

# Brain Drain

Where Austria's AI talent goes, and why

# 26.1 %

of NLP / GenAI leaves Austria

***Retention is solid at 67%. The real story is frontier leakage: 18% of Build, 26% of NLP / GenAI, half gone within twelve months.***

**67.4 %**Retained in  
Austria**13.1 %**Brain drain  
rate**18.0 %**Build-tier  
drain rate**48 %**Leave within  
first 12 months

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The brain-drain narrative is real but overstated. Austria retains nearly seven in ten AI career trajectories, and the cohort drain rate is actually falling — from 20 % (2018 cohort) to 17 % (2022 cohort). But the risk is concentrated where it matters most: Build-tier roles show an 18 % drain rate, NLP & Generative AI reaches 26 %, and half of all international departures happen within the first 12 months. The policy response must be targeted, not generalised — front-loaded retention for frontier roles, not blanket subsidies.**

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

**Prioritise frontier-role retention.** Build (18.0 %), NLP/GenAI (26.1 %), and Core ML Research (17.7 %) are Austria's most vulnerable capability pockets. Dedicated retention instruments — compute access, research sabbaticals, international collaboration grants — would yield the highest strategic return.

**Front-load the retention investment.** 48 % of brain drain happens within 12 months. Onboarding, mentorship, and promotion clarity must start in month one. The 3–8 year experience band is the retention battleground.

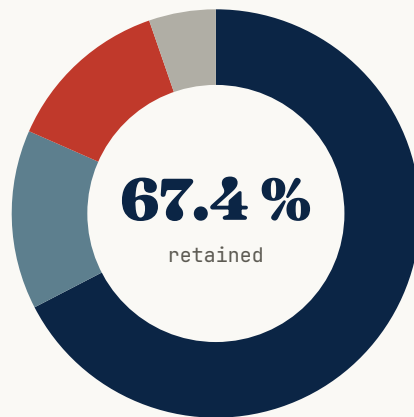
**Differentiate by destination corridor.** Germany requires ecosystem stickiness — career options, cluster depth. US and Switzerland require compensation competitiveness. Don't apply one-size-fits-all retention to different pull dynamics.

**Build ecosystem density as a structural hedge.** More AI employers, more career options, more cluster depth. This makes Austria organically stickier by reducing the career premium of relocation.

## EXHIBIT 3.1

# Retention Overview — The Big Picture

**The brain-drain narrative requires calibration, not alarm. On a full-sample basis, Austria retains 67.4 % of observed AI career trajectories — nearly seven in ten. Brain drain accounts for 13.1 % (2,266 trajectories), domestic churn for 14.2 % (2,469), and 5.3 % are unclassified. The Core AI sample (Build + Enable + Integrate, N = 12,350) tells virtually the same story: 67.9 % retained, 13.3 % brain drain.**



Source: Revelio Labs via WRDS · austria\_located segment

## KEY FINDINGS

- Roughly one in eight AI trajectories leaves Austria — meaningful but not dominant. The retention rate (67 %) is comparable to other mid-sized European economies with open labour markets.
- Domestic churn (14.2 %) is nearly as large as international outflow (13.1 %), indicating that Austria has a functioning internal AI labour market where professionals change employers without leaving the country.
- Core AI and Full AI show almost identical retention patterns (67.9 % vs 67.4 %), meaning the problem is consistent across technical depth levels — it is not a phenomenon of peripheral AI roles alone.

