

Dev Barometer Q1 2026:

Women's Career Agency and the AI Accountability Gap in Software Development

In January 2026, the Dev Barometer Q1 surveyed 1,329 software developers across 61 countries to assess AI's impact on engineering teams. In this edition, women developers report greater career autonomy, even as confidence in AI gender fairness trails overall sentiment. More broadly, developers report rising individual accountability for AI outcomes and persistent validation pressures tied to time and accuracy. At the same time, seniority is giving way to access, experimentation, and team culture as the primary drivers of AI advantage.

Women in Tech: Career Autonomy



of women in tech say AI has expanded their ability to shape career growth

AI Boosts Women's Career Agency, But Trust in Fairness Trails

Two-thirds of women in tech say AI has expanded their ability to shape career direction and professional growth, with 84% reporting improved career momentum linked to AI skills, signaling clear professional upside from adoption.

However, confidence in the gender fairness of AI-supported tools stands at 56% among women, compared to 62% overall. A measurable trust gap persists even as usage increases.

One-third of women report that AI has improved their visibility or access to opportunities. Yet most describe AI's impact on visibility as neutral (30%) or unclear (26%), indicating that amplification depends heavily on organizational context. Women point to flexible work policies (36%), transparent promotion criteria (27%), and active sponsorship (16%) as the clearest drivers of advancement, not AI adoption itself.

Dev Barometer survey, conducted in January 2026 by BairesDev. Respondent base = 1,329 developers from 61 countries.



1 in 3

women report that AI adoption has improved their visibility and access to opportunities.

Who's Responsible for AI Outcomes?

Developer responsibility

51%

Company responsibility

19%

Unclear ownership

11%

AI Accountability Is Shifting to Developers. Governance Isn't Keeping Up

As AI use accelerates, responsibility is concentrating at the individual level. 51% of developers say accountability sits primarily with them, while only 19% view it as a team responsibility. Another 11% report that ownership remains unclear. The data suggests company-wide accountability norms are evolving more slowly than AI adoption itself. Individual interviews suggest organizations lack time to test new technologies or fully define guidelines before adopting AI tools for development teams.

Most developers believe AI's benefits outweigh its overhead (58%) and feel confident using AI at work (88%), yet teams consistently report low confidence in their ability to validate AI outputs. Among those uncertain about their confidence in AI, 68% cite accuracy or reliability concerns as the primary limiter.

The top barriers to validating AI output are time pressure and deadlines, insufficient test coverage or data, and tool or platform limitations. This validation challenge helps explain why over half of engineers (56%) rank critical evaluation of AI output as the defining baseline skill for 2026.

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Top Barriers to Validating AI Output

Time pressure and deadlines

20%

Insufficient test coverage or data

16%

Tool or platform limitations

12%



What Drives Who Benefits from AI

Access to tools, infrastructure, and training



Willingness to experiment



Seniority



Over Two-Thirds of Engineers Say Access to Tools and Training Matters More Than Seniority

AI advantage is increasingly shaped by environment, not hierarchy. Access to tools, infrastructure and training rank the highest predictors of AI benefit, followed by individual markers.

Among women, organizational culture and team norms (49%) rank ahead of seniority (38%) as a determining factor. AI impact depends on enablement and experimentation, not title alone.

Key Takeaways

Women developers report increased career agency through AI adoption, yet they consistently point to organizational factors — flexible work policies, transparent promotion criteria, and active sponsorship — as the primary drivers of advancement.

At the same time, confidence in the gender fairness of AI-supported management tools lags behind usage, revealing a trust gap that persists as adoption accelerates.

More broadly, developers are absorbing individual accountability for AI outcomes faster than organizations are providing the validation infrastructure and time needed to carry that responsibility safely. The open question for 2026 is whether organizations will match AI adoption speed with the enablement, standards, and transparency required, or whether pressure to ship faster will continue to outpace developers' ability to validate AI-generated work.

About the Dev Barometer Survey

The Dev Barometer is a quarterly survey that dives into the minds of software engineers. The Q1 2026 edition surveyed 1,329 developers across 61 countries in January 2026. Of them, 47% had 8+ years of professional experience, 25% were women.

For additional information about the Dev Barometer or to request interviews, contact press@bairesdev.com

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