

STANDARD SETTING



2026 ETHICS SURVEY RESULTS



Hong Kong Institute of
Certified Public Accountants
香港會計師公會

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE INSTITUTE'S ETHICS COMMITTEE

Digital transformation continues to reshape workplaces, business models, economies, and society at large. Since the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants' ("HKICPA" or "Institute") last Ethics Survey in 2024, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies into professional activities has accelerated significantly. These technologies are transforming how professional accountants (PAs) perform their work, while also introducing new ethical risks and considerations.

Against this backdrop, the Institute conducted the Ethics Survey 2026 to better understand how these changes are influencing the ethical attitudes and behavior of PAs in Hong Kong. The findings provide insights into how the profession is adapting to a rapidly evolving technological environment and the ethical implications associated with these changes.

The Ethics Survey 2026 focuses on the following three key areas:

Use of technology at workplace How PAs' use of technology has evolved over the past two years and the ethical challenges encountered in professional work	General ethics Ethical issues faced by PAs amid evolving business contexts	Sustainability ethics PAs' awareness of ethics standards relevant to sustainability reporting and assurance, and any issues arising in implementation of these new standards
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In 2026, **174** completed responses were recorded for the survey. The respondents' feedback has been summarized in this report. We extend our sincere appreciation to all respondents and to all individuals and organizations that supported or promoted participation in the survey. The results of the survey will enable the Ethics Committee to identify emerging issues and areas requiring further attention.

Maria Xuereb
Chair, HKICPA Ethics Committee

HIGHLIGHTS OF ETHICS SURVEY 2026

Use of technology at workplace

- ❖ **Technology use has shifted significantly towards AI-enabled working practices.** Generative AI to prepare documentation has become a mainstream tool for professional activities, while AI-enabled tools have also grown significantly. This suggests that AI is increasingly complementing, and in some cases, transforming the traditional ways of performing professional work.
- ❖ **PAs are demonstrating more responsible use of technology.** Evaluating outputs, validating input data and assessing the suitability of technology before relying on them in professional work are now more common practices. This trend reflects a growing awareness of the importance of professional competence and due care, including the need to exercise professional judgement and avoid undue reliance on technology outputs.
- ❖ **Technology-related ethical risks remain evident.** Over-reliance on technology outputs, inadequate competence in using technology and concerns over data privacy and security remain among the most commonly identified ethical issues. While awareness of good practices when using technology appears to be increasing, the continued prevalence of reliance on technology outputs without verification suggests that such practices may not yet be consistently applied across all workplaces or professional activities.
- ❖ **Workplace safeguards appear to be broadening.** The survey points to wider use of policies, training, reporting mechanisms and monitoring activities, reflecting a growing awareness of technology-related ethical risks and the importance of addressing them through enhanced governance, oversight and organizational culture.

General ethics

- ❖ **Ethical awareness appears to be increasing.** Fewer PAs reported that no ethical challenges were encountered compared with 2024. While this may indicate a higher incidence of workplace ethical challenges, it may also suggest that PAs are becoming more aware of, and sensitive to, ethical concerns in their day-to-day work. This is supported by the results of this survey, which indicate increased implementation of safeguards to address ethical concerns, including training and awareness programmes, and policies and guidelines. In addition, recent ethics-related misconduct cases within the profession may have influenced PAs' awareness of ethical risks and responsibilities.
- ❖ **Confidentiality, integrity and objectivity remain key ethical concerns.** The most commonly identified ethical issues are improper use or disclosure of sensitive/confidential information, undue bias and conflict of interest. These findings underscore the importance of upholding the fundamental principles as PAs take on broader responsibilities and navigate increasingly complex business environments.
- ❖ **Workplace pressures and expanding responsibilities are key causes of ethical issues.** Pressure from management, pressure from stakeholders and limited resources were among the leading causes of ethical issues identified. Ethical challenges may become more pronounced as PAs take on broader responsibilities across increasingly diverse areas of professional activity.

