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AI Adoption by European Companies



Four years since the release of ChatGPT, we are at the dawn of an AI age. While many discussions understandably focus on whether we are rapidly progressing towards a general superintelligence, today's existing AI capabilities are already impressive. Within a macroeconomic and market context, most coverage focuses on the frenetic activity of the AI model providers or the compute infrastructure builders, typically in the US or Asia. By contrast, European commentary is usually more pessimistic, focusing on a lack of global competitors at the cutting edge of AI research.

In this piece, we look at how the Eurozone's largest public companies are specifically incorporating AI into their businesses. Fittingly, this analysis is enabled by AI itself. We're able to systematically analyse the earnings call transcripts of over 150 listed companies across the bloc. We strip away as much noise as we can, looking for specific mentions of internal AI use cases to understand the state of play today. This analysis aims to offer a piece of a bigger puzzle that is the state of global AI adoption.

Among these European companies, we found widespread adoption examples. So far, it's experimental. It's productivity additive. But, judged against the admittedly high standards of a possibly imminent superintelligence, uses are not yet revolutionary. Frequent examples include internal employee Copilot tools, process automation, and customer-facing chatbots. Research use cases such as drug discovery are there, but rarer. There's also a range of adoption rates across sectors, with communication and IT-native firms leading, contrasted against materials and energy companies where mentions to date are scarcer.

The AI ecosystem can be seen as three layers: infrastructure (e.g. data centres), models (e.g. LLMs) and applications. The latter is the most attractive and realistic area for value creation for most firms. This is particularly true in Europe. By incorporating flexibility at the model layer and avoiding single dependencies, European firms can take advantage of the enormous amount of research spending and competition in the US and China. Output-adjusted token costs are coming down, and open-source competition is a gift for Europe. The infrastructure layer presents a challenge, given compute and storage constraints. Firms will need access to reliable and secure compute. Coordination across firms and the public sector can help to develop the necessary infrastructure, including data centres and associated reliable energy infrastructure.

The State of Play

Aided by ever-polite AI assistants, we conducted an analysis of the largest public companies listed on Eurozone equity exchanges. This involved 700 earnings transcripts of 158 companies from Bloomberg's Eurozone Equity Index, going back to 2023. Of the 158 firms, we found 88 (55.6%) with clear references to specific internal AI use cases, and a further 19 (12%) which we categorise as vague. Conversely, 51 firms (32.4%), did not mention use cases in their own operations at all.

Importantly, we omitted cases where a firm cites broad AI demand boosting their own sales (e.g. construction companies benefiting from data centre projects). While important, that obscures data on actual adoption. We also avoid separating between 'agentic' and 'non-agentic' uses. This is because agentic capability is a continuum of autonomy and task complexity already reflected in the underlying use-case descriptions.

Caveats are required. This is a deliberately compartmentalised analysis, specifically focused on publicly listed European large-cap companies. This misses the sheer power of the small AI-native scale ups, where the most extreme adoption cases are likely to come from as they build AI-enabled products from scratch. It is not an academic paper, but comes from the perspective of a market analyst and investor. This is a large enough dataset to draw interesting patterns, but cannot provide a holistic global picture. Lastly, earnings calls themselves need to be read somewhat cautiously, as management may want to present an optimistic message. Moreover, analysts may be focused on idiosyncratic company issues, allowing no time for questions about AI usage. Companies that are incorporating AI may not be counted if it does not come up in these calls. Nevertheless, we find interesting data and patterns in the chaotic and unmapped area of AI adoption.

We identified four broad category types for use cases, with eleven more granular sub-types. This is shown in Table 1 below. So far, there is more breadth than depth. European firms are adopting AI primarily where the payoff is visible and can be bolted onto existing processes. The most frequently cited use cases are in internal productivity tools, process automation, logistics, customer engagement and sales. This is encouraging. But it also points to a constraint. Rarer appearances of AI in research, discovery and engineering suggests that Europe's adoption curve is tilted toward efficiency rather than transformation.

