Humanitarian Leadership Academy

DATA FRIENDLY SPACE

Humanitarian Tech webinar

Beyond the hype: Ground truth on AI across the humanitarian sector

Welcome to this session
Introduce yourself in the chat!

Session format

- **Welcome, introductions & housekeeping**
- **Audience poll:** Ka Man Parkinson & Madigan Johnson
- **Pulse survey insights**: Madigan Johnson & Lucy Hall
- **Panel discussion**
- **Audience Q&A**

Housekeeping

- **Session is being recorded:** YouTube link & slide deck will be emailed
- **Accessibility:** Zoom captions are enabled including translations. Post-event, a session transcript will be available.
- Use **chat** to share comments & reflections
- Submit questions via the **Zoom Q&A** function
- **Kind reminder:** Keep questions and comments respectful and on-topic
- **HPass badge:** You will receive an email next week

Speakers

Research team

Lucy Hall
Research & MEAL Lead
HLA

Madigan Johnson
Head of Communications
Data Friendly Space

Ka Man Parkinson
Communications & Marketing Lead
HLA

Panellists

Rebecca Chandiru
Volunteer Engagement Coordinator
Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team

Liz Devine
Head of Program Technical Team
GOAL Global

Timi Olagunju
Policy expert, lawyer
& governance strategist
The Timeless Practice

Nayid Orozco Bohorquez
Chief Product Officer
Data Friendly Space

Community focus

- **January 2026 pulse survey:** 1,729 responses from 120+ countries
- **Builds on 2025 global baseline study:** enabling us to track any shifts & emerging sectoral trends
- **Key insights** highlighted today for thematic discussion
- **Executive summary & dashboard:** planned for release in March

Share your thoughts with us!
Take part in our poll

Humanitarian AI paradox: a sector in transition

- AI is no longer just an experiment. Adoption is widespread across roles, organisations, and geographies
- The level of use has increased significantly since 2025 and there is a clear indication that AI is here to stay as a core tool in humanitarian work
- **50.4%** use AI daily (**+14.2%** from 2025)
- **75.0%** use AI weekly or more (**+9.6%** from 2025)
- Adoption spans LNGOs, INGOs, UN, government, academia and the private sector

> *It is a technology that has come to stay, and organisations that shy away from it will be left behind.*
>
> Survey respondent from a local NGO In Sub-Saharan Africa

A year of acceleration: what repeat respondents reveal

- A leading cohort has rapidly advanced in adoption, governance, and training
- This shows organisational integration is actively progressing with those that have utilized AI in the past year

- **Daily use:** 44.5% → 58.7% (**+14.2pp**)
- **Daily+weekly use:** 69.5% → 79.1% (**+9.6pp**)
- **Policy presence:** 21.8% → 35.7% (**+13.9pp**)
- **Policy present/developing:** 36.1% → 53.9% (**+17.8pp**)
- **Organization training ≥25%:** 21.9% → 40.9% (**+19pp**)

