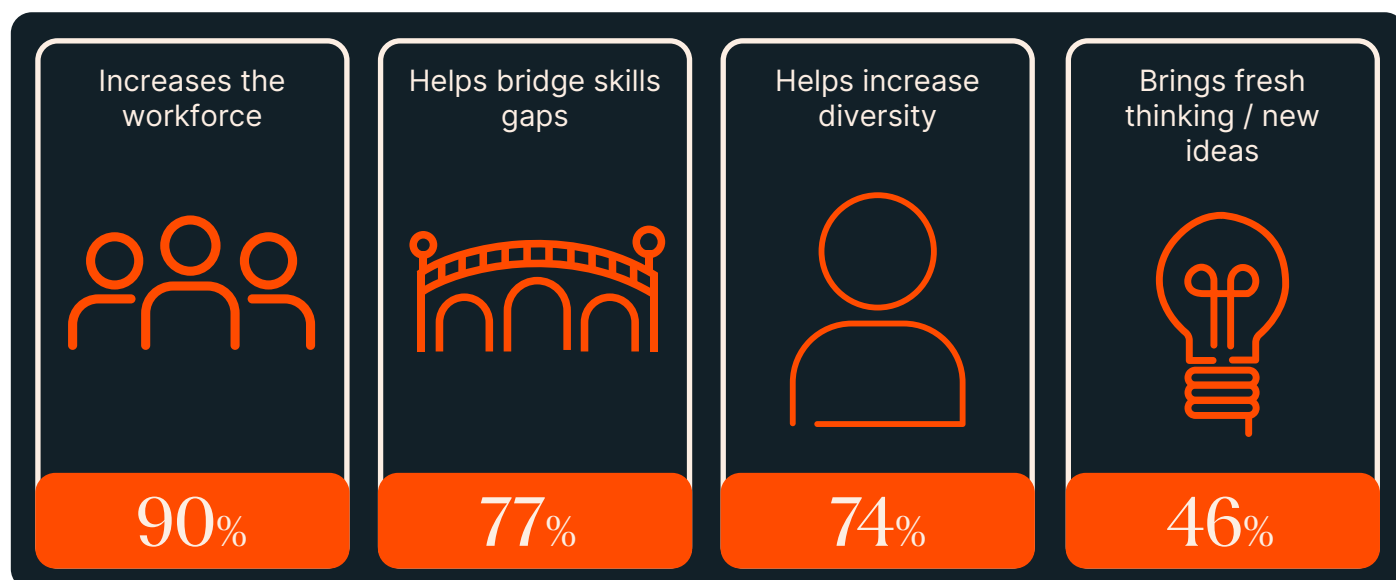


Immigration and workforce growth

What impact do you expect immigration of workers into Ireland to have on your business growth?



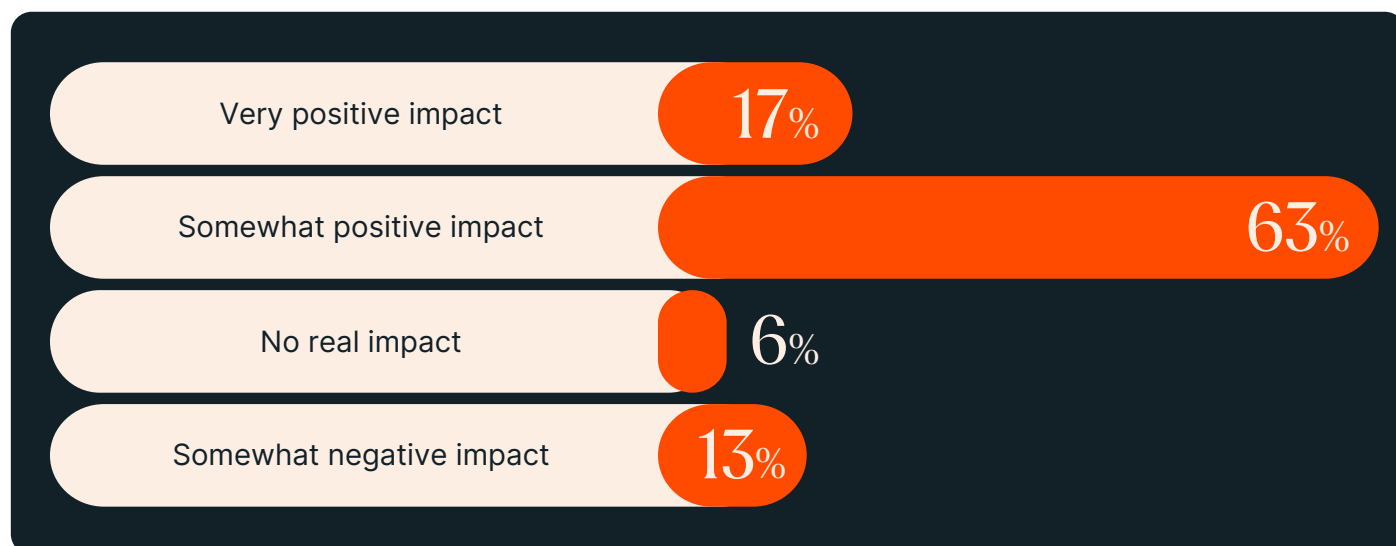
Why is immigration having a positive impact on growth plans?