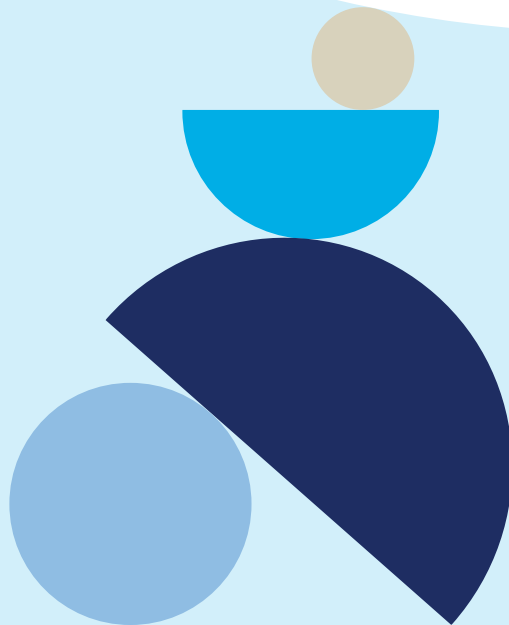


Table 1. AI use-case categorisation

Category	Sub-area	Example use cases	Firms citing	% of AI users	% of all firms in sample
Commercial & Customer-facing AI	Customer service & experience	Customer support chatbots, voice bots, customer self-service automation.	28	32%	18%
	Sales & marketing	Personalisation and recommendations, campaign/media optimisation, lead generation and sales support, dynamic pricing.	34	39%	22%
	AI-enhanced products & services	AI-enabled diagnostics and clinical software, smart-vehicle assistants, telecom network automation, AI-assisted archive restoration/content enhancement.	34	39%	22%
Internal Productivity & Control	Employee productivity & process automation	Enterprise copilots, internal LLM portals, workflow and back-office automation, advisor productivity tools, quote-to-cash automation, automated product testing.	62	70%	39%
	Software engineering	Code generation, coding assistance, developer productivity tools.	21	24%	13%
	Risk, fraud, compliance & cybersecurity	Fraud and cybersecurity detection, credit analysis and early-warning systems, underwriting automation, anomaly and hazard monitoring.	22	25%	14%
Operations & Physical Systems	Non-factory operations, logistics & supply chain	Route and logistics optimisation, inventory optimisation, supply-chain and demand planning, client onboarding workflows, payment operations, trade processing.	53	60%	29%
	Manufacturing & industrial process optimisation	Manufacturing and process automation, production planning, quality control, production availability improvement.	20	23%	13%
	Asset, energy & grid optimisation	Predictive maintenance, asset and grid optimisation, bottleneck prediction, automated drilling, hydrological modelling.	10	11%	6%
Innovation & Product Development	Research & discovery	Drug and biopharma discovery, product innovation, formulation, reservoir analysis.	10	11%	6%
	Engineering, design & simulation	Product design and R&D, digital twins & simulations, software-defined vehicle platforms, autonomous engineering, chip design acceleration.	14	16%	9%

Source: Zurich calculations, Bloomberg, Company earnings call transcripts. Note: 158 firms analysed in total, 88 of which had clear use case references.

Some of the most theoretically impactful (or overly optimistic, depending on your own bias) ideas, such as frontier-level agents running entire units or directly actioning end-to-end decisions, are not yet happening. There is also no clear example yet of a single firm in our sample pulling ahead of its competitors through aggressive AI adoption. Lastly, while there are relatively few claims related to job losses, they do exist. Around 5% of companies that we identified with clear AI use cases refer to possible AI-related workforce reduction or to AI decreasing the need for future hiring.

Sectoral continuum

Breaking down the list by sector clearly shows adoption trends. Table 2 below categorises each of the 158 companies into their respective Global Industry Classification Standard (GICS) sectors, showing the number of clear use cases identified as a proportion of the total sector in the index. This is ordered from the most prevalent to the least. Table 3 provides additional detail on common use-cases within sectors, and provides some illustrative examples via direct earnings transcript quotes.

At the top of the table for adoption are communication services firms, with six of seven citing AI use cases. Telecom firms have been adopting chatbots for customer queries and AI monitoring for network maintenance. IT firms are unsurprisingly high on the list as well, with a clear business urgency to innovate around the technology. Usage here is evenly split between directly incorporating AI into products, as well as internal productivity enhancements in both coding and general business functions. Coding assistance and software development is an obvious use case, and one that unsurprisingly appears often. The relatively low count of coding references in Table 1 is a function of IT firms only making up a small part of the index, with more sporadic references to coding across other sectors.

