



More Perspectives from the Frontline Workforce

UKG's second-annual global frontline study
— with AI insights

Learn more >



Introduction

This report details findings from a 2025 global study on the frontline workforce, commissioned by UKG and Workplace Intelligence and conducted by Walr. It features perspectives from 8,200 frontline employees on AI in the workplace, as well as a range of topics that drive recruiting, engagement, retention, and the overall frontline employee experience — from burnout and schedule flexibility to work-life balance and financial wellness.

A frontline employee is someone who often must be physically present to do their job at a specific time and place to directly engage with customers, manufacture products, and/or deliver services. For some industries, customers may be defined as patients, students, citizens, and/or guests.

Table of Contents

01	—	Introduction
02	—	Your frontline employees remain burned out — but AI can make a difference
03	—	The frontline workforce has mixed feelings about AI
05	—	Burned out, overworked, and financially stretched
06	—	Greater flexibility remains the key
07	—	Perspectives from the frontline workforce: Global spotlight
09	—	Perspectives from the frontline workforce: Industry spotlight
11	—	How AI-led workplace technology supports the frontline workforce
13	—	Survey methodology

Your frontline employees remain burned out — but AI can make a difference

Frontline employees are essential to organizations, communities, and economies everywhere. However, discussions about work-life balance and employee experience often overlook this critical group, whose needs, preferences, and motivators can vary industry by industry — and from those of office-based employees.

Our second-annual study on the global frontline workforce provides executive leaders with insightful perspectives from over 8,000 frontline employees in 10 countries and across different industries, demographics, and organizational sizes.

Year over year (YoY), some things haven't changed. Over three-quarters of frontline employees remain burned out (76% in 2025 vs. 75% in 2024). That's especially true for younger generations, with 85% of Gen Z and 80% of millennials reporting burnout (vs. 74% of Gen X and 54% of baby boomers).

Our analysis finds frontline employees using AI at work report lower levels of burnout (even if they don't realize it).



The biggest change worldwide, unsurprisingly, has been the emergence of AI at work. About 4 in 10 frontline employees (38%) say they're currently using AI in their roles, a steady increase from 31% in 2024. Just over half (53%) believe their employer is properly preparing them for an AI-driven workplace.

While millions of frontline workers across all industries still have AI anxiety, there's a bright silver lining: frontline employees using AI at work report lower levels of burnout (41%) vs. those who aren't (54%).

But some employees are hesitant to adopt AI due to fears of being replaced. Our research uncovers a need for more open conversations, greater transparency, and increased training on AI's new role in the workplace.

Ultimately, AI should enhance your employees' experiences — not replace them. In this report, you'll learn how AI could make a difference for organizations to help alleviate burnout, fuel productivity, and improve both the frontline employee and customer experience.

The frontline workforce has mixed feelings about AI

There's optimism

Overall, 73% of frontline employees are either optimistic (43%) or still undecided (30%) about using AI at work. Half of all employees surveyed believe AI can help them work more efficiently, and 40% think AI will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction in their industry.