5 Key Themes

1 Distributed, locally embedded AI capacity

2 Sector-wide AI integration: widespread individual use, uneven institutionalization

3 Adoption is practitioner-driven, not top-down

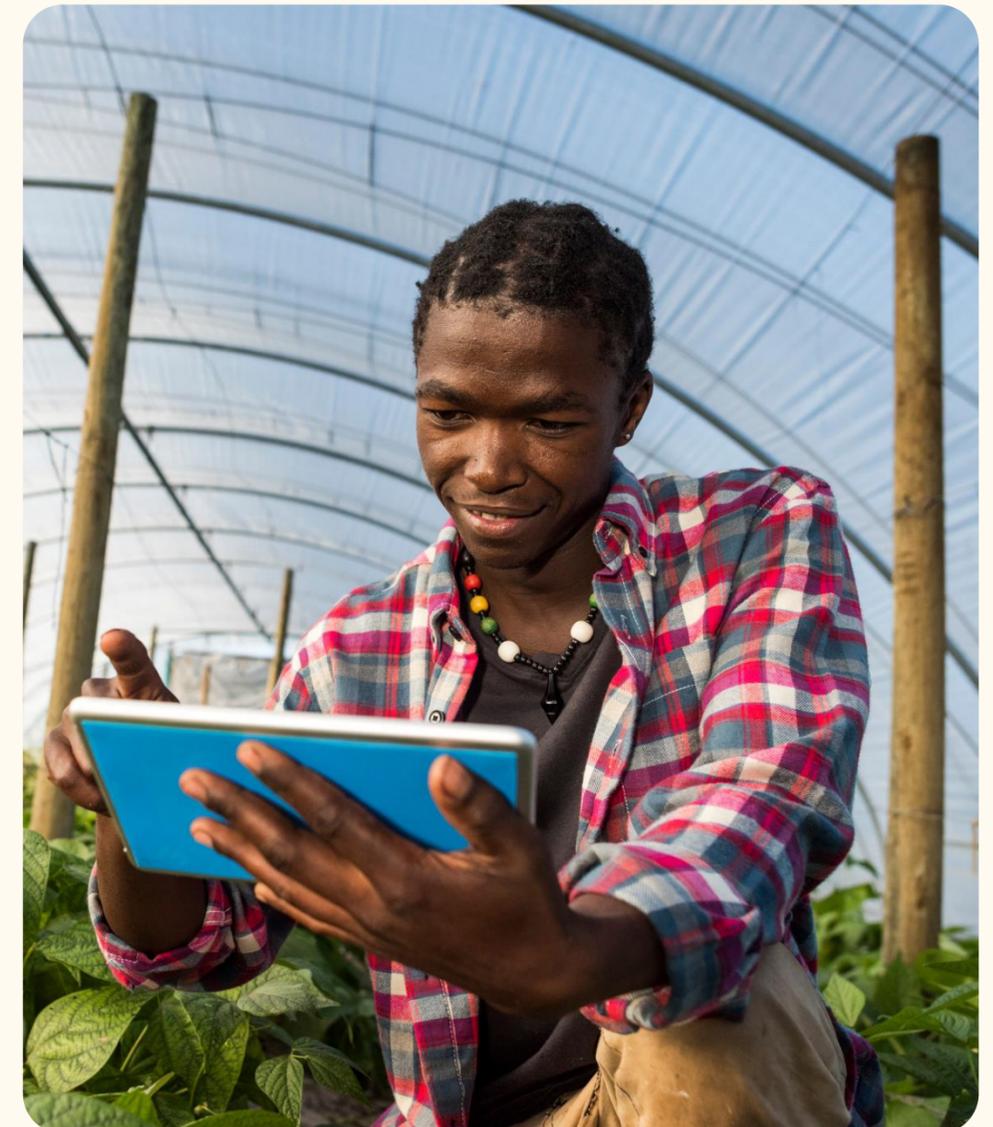**4** Regional adoption is shifting

5 Moving humanitarian AI from individual practice to sector transformation

1 **Distributed, locally embedded AI capacity**