- ❖ **Responses to ethical issues are becoming more responsive.** Escalation, consultation and reporting mechanisms feature more prominently when ethical issues arise. Declines in “No action taken” and “Resigned from the employing organization” suggest a positive trend towards greater engagement with ethical concerns.
- ❖ **The HKICPA’s *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* (HKICPA Code) continues to play an important role in ethical decision-making.** PAs drew on both professional judgement and formal sources of guidance, with the HKICPA Code ranking second after professional judgement and experience. This suggests that PAs recognize the HKICPA Code’s value as a practical tool for applying the conceptual framework to address ethical risks.

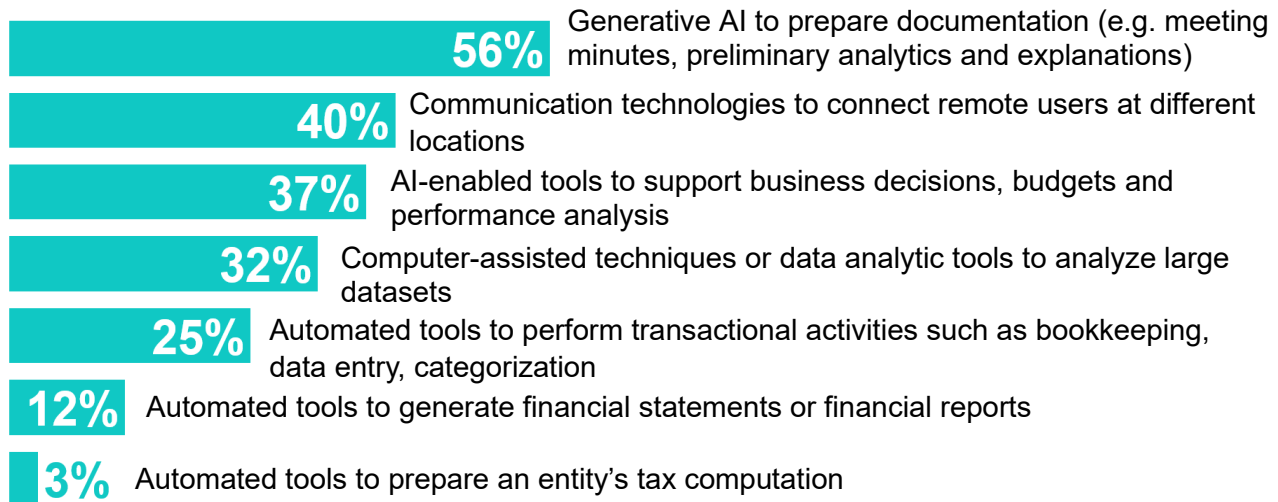
Sustainability ethics

- **Sustainability-related responsibilities are becoming increasingly relevant to PAs.** Although most PAs were not directly involved in sustainability-related activities, a meaningful proportion are involved in supporting, reviewing or approving sustainability-related information. This suggests that sustainability considerations are extending beyond specialist teams and becoming relevant across a broader range of PAs’ responsibilities, highlighting the importance of possessing the necessary competence and adhering to the fundamental principles when undertaking sustainability-related work.
- **Data reliability, professional competence and uncertainty over roles and responsibilities are key ethical challenges.** These findings highlight the importance of robust training to address competence gaps, appropriate governance arrangements to define roles and responsibilities, and stringent internal controls to ensure the reliability, completeness and accuracy of sustainability data, thereby supporting PAs to conduct sustainability reporting and assurance activities.