Table 2. Specific AI use cases broken down by firm sector

Sector	Specific AI use references?			Total	% Yes of Total
	Yes	Vague	No		
Communication Services	6	1	0	7	85.7%
Information Technology	8	1	1	10	80.0%
Consumer Staples	9	2	1	12	75.0%
Financials	25	4	8	37	67.6%
Health Care	9	1	4	14	64.3%
Industrials	16	2	14	32	50.0%
Utilities	7	4	4	15	46.7%
Consumer Discretionary	5	0	11	16	31.3%
Materials	2	2	3	7	28.6%
Energy	1	1	5	7	14.3%
Real Estate	0	1	0	1	0.0%
Total	88	19	51	158	55.7%

Source: Zurich calculations, Bloomberg, Company earnings call transcripts. Note: 158 total firms analysed in total.

Usage across consumer staples companies ranges from molecular research for beauty products to supply chain decision optimisation and customer behavioural trend analysis. This relatively high usage stands in stark contrast to consumer discretionary firms. There, earnings transcripts often offer no commentary on AI at all. This is particularly true of the luxury sector. A possible explanation could be that bespoke, higher-margin products are under less pressure to aggressively optimise processes than more commoditised peers.

Financials are the single largest component of the large-cap Eurozone equity index with 37 firms, including 19 banks. Here, AI use cases are broad. Customer experience products, such as chat assistants, are common on the retail side. AI-augmented credit analysis is a clear core business use case for banks and crops up often. Employee tools such as internal LLMs and productivity tools appear often, as do references to risk controls, compliance and anti-fraud monitoring measures.

Healthcare companies show unique AI use cases. In diagnostics, firms point to AI being embedded into imaging, radiotherapy planning, quality control and clinical workflow tools. There is also some evidence around hospital operations, such as AI-supported admissions and workforce planning, using hospital data to improve how patients and staff are managed. The broader pattern is still selective rather than universal, but these examples suggest AI is being incorporated into core clinical and operational workflows. While drug discovery is mentioned, references are generally forward-looking and projected rather than referring to any current product.



Table 3. Example AI use cases by sector

Sector	Example use cases	Earnings transcript examples
Communication Services	Customer service automation, network automation and predictive maintenance, AI-enriched marketing, AI-assisted archive restoration/content enhancement.	"In Germany, our AI enabled chatbot deflected 1 million calls in the first quarter. And we plan to double the number of deflected calls in 2026." (Deutsche Telekom, 13/05/2026)
Information Technology	Software engineering and code generation, customer support automation, edge AI developer ecosystems, AI-hardware acceleration, quote-to-cash process automation.	"We launched [...] our agentic AI solution for event-driven automation management, which reduces network downtime by 96%." (Nokia, 29/01/2026)
Consumer Staples	Precision marketing and media ROI optimisation, product innovation and formulation, customer beauty advisors, dynamic pricing, supply-chain and demand planning, in-store AI-powered shopping tools.	"For AI, we concentrate on four domains sourcing and merchandising, marketing, store operations, and agentic shopping. And with more than 100 active use cases, we are already capturing value by improving availability and freshness, optimizing pricing and assortment decisions, and increasing operational efficiency in stores." (Koninklijke Ahold Delhaize, 06/05/2026)
Financials	Fraud detection, customer service chatbots and voice bots, advisor productivity tools and copilots, credit analysis and early-warning systems, dynamic pricing, underwriting automation.	"As an example, this quarter it [Austria Business] developed several AI agents in credit analysis generating a 50% productivity uplift and rolled out AI enabled sales training for relationship managers supporting scalable capability building." (Unicredit, 05/05/2026)
Health Care	AI-enabled diagnostic imaging, drug discovery, predictive clinical intervention, radiotherapy planning, automated product testing, AI-supported diagnostics, clinical workflow software.	"We have expanded adoption of AI-driven interventions for imminent hospital admissions of ESRD patients. Where employed, these programs have shown a reduction in hospitalizations by as much as 15% and missed dialysis treatments per member per month by up to 26% for the highest risk patients." (Fresenius Medical Care, 05/05/2026)

Table 3. Example AI use cases by sector (continued)