- Daily AI use is widespread across organisation types
- Local NGOs report higher daily use **(52.7%)** than INGOs **(47.6%)**
- There is strong adoption in mutiple complex operational contexts, particularly:
  - Kenya **(64.4%)**
  - Sudan **(59.6%)**
  - Cameroon **(55.8%)**
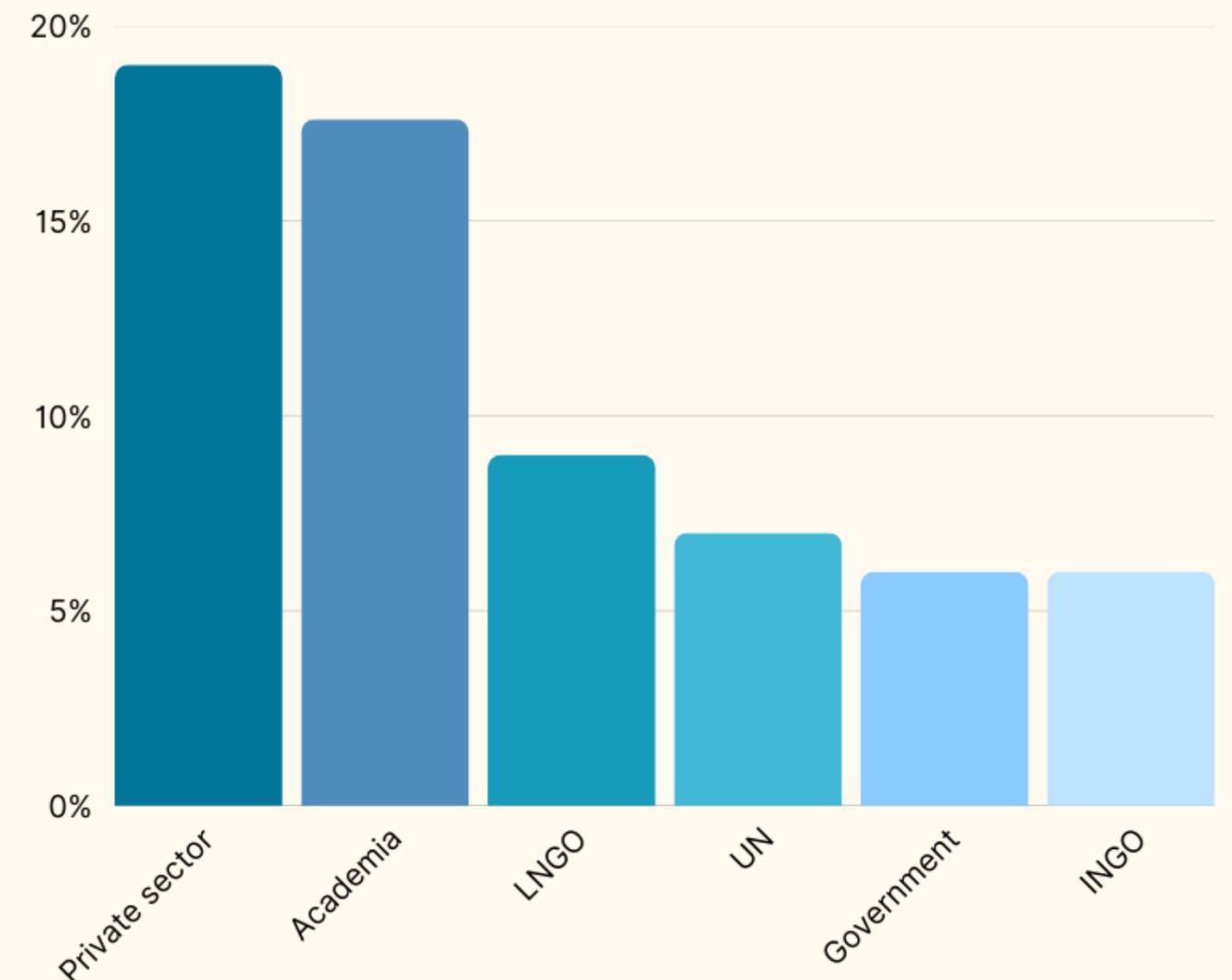- AI capability is emerging across the system, not concentrated in large institutions