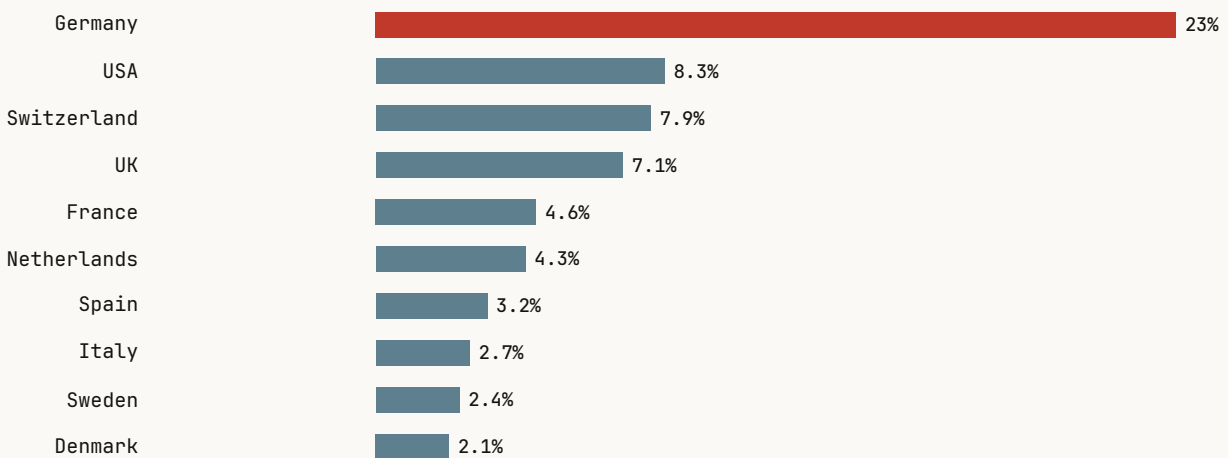
## IMPLICATION

***Frame the narrative accurately: Austria has a retention challenge, not a retention crisis. The data supports targeted intervention for specific risk pockets, not economy-wide alarm or blanket subsidies that would be both expensive and poorly targeted.***

EXHIBIT 3.2

# Where They Go — The Geography of Outflow

**The geography of outflow is policy-relevant because it reveals distinct pull dynamics that require different retention responses. Germany absorbs the largest outflow by far (522 departures, 23 % of all brain drain), driven by deep DACH labour-market integration, language proximity, and ecosystem scale. The United States (188) and Switzerland (178) are smaller in volume but exert the strongest salary pull.**



Source: Revelio Labs via WRDS · share of total brain-drain departures

### KEY FINDINGS

- Germany dominates by volume (522 departures, 23 % of total) but this reflects DACH labour-market integration and geographic proximity, not a pay differential — the median salary uplift to Germany is just +5 %.
- The US (188 departures) and Switzerland (178) are the compensation magnets, with 33 % median salary uplifts and 72–76 % of movers receiving a raise — the corridors where targeted retention tools are most defensible.
- The long tail of European destinations (UK, France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy) collectively absorbs about 440 departures at modest or negative salary changes — suggesting career optionality and lifestyle factors, not compensation, drive these moves.