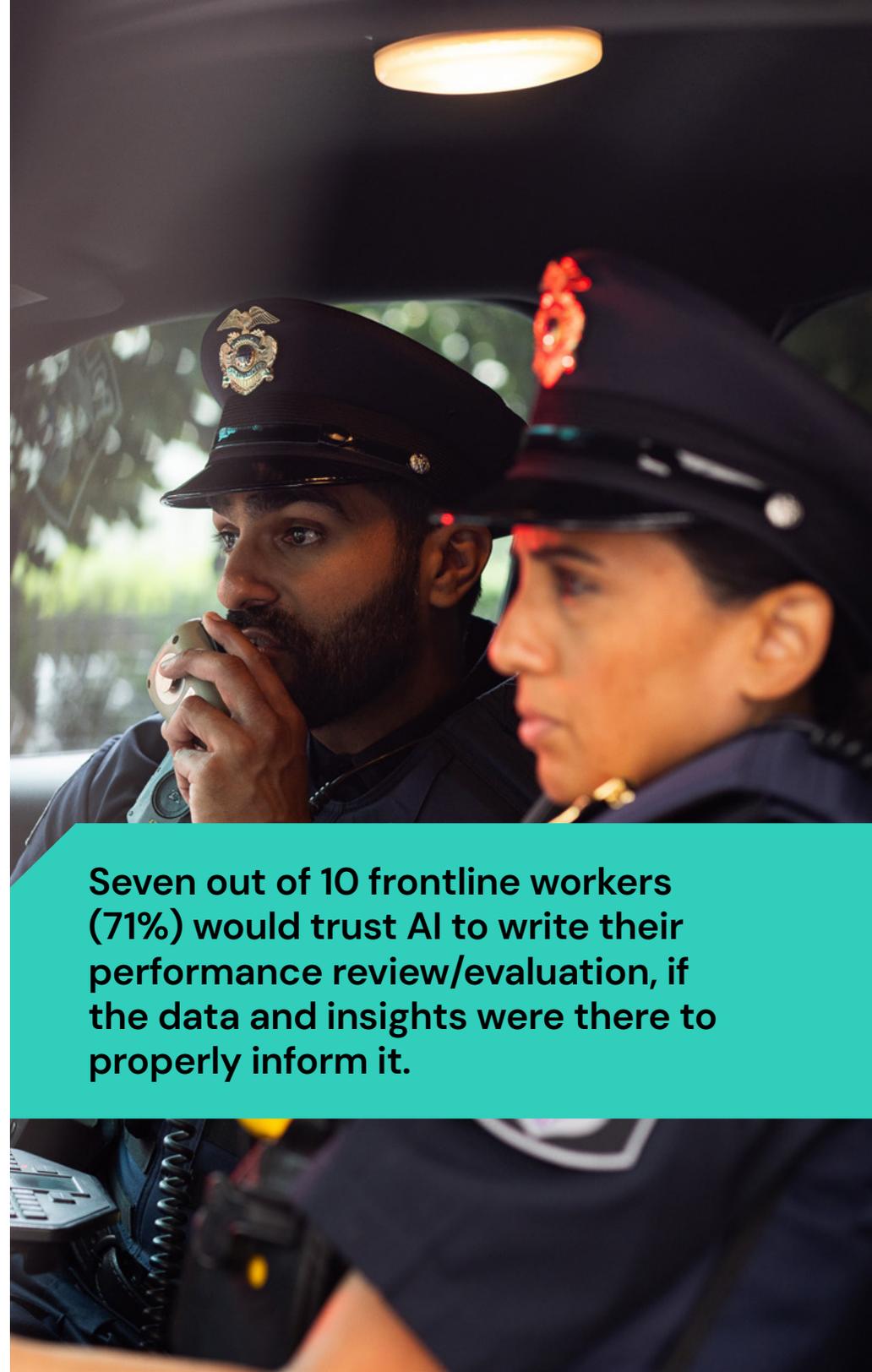
Among those frontline employees excited about AI's potential, over three-quarters say they'd trust AI to handle a variety of workplace tasks.

The top five workplace tasks frontline employees trust AI to handle are:

- Searching the company handbook and summarizing company policies (81%)
- Recommending a work schedule that aligns with their preferences and availability (80%)
- Helping them use or understand their benefits (79%)
- Providing training recommendations (79%)
- Updating certifications, skills, and more in their company profile (78%)

Moreover, 76% of the frontline workforce would trust AI with:

- Developing goals and suggesting career paths
- Recommending new roles within their organization
- Finding coverage for shifts they can't work
- Verifying their paychecks are correct
- Reviewing and approving their time off and shift-swap requests in real time



Seven out of 10 frontline workers (71%) would trust AI to write their performance review/evaluation, if the data and insights were there to properly inform it.

There's fear

There's still anxiety about AI, though. An overwhelming majority of frontline employees (85%) say it would be a "huge mistake" if AI replaced the frontline workforce. About two-thirds (64%) say they're concerned AI might replace their job, and 61% believe AI can't do a better job than they can. The greatest fear is actually human: 65% worry someone who knows how to use AI could take their job.

Among the frontline employees concerned about AI replacing their job, about 1 in 4 (23%) say their fears have made them less trusting of their employer, and about 1 in 5 (19%) say it's worsened their mental health.

The fear has spurred some frontline workers into action. Almost half (46%) say they're taking extra steps to "prove their worth" so AI won't replace them. They're learning new skills (including AI-related skills), taking on extra projects, working long hours or extra shifts, working when they're sick, and skipping breaks or working through their lunch breaks (which could violate labor laws).