2 Sector-wide AI integration: widespread individual use, uneven institutionalization

- AI is used by **50.4%** of individuals daily
- Only **8.8%** of all respondents have widespread AI integration within their organizations
- **58.5%** of respondents report either no AI policy or not knowing if they do
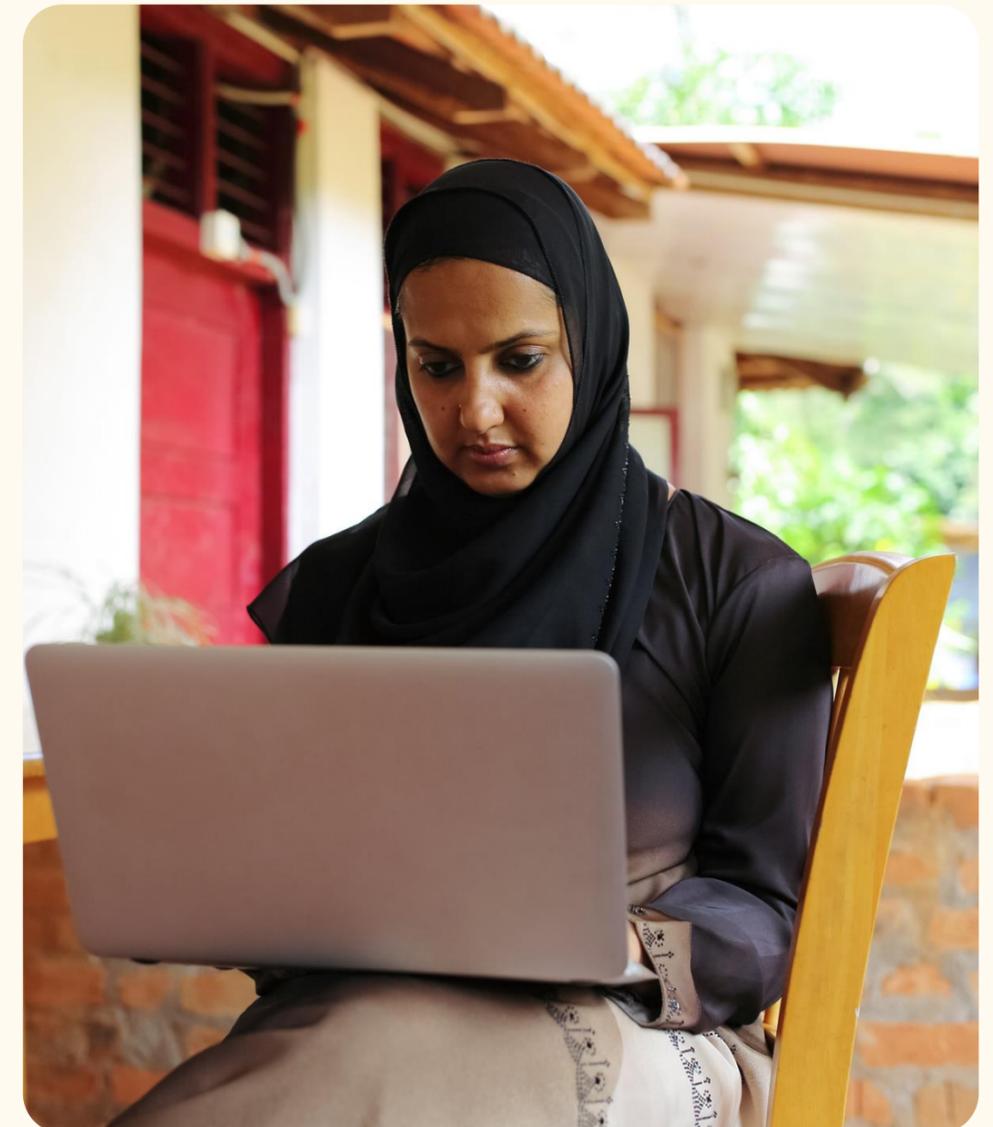- AI training and skill development remains a large gap with many relying on self-learning.

'Widespread' AI adoption: by organization type

3 Adoption is practitioner-driven, not top-down

- Practitioners are adopting AI without waiting for institutional roll out
  - Only around a third of respondents receive organisational AI training **(34%)** - consistent engagement in AI usage and conversations looks linked to organsiational training
- Low technical barriers are enabling organic, sector-wide diffusion
  - Adoption is emerging through hands on experimentation and peer learning
- AI is expanding what practitioners can do, not just how fast they work, extending their own operational capacity.
  - Through analysis, forecasting and sense making