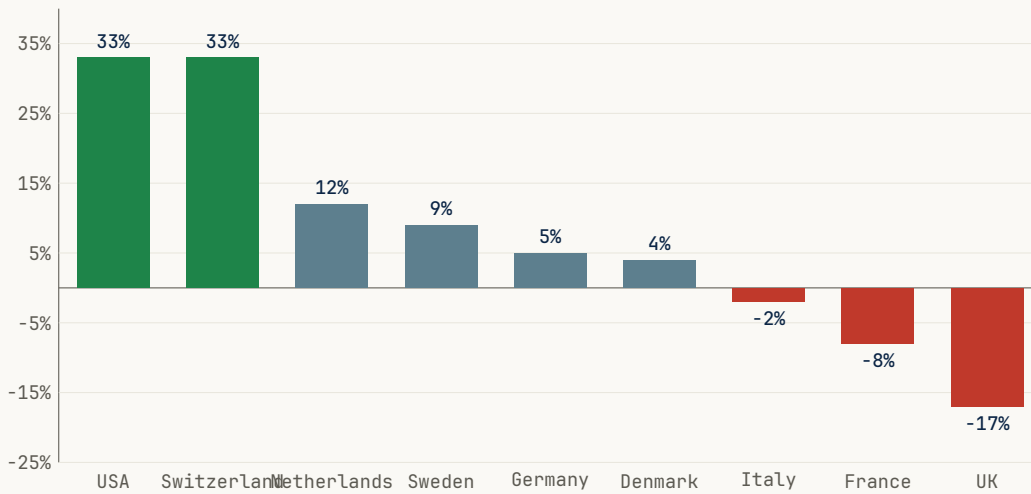
### IMPLICATION

***Differentiate retention strategies by corridor. Germany requires ecosystem stickiness — more career options, deeper AI clusters. US and Switzerland require compensation competitiveness and frontier-research access.***

EXHIBIT 3.3

# The Economics of Leaving — Salary Outcomes by Destination

Salary outcomes vary sharply by destination, and the variation itself is the policy signal. For Germany — the largest destination — the median uplift is effectively marginal at +5 %, with only 53 % of movers receiving any raise. By contrast, the US delivers +33 % (+€25 K) and Switzerland +33 % (+€22 K). Critically, several European destinations come with median pay cuts: the UK (-17 %) and France (-8 %) — implying that international mobility for these corridors reflects career optionality, not financial gain.



Source: Revelio Labs via WRDS · machine-imputed salaries · USD → EUR at ECB annual avg rate

**KEY FINDINGS**

- Germany is an ecosystem pull, not a pay pull: +5 % median uplift, only 53 % get a raise. Talent moves for career options, firm prestige, and DACH market integration — not for money.
- US and Switzerland are the clear compensation-sensitive corridors: +33 % median uplift each, 72–76 % get raises. These movers are economically rational — and the hardest to retain without matching the financial offer.
- Leavers are not Austria's highest earners ex ante. Median pre-departure salary is €75 K for brain drain vs €84 K for stayers — the mid-career, mid-salary cohort is most mobile, not top performers.

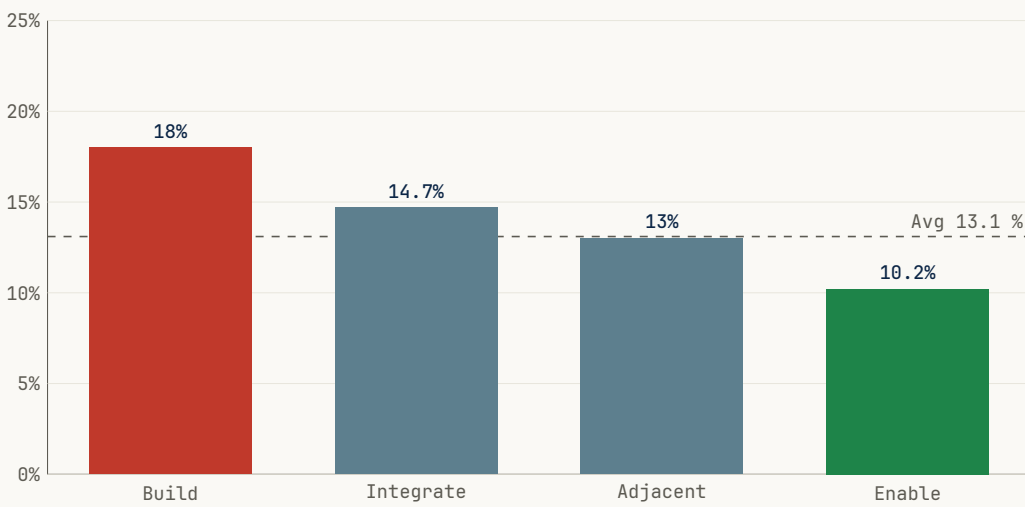
**IMPLICATION**

*Compensation-based retention is only defensible for US- and Switzerland-bound movers — roughly 366 departures, or 16 % of total brain drain. For the remaining 84 %, the answer is ecosystem depth, career progression, and research infrastructure, not salary matching.*

EXHIBIT 3.4

# Who Leaves — The Tier Lens on Brain Drain

The risk profile across tiers is starkly uneven. Build-tier workers — the ML engineers, computer-vision specialists, and AI researchers closest to model creation — show the highest lifetime brain-drain rate at 18.0 %, five percentage points above the average. Enable roles (data engineers, platform builders) are markedly stickier at 10.2 %, likely because infrastructure work is tied to domestic firm context and local data architectures.