There's confusion

More than 4 in 10 (42%) frontline employees say they don't understand the value of using AI to support their work, and half (51%) say their employer hasn't said anything about how AI will impact frontline employees at their organization.

This lack of education has caused an interesting contradiction: 30% of employees fear they'll be asked to take on more work due to AI. With 76% of the frontline already feeling burned out, this concern could prevent employees from fully embracing AI and using the technology to make their lives easier and more productive.

"Over one-third of frontline workers (35%) say they'll quit if their employer forces them to use AI in ways that don't make sense. If used the right way, AI can empower people to do what they were meant to do. Consider this a wakeup call for better education, training, and explanation on the 'why' behind frontline AI use. It's about AI and frontline employees working together to move from menial to meaningful work. When AI is deployed with a people-first focus, it doesn't feel like you're using technology — it feels like you're solving problems."



Corey Spencer
General Manager of AI, UKG

Burned out, overworked, and financially stretched

Over three-quarters of frontline workers report feeling burned out, with many factors contributing to the strain. According to the study:

- 62% of frontline employees feel like they're living to work rather than working to live
- 57% can't take as much time off from work as they'd like to
- 56% must work long hours to make ends meet
- 50% say it's difficult to change their shift if needed for personal reasons
- 49% believe their work schedule makes it impossible to maintain a healthy lifestyle

The stress doesn't just stay at work. Among the frontline employees who are also caregivers at home for children, adults, or both (e.g., the sandwich generation) — which accounts for 58% of frontline employees surveyed globally — nearly 9 in 10 say it's hard to manage both their workload and their caregiving responsibilities, and 81% report feeling burned out vs. 69% of non-caregivers.

This burnout has real impacts. Frontline employees say that when they're burned out, they are less productive (84%), make more mistakes (72%), call out sick from work (45%), or start looking for a different job (41%).

Financial pressures are easing, but pay-related stress still exists

Many frontline employees also feel financially pinched — though this has improved over the past year. More than half of the frontline workforce (56%) reports living paycheck to paycheck (vs. 64% in 2024), and low pay remains the top reason frontline employees say they'd quit their current job.

Top five reasons frontline employees would quit their jobs (2024 vs. 2025)	
2024	2025
Low pay	Low pay
Job negatively affects wellbeing	Work schedule (New option for 2025)
Lack of recognition and rewards	Lack of career advancement
Lack of benefits	Lack of recognition or rewards
Lack of flexibility	Lack of benefits

Greater flexibility remains the key

Behind pay, work schedule is the top factor in frontline workers deciding whether to stay or go. Providing the frontline with technology to foster greater flexibility and autonomy over their schedules can improve the employee experience and combat burnout while supporting organizational needs.

Three ways making flexibility easy helps your organization:

- Increases retention
- Attracts talent
- Ensures proper staffing

Flexibility looks different for different people, from more time off to the ability to self-schedule to working more overtime (OT) hours. Currently, 64% of frontline employees work voluntary OT up to a few times a month (down from 72% in 2024), while 22% of frontline employees say they never work OT or their employer doesn't offer it.

Our research shows offering greater choice around OT — empowering employees with the autonomy to decide when, where, and how often to pick up extra shifts that align with their personal preferences — is an underutilized way to support employee and customer needs alike.

How often frontline employees work voluntary OT

- Every day: 9% in 2025 vs. 16% in 2024
- 1-2 days a week: 21% in 2025 vs. 20% in 2024
- 3-4 days a week: 13% in 2025 vs. 16% in 2024
- A few times a month: 21% in 2025 vs. 20% in 2024
- A few times a year: 14% in 2025 vs. 11% in 2024
- Never/don't get OT: 22% in 2025 vs. 17% in 2024



“Given the high burnout levels reported across the frontline workforce, it may seem contradictory to say employees wish they'd work more OT shifts. However, it's all about workers wanting greater control over when and how many hours they work. OT can be a strategic option for serving employees and the organization together, while even boosting retention.”



Teresa Smith,
Director of Human Insights
and HCM Strategic Advisory,
UKG

Perspectives from the frontline workforce: Global spotlight

Looking across the frontline workforce globally, here's how employees in various countries feel about using AI in the workplace, as well as other critical factors impacting the employee experience.