4 Regional adoption is shifting

- **Asia-Pacific** is now the fastest-growing region in terms of AI adoption
- **Sub-Saharan Africa** and **Latin America** both show meaningful AI movement
- However, widely adopted and integrated AI sits **below 10%** in every region
- AI policies are a lagging indicator. Every region uses AI more than it governs it.
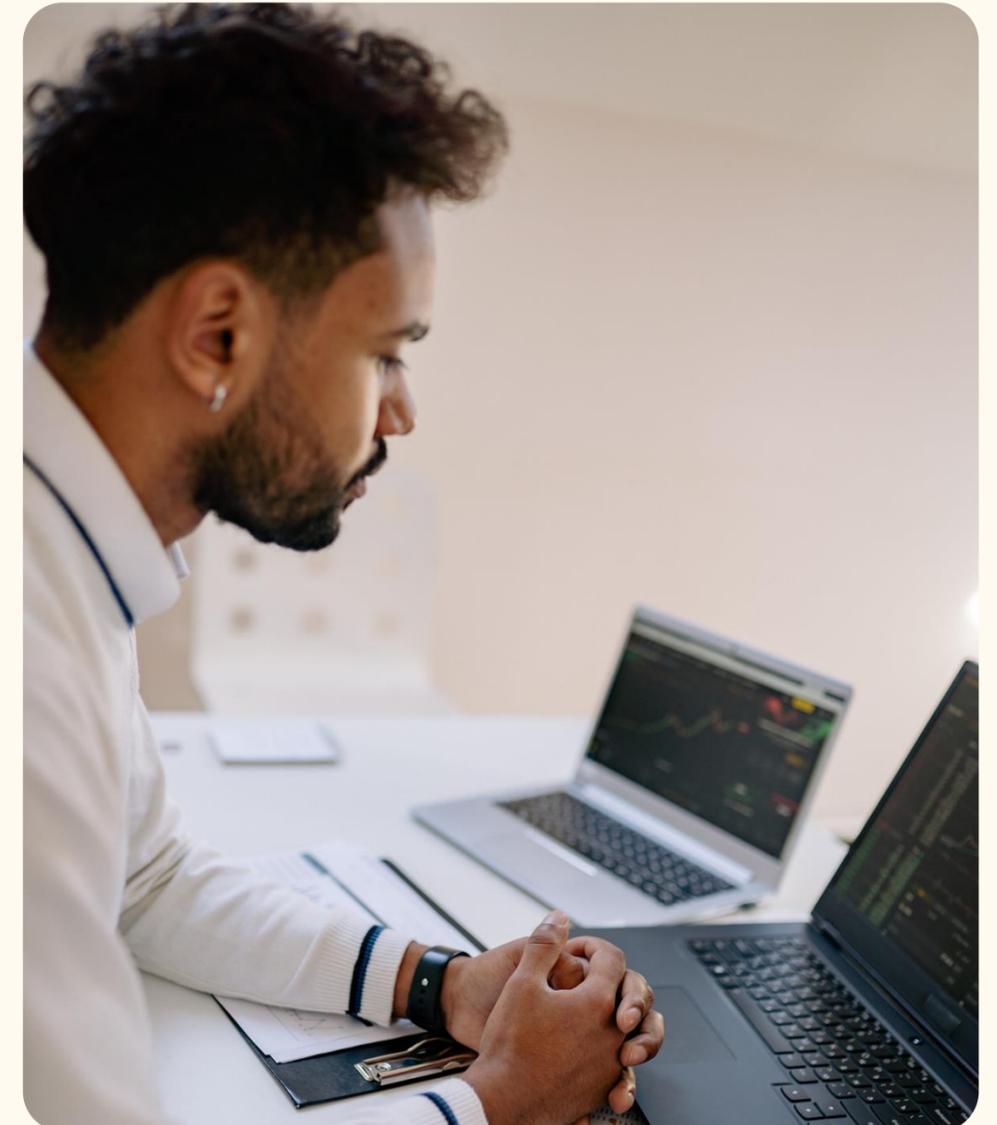
AI adoption among organizations

Region	2025	2026	Change
Asia-Pacific	45.6%	58.4%	+12.7pp
Latin America & Caribbean	50.5%	56.2%	+5.8pp
Global / Multi-region	66.1%	71.7%	+5.5pp
Sub-Saharan Africa	50.7%	54.9%	+4.2pp
MENA	47.2%	47.9%	+0.6pp

5 Moving humanitarian AI from individual practice to sector transformation

- AI is being more positively perceived with **64.5%** agreeing AI has improved operational efficiency and **54%** believing it has led to better decision-making
- AI resistance is softening in most regions as adoption grows
- Local NGOs show stronger confidence in AI's decision-making value (**11.3%**) than INGOs, despite comparable adoption rates
- AI risks including rapid rise of agents (**29.8%** using custom-built agents), data protection, and environmental impact - remain large concerns for humanitarians

Panel reflections

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Reflection on collective learning & action

We invite you to reflect and consider...

- What can you do today to support your individual or organisational AI journey?
- Could you set a follow-up action for yourself?

Upcoming AI events

Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week

- **Bridging digital divides: centring local leadership in humanitarian AI development (remote).** 3 March, 11:00-12:00 UTC.

  With Musaab Abdalhadi, Ali Al Mokdad, Lucy Hall, Gülsüm Özkaya & Ka Man Parkinson.

- **The State of Learning and Development in the Nonprofit Sector (remote).** 5 March, 14:00-15:30 UTC+1.

  With the Training Providers Forum

Upcoming AI events

Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week

- **GANNET Crisis Response: AI-Powered Quantitative Analysis using HAPI Data (Remote)** 4 March, 14:00-14:30 UTC+1

- **From Primary Data Collection to Analysis: A Unified Human-in-the-Loop Ecosystem for Humanitarian Data (Hybrid)** 12 March, 11:00-12:30 UTC+1

Thank you for joining us!

- **Feedback:** Please complete the short survey on Zoom
- **Recording:** This will be available on the HLA YouTube channel within 24 hours and emailed to you
- **Executive summary:** This will be emailed to all attendees once published
- **HPass digital badge:** will be emailed next week

Humanitarian Tech Series
Beyond the hype: Ground truth on AI across the humanitarian sector
Webinar attendee