Source: Revelio Labs via WRDS · Austria average 13.1 %

### KEY FINDINGS

- Build tier: 18.0 % drain rate — about 5 pp above average. Austria is losing its most strategically valuable cohort at the highest rate. Each Build departure reduces the country's capacity to create, not just apply, AI systems.
- Integrate tier: 14.7 %. These roles sit at the AI / business interface and are internationally substitutable — a data scientist applying AI to supply chains can do so in Munich as easily as in Vienna.
- Enable tier: 10.2 % — the stickiest tier. Infrastructure and platform work is structurally anchored to domestic IT architectures, regulatory systems, and organisational knowledge that does not transfer easily across borders.

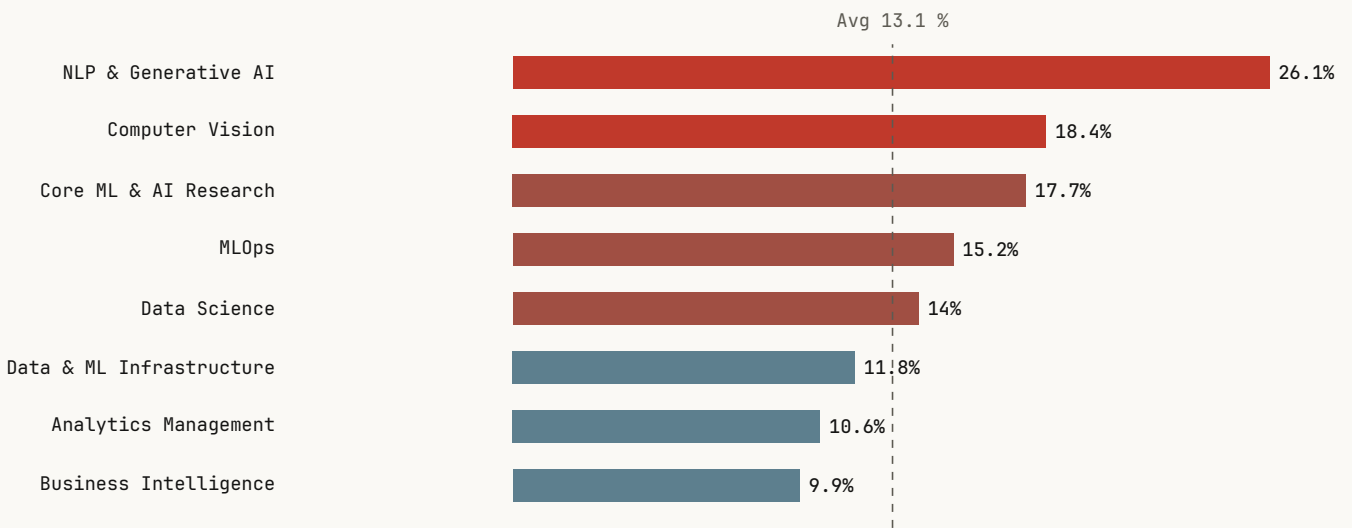
### IMPLICATION

**Adopt a tier-weighted retention strategy. One Build worker anchors more frontier capability than ten Adjacent analytics roles. Policy instruments should be calibrated to strategic value, not headcount volume.**