Frontline workers in India, Mexico, and Australia use AI the most in their roles, while employees in Canada, France, the United States, and New Zealand are late adopters.

Above global average - ■

Frontline worker AI use, optimism, fear, and confusion by country	Global	AU	CA	FR	DE	IN	IE	MX	NZ	UK	US
I'm currently using AI to support my work.	38%	39%	27%	28%	33%	84%	33%	52%	28%	33%	28%
I'm optimistic about using AI at work.	43%	42%	29%	35%	37%	74%	44%	64%	36%	38%	33%
I'm undecided about using AI at work.	30%	31%	37%	29%	36%	13%	30%	25%	34%	29%	30%
My employer is preparing me for an AI-driven workplace.	53%	54%	43%	50%	49%	88%	46%	64%	46%	50%	46%
I don't understand the value of using AI to support my work.	42%	41%	41%	51%	41%	42%	46%	30%	46%	46%	46%
I'm afraid I'll lose my job if I don't learn how to use AI.	33%	31%	31%	31%	27%	50%	35%	37%	29%	39%	29%

Workers in India, Australia, Ireland, and Mexico are actively looking for a new job at the highest rates, while employees in France, Germany, and the United States are staying put.

Above global average - ■

Frontline employees' feelings about burnout, finances, and flexibility by country	Global	AU	CA	FR	DE	IN	IE	MX	NZ	UK	US
I feel burned out at work (i.e., experience chronic workplace stress).	76%	80%	79%	61%	71%	85%	74%	80%	70%	77%	73%
I live paycheck to paycheck.	56%	55%	61%	51%	43%	57%	62%	52%	51%	56%	60%
I'm not able to take as much time off from work as I'd like to.	57%	56%	56%	52%	51%	63%	63%	66%	48%	57%	54%
I feel like I'm living to work rather than working to live.	62%	65%	64%	59%	58%	66%	62%	61%	58%	62%	60%
I'm actively looking for a job right now.	35%	38%	35%	20%	27%	54%	37%	37%	34%	35%	31%
Technology has made it easier for me to manage my work schedule.	75%	78%	72%	56%	67%	88%	78%	79%	78%	74%	76%

Perspectives from the frontline workforce: Industry spotlight

Looking across the frontline workforce globally, here's how workers in specific industries feel about using AI in the workplace, as well as other critical factors impacting the employee experience.

Frontline workers in financial services, manufacturing, and professional services use AI the most in their roles, while employees across retail, hospitality, and food service, as well as logistics and distribution and the public sector, are unsure about the value AI could bring to their role.

Above global average - ■

Frontline worker AI use, optimism, fear, and confusion by industry	Across the Frontline	Financial Services	Healthcare	Logistics & Distribution	Manufacturing	Professional Services	Public Sector	Retail, Hospitality, & Food Service
I'm currently using AI to support my work.	38%	53%	27%	32%	41%	38%	33%	33%
I'm optimistic about using AI at work.	43%	53%	32%	40%	51%	40%	34%	38%
I'm undecided about using AI at work.	30%	28%	34%	31%	26%	32%	35%	30%
My employer is preparing me for an AI-driven workplace.	53%	68%	44%	51%	57%	47%	44%	49%
I don't understand the value of using AI to support my work.	42%	42%	42%	44%	39%	39%	43%	45%
I'm afraid I'll lose my job if I don't learn how to use AI.	33%	43%	28%	35%	22%	31%	28%	33%

Frontline workers in healthcare, financial services, and across retail, hospitality, and food service report the highest levels of burnout. Employees in these industries also say they feel like they're living to work rather than working to live.

Above global average - 

Frontline employees' feelings on burnout, finances, and flexibility by industry	Across the Frontline	Financial Services	Healthcare	Logistics & Distribution	Manufacturing	Professional Services	Public Sector	Retail, Hospitality, & Food Service
I feel burned out at work (i.e., experience chronic workplace stress).	76%	81%	81%	73%	72%	70%	74%	78%
I live paycheck to paycheck.	56%	54%	56%	53%	51%	55%	55%	62%
I'm not able to take as much time off from work as I'd like to.	57%	59%	55%	60%	56%	54%	51%	60%
I feel like I'm living to work rather than working to live.	62%	64%	63%	60%	60%	58%	62%	64%
I'm actively looking for a job right now.	35%	37%	34%	29%	33%	30%	32%	40%
Technology has made it easier for me to manage my work schedule.	75%	83%	75%	72%	74%	76%	75%	74%

How AI-led workplace technology supports the frontline workforce

The future of work relies on the frontline workforce. These essential employees need greater schedule flexibility, opportunities to pick up shifts that work for their lives and their organizations, financial wellness support, collaborative solutions that connect them with their colleagues and leaders, and, ultimately, an organization that truly cares.