Sector	Example use cases	Examples from Earnings Transcripts
Industrials	Predictive maintenance, logistics and route optimisation, manufacturing process automation, anomaly detection in remote inspections, autonomous engineering tasks.	"First, we launched our Eigen Engineering agent, with which we are moving industrial AI from providing assistance to autonomously planning and executing industrial automation engineering tasks. The impact is impressive, with up to 50% greater engineering efficiency and up to 80% higher solution quality proven in more than 100 global pilot deployments." (Siemens, 13/05/2026)
Utilities	Grid operations and bottleneck prediction, forecasting and control-desk optimisation, predictive maintenance, customer service automation, water management.	"In 2025, 23% of our operational efficiencies were already derived from AI and digital, and we aim at 50% by 2030. This is by scaling up AI-based tool we've already tested to maximize plant productivity, to reduce energy or chemical consumption, or to help detect leaks." (Veolia Environnement, 06/05/2026)
Consumer Discretionary	Product and in-car intelligence, virtual assistants, sales operations and lead generation, factory monitoring, inventory optimisation, personalisation and recommendation engines.	"In two years only, we have reduced the energy consumption per vehicle in our plants by 20%, again through AI monitoring." (Renault, 15/02/2024)
Materials	Formulation optimisation, process safety and hazard monitoring.	"Advanced analytics, including AI, are strengthening these [safety] efforts. For example, enabling early identification of workers entering hazards areas and triggering [faster] alerts and interventions than human monitoring alone." (ArcelorMittal, 30/04/2026)
Energy	Predictive maintenance, asset optimisation, production availability improvement, reservoir analysis, automated drilling optimisation.	"High performance computing and AI as exemplified by the startup of HPC6, one of the top five supercomputers in the world which enhances our ability to analyze complex reservoirs and optimize decision making." (Eni, 27/02/2025)

Source: Zurich calculations, Bloomberg, Company earnings call transcripts. Note: From 88 firms found citing clear AI use cases.

The industrial sector, the second largest in the Eurozone index, shows the clearest split between digitally advanced capital goods firms and more traditional transport, construction and building-materials names. Aerospace and defence, machinery and electrical equipment are where AI use cases look most developed, often tied to software, automation, engineering and product functionality. Utilities also show a similar split. Grid-heavy names have the strongest AI rationale, because reliability pressures make forecasting and asset optimisation more urgent. Others hardly mention AI, which may reflect weaker focus from analysts, but also suggests the technology is most strategic where firms manage complex networks in real time.

The companies that are benefiting most from huge AI demand actually lag in adoption. Perhaps that's intuitive. In materials, AI is mainly operational, with examples in industrial process control, autonomous quarry haulage and safety monitoring. In energy, the pattern is narrower still, with most oil and gas names disclosing little direct AI use beyond asset optimisation.

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The AI landscape is unstable and prone to earthquakes. Firms should compete by building the world's best AI applications. There is a genuine advantage from proprietary data, processes, customer relationships, and sector expertise. Use cases should continue to be bolder. For example, breakthroughs in simultaneous language translation could unlock broader EU and global markets for previously local service products.

The pace of model development is frenetic, and fiercely competitive. European firms should stay nimble at the model layer, switch between providers as performance and pricing change, use open-source models where appropriate, and benefit from the huge US-China investment race rather than trying to replicate it from a standing start. Another key input into this decision will be ensuring data security and privacy is robustly maintained.

This approach doesn't mean model development is impossible. Small European teams can still build, adapt and improve open-source models, especially for specific sectors or workflows. The bigger prize is to embed AI deeply into real business processes, aiming for end-to-end personalised AI healthcare treatment, optimised and resilient energy systems, and AI-designed and driven factories.

All of this requires understanding and managing the risks of errors or critical dependence. Infrastructure itself is a problem, and compute availability is a strategic constraint. Europe needs reliable access to abundant and secure data centre and cloud capacity. This is a clear area for co-ordination across industry and the public sector to ensure resilient compute and storage access.

Conclusion

Almost four years after the launch of ChatGPT, and exponential capability improvements since, analysis from earnings calls shows half of large public Eurozone firms are specifically incorporating AI within their operations. Adding vaguer references, this increases to two-thirds of firms. Sector adoption is uneven, with data-rich and digitally native industries like IT and telecoms leading in adoption. By contrast, firms closest to the raw material input in energy and materials benefit from demand and refer less to adoption themselves. Where it exists AI-usage is practical, focused mainly on efficiency and process automation rather than bold transformation. Yet, these use cases are actual technological innovations that were impossible only a small number of years ago.

The next competitive edge can come from firms that move beyond incremental improvements and embed AI into core products, R&D, and business models. The companies that best read and understand the evolving technological landscape will accrue this edge. Acquisitions of AI-native start-ups will likely be a part of this strategy for larger firms. We believe the EU's current perceived disadvantage from a lack of AI model labs could be turned into an advantage if the model layer itself becomes commoditised and the value accrues to those building the application layer on top.

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