FINDINGS

1. Ethical issues from PAs' use of technology and safeguards at workplace

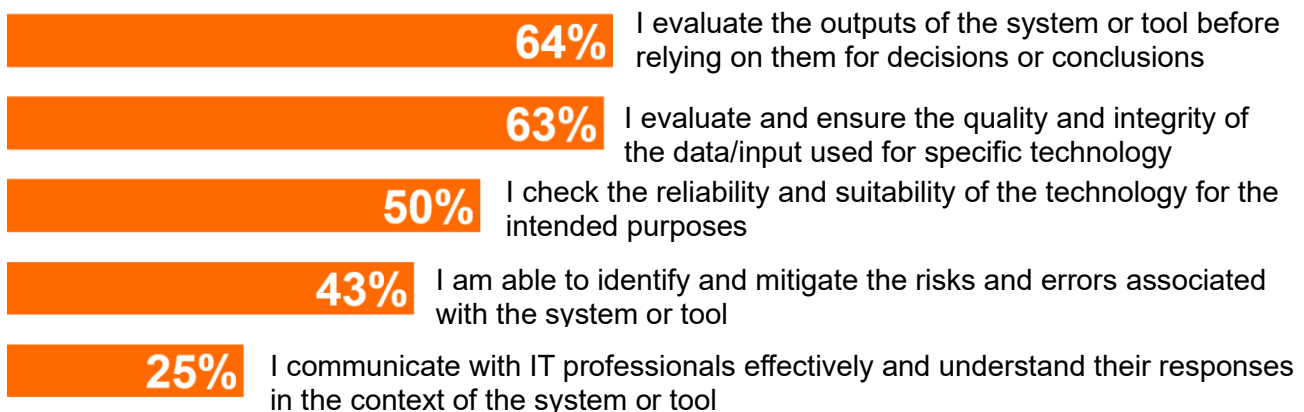
In the last twelve months, have you used any of the following technologies and their outputs to carry out professional activities at work?



Generative AI has become the most commonly selected technology, with 56% of respondents using it to prepare documentation such as meeting minutes, preliminary analytics and explanations. This marks a notable rise by 52% from 4% in 2024, indicating that generative AI is becoming more integrated into everyday professional activities, particularly for drafting, summarizing, and preparing initial analyses.

This trend extends to decision support functions: the proportion using AI-enabled tools for business decision-making and performance analysis climbed from 14% in 2024 to 37% this year, suggesting that AI adoption is broadening across a wider range of work-related activities.

How do you use technology and its output in your professional activities?



Majority of respondents indicated that they evaluate the technology outputs before relying on them for decisions or conclusions, as well as evaluate and ensure the quality and integrity of data/input used for specific technologies. These increases are encouraging, as they suggest that more PAs are taking active steps to evaluate technology outputs and the quality of underlying data before relying on them. This suggests greater awareness of the need to exercise professional judgement and avoid undue reliance on technology outputs when making professional decisions. However, less than one-half of respondents indicated that they are able to identify and mitigate risks and errors associated with systems or tools, while only around one-quarter reported effective communication with IT professionals, indicating room for further development in these areas.

In the last twelve months, have you encountered or observed any ethical issues related to technology usage in your workplace?

Majority of respondents (2026: 56%; 2024: 60%) reported that they did not encounter or observe any ethical issues related to technology usage in their work environment. For those who did, the three most frequently reported ethical concerns remained unchanged between 2026 and 2024, as set out below.



Reliability

Relying upon the technology outputs without checking or verifying their accuracy or reliability

Professional competence

Using technology without having the necessary knowledge or skills to operate it effectively and appropriately for the intended purposes

Confidentiality

Inadequate protection on the privacy and security of the data or information processed by technology

Which of the following safeguards does your workplace put in place to mitigate ethical threats arising from using technology at work?

Rules and controls

44% (2024: 19%)

Implementing clear and comprehensive ethical guidelines and policies for technology use

44% (2024: 45%)

Establishing access controls and user authentication mechanisms to prevent unauthorized use

People and culture

37% (2024: 11%)

Providing regular training and awareness programmes on ethical considerations related to technology

31% (2024: 5%)

Encouraging a culture of open communication and reporting to address ethical concerns related to technology

Oversight

25% (2024: 4%)

Conducting regular audits & monitoring activities to detect and address any potential ethical violations

25% (2024: 16%)

None or I don't know

This question aims to understand how widely each safeguard is implemented in workplaces to address ethical threats arising from using technology. In 2024, the question asked respondents to identify the single most prominent safeguard in place, whereas in 2026 it asked respondents to indicate all safeguards that their workplace has implemented. Accordingly, the 2026 percentages are not directly comparable with those from 2024.