Change takes time, but organizations don't have to work alone. Technology can help, and the return on investment is plentiful — from improved retention to increased productivity to better employee experiences.

Indeed, 74% of frontline employees say technology helps enhance their experiences at work, and 73% would like their employer to invest more in workplace technology.



Here are three ways AI-led workplace technology can support the frontline workforce.

1. Employee scheduling software provides optimized staffing for organizations and more flexibility for frontline employees

Behind pay, an undesirable work schedule is the main reason frontline employees would quit their job. Implementing employee scheduling software that schedules the right people at the right time, while offering employees a simple, frictionless way to choose preferred schedules, swap shifts, or pick up extra hours, can ensure appropriate staffing levels while improving the employee experience.

Organizations that have already adopted scheduling technology have felt the benefits. For example, 75% of frontline workers say technology has made it easier for them to manage their work schedule.

2. Smart payroll technology ensures accurate pay and on-demand access to wages, while promoting financial wellness

With pay the top reason frontline employees decide whether to stay or go, ensuring on-time, accurate pay is key for retention and organizational success. What's more, over half of all frontline employees live paycheck to paycheck, and 45% say that after two errors in their paycheck, they'd start looking for a new job.

But pay is about more than just "getting it right" every time. It also means setting employees up for success with financial wellness solutions.

Notably, 55% of frontline employees say they can't afford to save for retirement, compared with 7 in 10 (70%) who were actively saving money for retirement in 2024. The frontline workforce needs solutions that can help them achieve their short- and long-term financial goals.

And while 52% of frontline workers say it's important they have on-demand access to their pay, also known as earned-wage access (EWA), just 27% say their organization offers EWA. Solutions that provide EWA and promote financial wellness can set up employees for more secure and successful futures.



3. Culture-focused solutions foster high-trust, high-performance organizations, from the front office to the front line

Organizations have made strides YoY in building great workplaces for their frontline workforce. Seven in 10 frontline employees say their organization is a great place to work (up from 66% in 2024). However, 47% still believe there are two separate cultures in their organization: one for frontline employees, and one for everyone else. Just over half (51%) aren't satisfied with their employee experience. This improved from 55% in 2024, but it remains alarming. That means there's still important work to do.

People-focused, mobile-first technology designed to better connect frontline employees with their peers, leaders, and teams throughout the organization fosters collaboration and a greater sense of belonging. It elevates the frontline employee experience and helps make work more meaningful, so a day-to-day job becomes a rewarding career and not just a way to make money.

A Workforce Operating Platform that puts employees at the center creates a better work experience for every person. Because when work works, everything works. Remember, though, that the real work is never done. Now is the time to build on your workplace momentum to develop a culture of belonging and engagement that serves every employee.

Survey methodology

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Walr from May 29 to July 13, 2025. In total, 8,200 global workers completed the survey. The survey targeted frontline employees in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, India, Mexico, and Ireland. The survey covered topics such as job satisfaction, burnout, overtime, and compensation. Respondents were also asked about AI use in their roles and, more specifically, what impact AI is having on frontline jobs, or they believe it will have in the future. Respondents were recruited through a number of different mechanisms, via different sources, to join the panels and participate in market research surveys. All panelists have passed a double opt-in process and completed, on average, 300 profiling data points prior to taking part in surveys. Respondents are invited to take part via email and are provided with a small monetary incentive for doing so. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 0.8 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

For more information about this study, please contact media@ukg.com.

About UKG

UKG is the Workforce Operating Platform that puts workforce understanding to work. With the world's largest collection of workforce insights, and people-first AI, our ability to reveal unseen ways to build trust, amplify productivity, and empower talent, is unmatched. It's this expertise that equips our customers with the intelligence to solve any challenge in any industry — because great organizations know their workforce is their competitive edge. To learn more, visit ukg.com.



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