For SMEs, immigration is primarily a practical workforce solution, helping businesses access more people and close critical skills gaps.

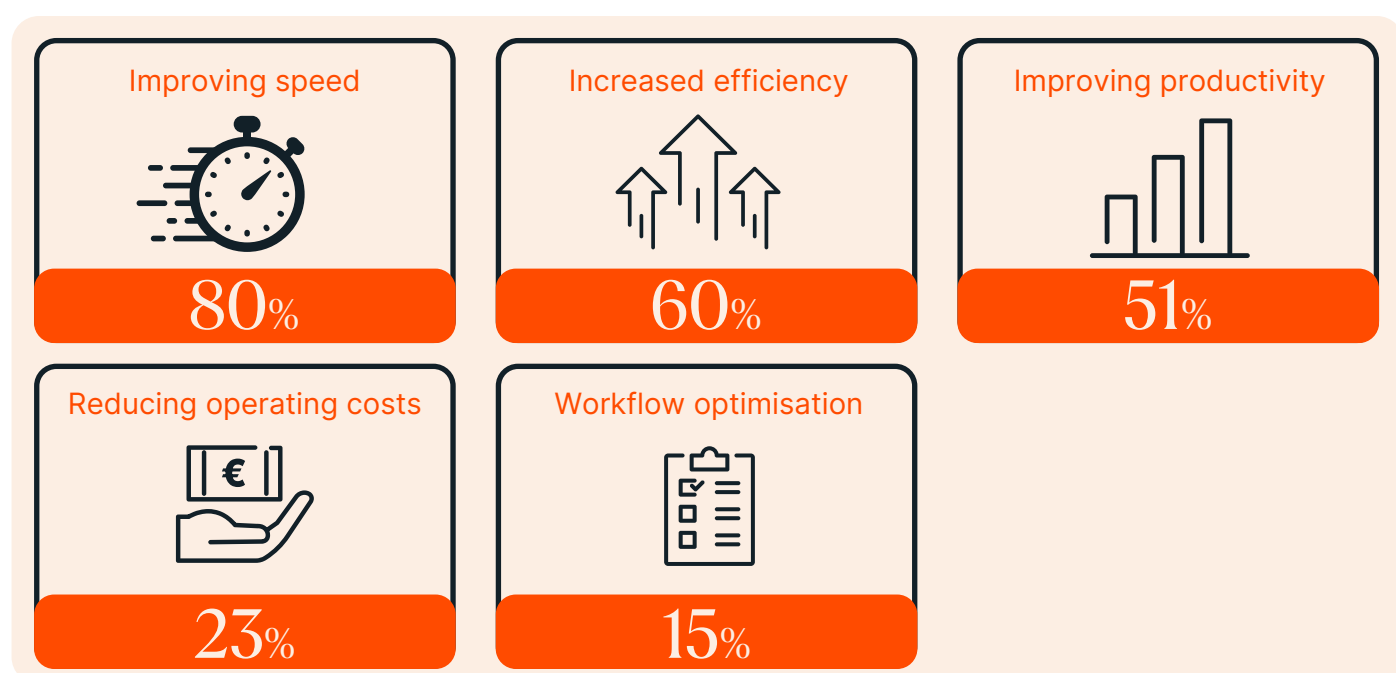
AI and business transformation

Thinking about emerging technological developments, how do you expect the growth of AI to impact your business?



AI sentiment is broadly positive, with four in five SMEs expecting AI to have a positive impact on their business.

What opportunities could AI create for your business?



Businesses see AI as a route to doing more with existing resources, particularly through faster processes, greater efficiency and improved productivity.

What challenges or threats could AI create for your business?



The biggest perceived AI risk is not technology itself, but the potential loss of human connection, alongside concerns about reliability, privacy and adoption.

Key takeaways

- Irish SMEs see future growth as increasingly dependent on the right mix of people, skills and technology.
- Skills gaps remain a clear constraint, with businesses particularly challenged in sales and marketing, financial capability and leadership.
- Immigration is viewed as a practical and positive solution to workforce pressures, helping to increase the available labour pool and bridge skills gaps.
- AI is seen as a significant opportunity to improve speed, efficiency and productivity.
- Successful AI adoption will require careful management of human connection, reliability, privacy and training.
- The next phase of SME growth will be shaped by how effectively businesses combine talent, diverse workforces and emerging technology.