The 2026 results provide a positive indication that organizations are becoming increasingly attuned to technology-related ethical risks, and the importance of addressing them through enhanced governance, oversight and organizational culture. More than 40% of workplaces have now implemented clear and comprehensive ethical guidelines and policies for technology use, as well as access controls and user authentication mechanisms to prevent unauthorized use. These patterns suggest that many organizations have implemented a broader and more layered set of safeguards, extending beyond basic access controls, reflecting stronger recognition of the range of measures needed to manage technology-related ethical risks.

Yet broader safeguards have not eliminated technology-related ethical issues, which continued to surface in 2026. This likely reflects the sharp rise in the use of AI and other technologies since 2024, which may have expanded exposure to technology-related risks. At the same time, the wider adoption of enhanced policies, training and awareness programmes (37%) may have heightened awareness of these risks and encouraged the identification and reporting of ethical issues when they arise. On balance, these survey results may signal greater awareness and vigilance around technology-related risks, rather than a decline in workplace ethics or controls.

2. Ethical issues from PAs' expanded responsibilities, causes and actions taken

As the role of PAs continues to evolve beyond traditional financial stewardship, many are taking on broader responsibilities in areas such as sustainability/ESG reporting, oversight of technology, data governance and stakeholder engagement.

From your perspective, what ethical issues have PAs in business (PAIBs) encountered from these expanded responsibilities over the past twelve months? What are the causes?

Top three ethical issues



Improper use or disclosure of sensitive/confidential information **21%**
(2024: 8%)



Undue bias **17%**
(2024: 14%)



Conflict of interest **17%**
(2024: 25%)

As PAs took on expanded responsibilities in areas such as technology, sustainability, data governance and stakeholder engagement, many reported that they encountered more than one ethical issue in the course of their work. In 2026, the three most frequently reported ethical issues together accounted for more than half of all responses, with confidentiality and objectivity continuing to feature prominently. This underscores the growing complexity PAs face in exercising professional judgement and safeguarding information as their roles evolve.

Workplace pressures emerge as the most significant driver of ethical issues arising from the PAs' expanded responsibilities. Pressure from management and stakeholders/clients ranked among the leading causes, alongside limited resources for thorough review and assessment of these broader duties. Together, these indications suggest that ethical challenges may become more pronounced as PAs assume broader responsibilities across increasingly diverse areas of professional activities.

* This option was not available in the 2024 survey.

Common causes

Pressure from management (time; performance targets) **24%**
(2024: 27%)

Limited resources for thorough review and assessment **20%**
(2024: N/A*)

Pressure from stakeholders/clients **14%**
(2024: 17%)

How were the ethical issues addressed?

Top three actions taken



Reported to the board, audit committee or appropriate level of management **30%**
(2024: 36%)



Sought advice from internal compliance, legal or ethics functions **19%**
(2024: 4%)



Sought advice from external parties (e.g. professional bodies, legal counsel) **14%**
(2024: 10%)

No action taken

2026
6%
(2024: 11%)



Resigned from the organization

2026
5%
(2024: 9%)



The 2026 results indicate a continued shift towards more responsive actions to ethical issues. While reporting matters to the board, audit committee or appropriate level of management remained the most common action, respondents were also more likely to seek advice from internal and external sources, alongside a reduction in actions such as “taking no action” or “resigning from the employing organization”. Taken together, these findings suggest a continuing trend towards greater engagement with ethical issues, and increased use of escalation, consultation and reporting mechanisms rather than remaining passive when ethical concerns arise.

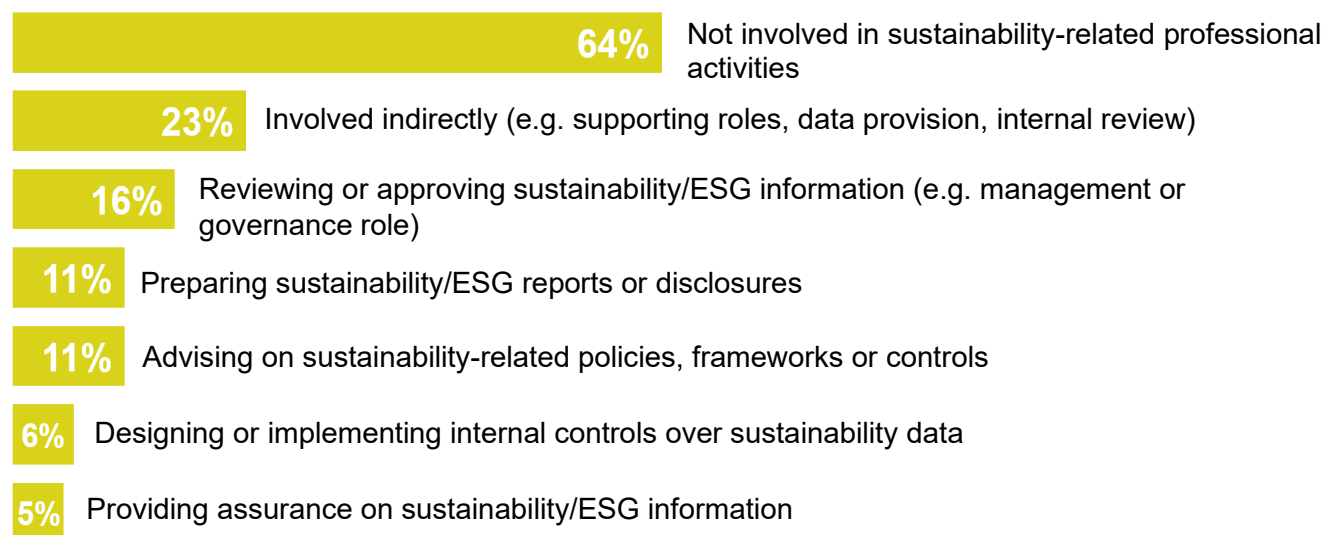
Which sources of guidance were consulted or referenced?



The top three sources of guidance indicate that respondents draw on both personal and institutional sources when addressing ethical issues. This suggests that ethical decision-making is not based solely on individual judgement but is also supported by professional standards and organizational governance frameworks. The high ranking of the HKICPA Code is particularly encouraging, as it reflects that respondents recognize its value as a practical tool for applying the conceptual framework to address ethical risks in the workplace.

3. Ethical challenges in sustainability-related professional activities

In the last twelve months, have you been involved in the sustainability-related professional activities?



Sustainability-related responsibilities appear to be gaining relevance within the profession: Although most PAs are not yet directly involved in sustainability-related professional activities, a meaningful proportion already support, review or approve sustainability/ESG information. As this area of work continues to grow, professional competence, objectivity and integrity will remain essential ensuring its quality and reliability.

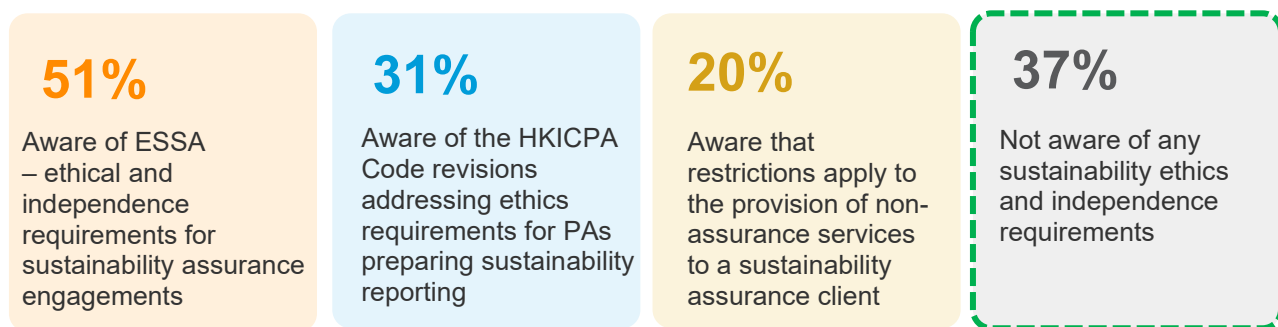
Which ethical challenges have you encountered in sustainability-related activities?

Among respondents who reported involvement in sustainability-related activities in the last twelve months, 10% indicated that they did not encounter or anticipate any ethical challenges or difficulties when carrying out the relevant work. For those who did, the frequently reported ethical concerns are categorized by the following fundamental principles.

Fundamental principle	%	Ethical challenge encountered
Professional competence and due care	25%	Concerns about the reliability, completeness or accuracy of sustainability data
	18%	Competence or capability concerns when asked to perform sustainability-related work
	14%	Uncertainty about roles and responsibilities in sustainability reporting or assurance engagements
Integrity and professional behavior	12%	Pressure to present sustainability information in an overly favourable manner (e.g. greenwashing)
Objectivity	12%	Insufficient clarity in applying independence requirements to sustainability engagements
	9%	Conflicts of interest between sustainability reporting, advisory and assurance roles

The results highlight the importance of robust training to address competence gaps, appropriate governance arrangements to define roles and responsibilities, and stringent internal controls to ensure the reliability, completeness and accuracy of sustainability data, thereby supporting PAs to conduct sustainability reporting and assurance activities.

How aware are you of the ethical and independence requirements applicable to sustainability reporting and assurance?



Awareness of the new sustainability ethics framework is emerging, although detailed familiarity is still developing ahead of the 31 December 2026 effective date. This indicates a continued need to support understanding of the ethical and independence requirements, so practitioners are prepared when the standards take effect.

Following the issuance of the *Ethics Standards for Sustainability Assurance (ESSA) and the Other Revisions to the Code Relating to Sustainability Assurance and Reporting* in October 2025, the Institute has made available a range of resources to support PAs in implementing the Sustainability Ethics Standards, as well as the Sustainability Assurance and Reporting Standards. All these resources are featured in the [HKICPA Sustainability Information Centre](#).

HKICPA Sustainability
Information Centre

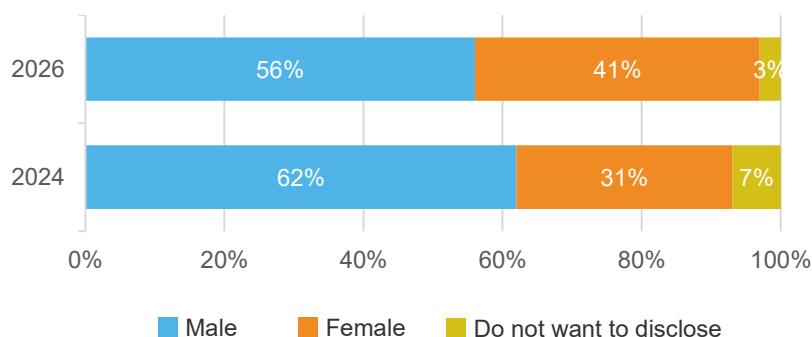


4. Demographic information

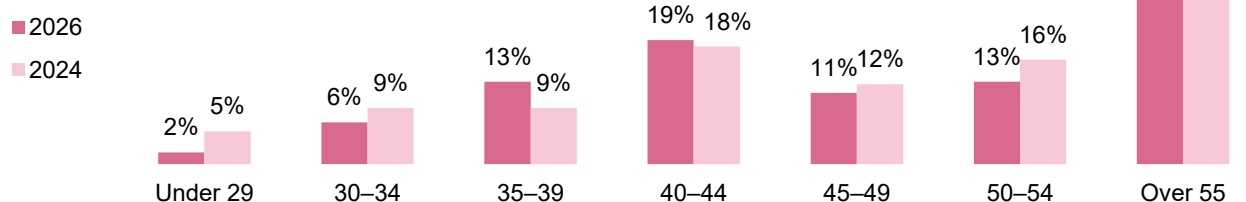
Completed responses received

174
(2024: 139)

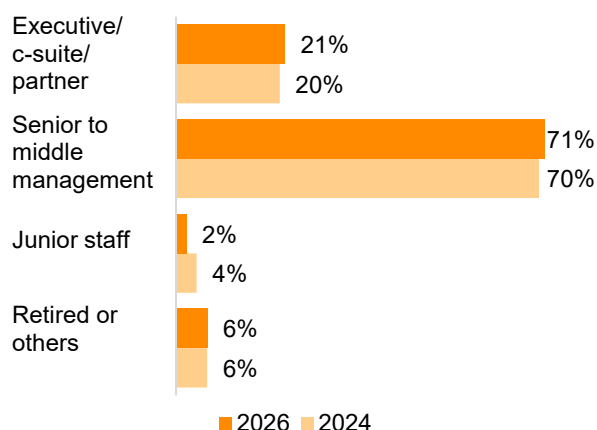
Gender distribution



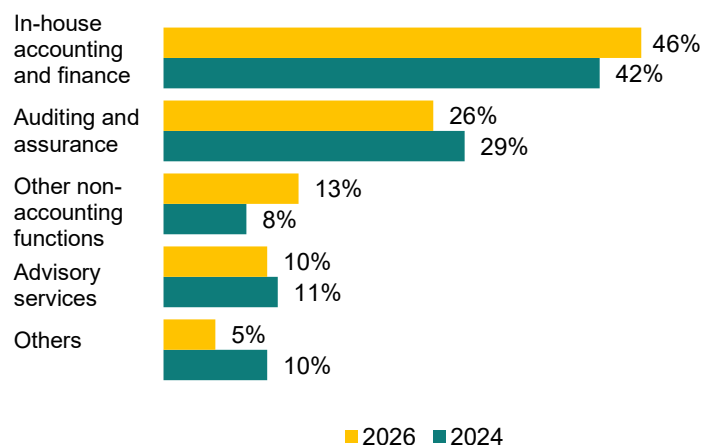
Age distribution



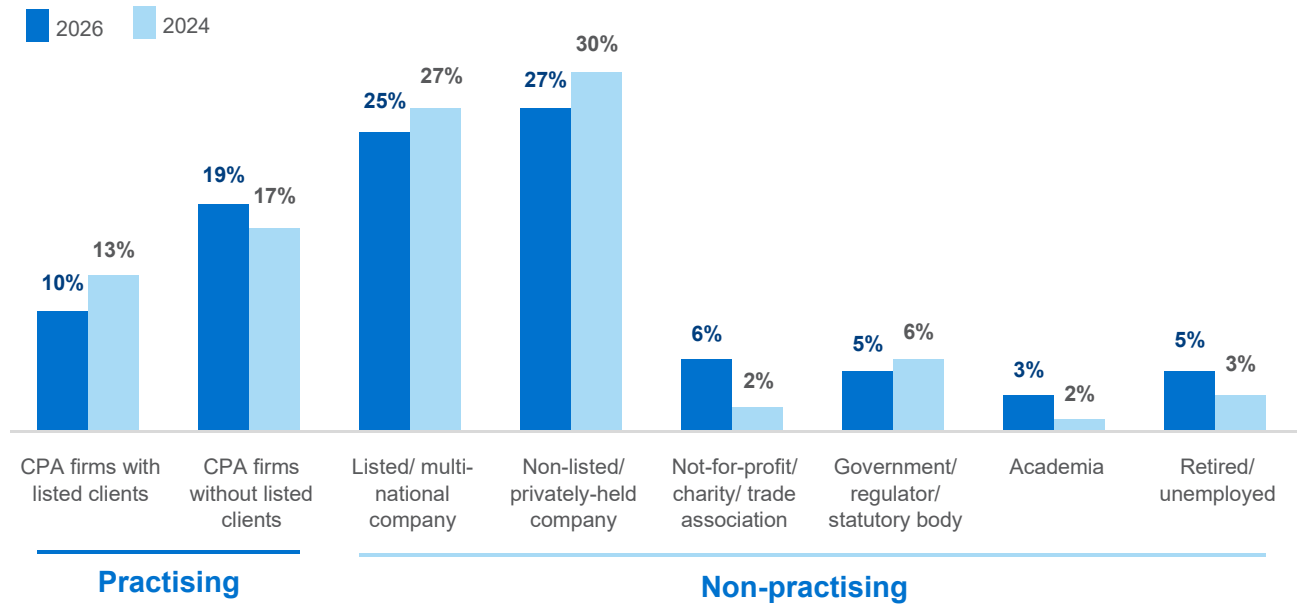
Job position



Job responsibilities



Nature of employing organization



CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The Ethics Survey 2026 highlights how digital transformation, expanding professional responsibilities and sustainability-related developments are shaping the ethical landscape for PAs in Hong Kong. Compared with 2024, the results show a clear shift towards AI-enabled working practices, with generative AI and other AI-enabled tools becoming increasingly integrated into professional activities. The findings indicate positive developments in several areas, such as greater use of review and validation practices when applying technology in professional activities, broader implementation of workplace safeguards, and a shift towards more responsive actions when ethical issues arise.

At the same time, concerns relating to workplace and stakeholder pressures, data reliability and professional competence associated with PAs' expanding responsibilities remain important areas of focus. The findings also highlight the importance of continued efforts by firms, employers, the Institute and PAs to support ethical decision-making and maintain public trust as the role of PAs continues to evolve.

Following the findings in the survey, it is recommended that:

Firms and employers to:

- ❖ Establish clear governance and accountability frameworks for the use of AI and emerging technologies, including validating data inputs, evaluating technology outputs and exercising professional judgements when AI-enabled tools are used to support decisions or conclusions.
- ❖ Support employees through training and awareness programmes on responsible use of technology, including evaluating outputs, validating data inputs and understanding the limitations of technology-enabled tools.
- ❖ For sustainability reporting or assurance activities, establish appropriate governance arrangements with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, provide robust training to address competence gaps, and implement stringent internal controls to support the reliability, completeness and accuracy of sustainability data.
- ❖ Use recurring monitoring and incident reporting to identify whether safeguards are working in practice, particularly in relation to the protection of sensitive information, rather than relying only on the existence of policies.
- ❖ Foster an ethical culture that encourages consultation, escalation and reporting of ethical concerns, particularly where workplace pressures, stakeholder pressures or limited resources may affect judgement in carrying out professional activities.

The Institute to:

- ❖ Continue developing practical guidance on application of the HKICPA Code to emerging areas such as AI-enabled technologies and sustainability-related activities, including examples of common ethical dilemmas and appropriate safeguards.

- ❖ Continue providing accessible ethics-related learning resources and educational opportunities (e.g. webinars and other professional development initiatives) to support members' ongoing understanding and application of the HKICPA Code.

PAs to:

- ❖ Continue exercising professional judgement and maintaining competence and due care when using technology in professional activities, including evaluating outputs, validating data inputs, avoiding undue reliance on technology-generated information, and considering limitations and uncertainties of technology-enabled tools.
- ❖ Remain alert to ethical threats arising from evolving roles and expanding responsibilities, and consider how these may affect compliance with the fundamental principles of the HKICPA Code (e.g. confidentiality and objectivity), and whether appropriate safeguards are needed.
- ❖ Take proactive action when ethical concerns arise by using appropriate escalation, consultation and reporting mechanisms.

Reminder on ethics-related continuing professional development (CPD) requirements

Under the revised [Statement 1.500 Continuing Professional Development](#), all HKICPA members are required to complete a minimum of two verifiable hours annually on ethics-related CPD activities:

- Responsible persons of registered public interest entity auditors and practising certificate holders (Effective date: 1 December 2025);
- All HKICPA members (Effective date: 1 December 2026).

Members should take the ethics-related CPD requirements into account when planning their ongoing professional development activities to ensure compliance with the revised requirements.

Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants

37th Floor, Wu Chung House

213 Queen's Road East, Wanchai, Hong Kong

Tel: (852) 2287 7228

Fax: (852) 2865 6603

Website: www.hkicpa.org.hk