EXHIBIT 3.5

# Frontier Vulnerability — Subcategory Drain Rates

**Subcategory detail sharpens the tier-level picture into a precise risk map. NLP & Generative AI has the highest drain rate at 26.1%: one in four practitioners leaves Austria. The base is small (about 120 professionals), but that is precisely why each loss matters strategically — Austria cannot afford to lose a quarter of an already tiny frontier.**



Source: Revelio Labs via WRDS · Austria average 13.1 %

**KEY FINDINGS**

- NLP & Generative AI: 26.1 % drain rate — the highest of any subcategory. With only about 120 practitioners, Austria is haemorrhaging the capability most central to the current wave of commercial AI development.
- Core ML & AI Research (17.7 %) and Computer Vision & Autonomous Systems (18.4 %) are also well above the 13.1 % average — these are the roles closest to frontier system development and the hardest to replace domestically.
- Enterprise categories (Data Science, Business Intelligence, Data & ML Infrastructure) lose more people in absolute terms but at lower relative rates (10–16 %) — Austria's challenge is specialised scarcity at the frontier, not broad-based attrition.

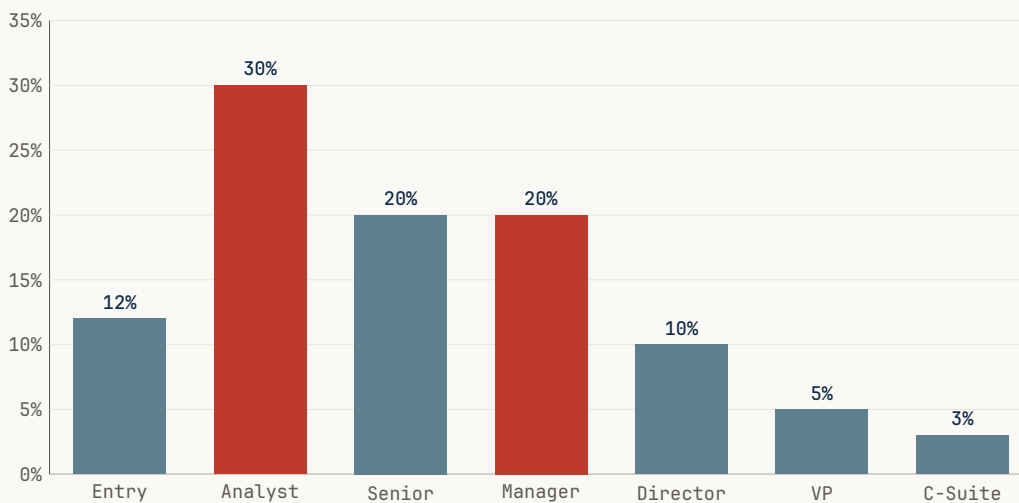
**IMPLICATION**

***Create dedicated retention instruments for the top 3–4 frontier subcategories: competitive compute access, research sabbaticals, international collaboration grants that connect Austrian researchers to global networks without requiring permanent relocation.***

EXHIBIT 3.6

## The Mid-Career Battleground — Seniority of Leavers

**Brain-drain movers have a median seniority of 2.0 (Analyst / Associate) compared with 3.0 among both stayers and domestic churners. Nearly half of all departures come from the Analyst-Associate and Manager levels — the 3–8 year experience band where talent has become globally competitive but has not yet committed to a senior domestic career ladder.**



Source: Revelio Labs via WRDS · share of total brain-drain departures by seniority

### KEY FINDINGS

- Analyst / Associate (30 %) and Manager (20 %) together account for half of all brain-drain departures — the 3–8 year experience band where talent becomes globally mobile but is not yet anchored.
- Median seniority is lower for brain drain (2.0) than for stayers (3.0), confirming that Austria primarily loses people before they settle into senior local career ladders — a pre-anchoring phenomenon.
- Senior-leadership exits (Director, VP, C-suite) are smaller in volume (about 20 %) but disproportionately high-impact: each senior departure removes institutional knowledge, team leadership, and a mentorship multiplier.

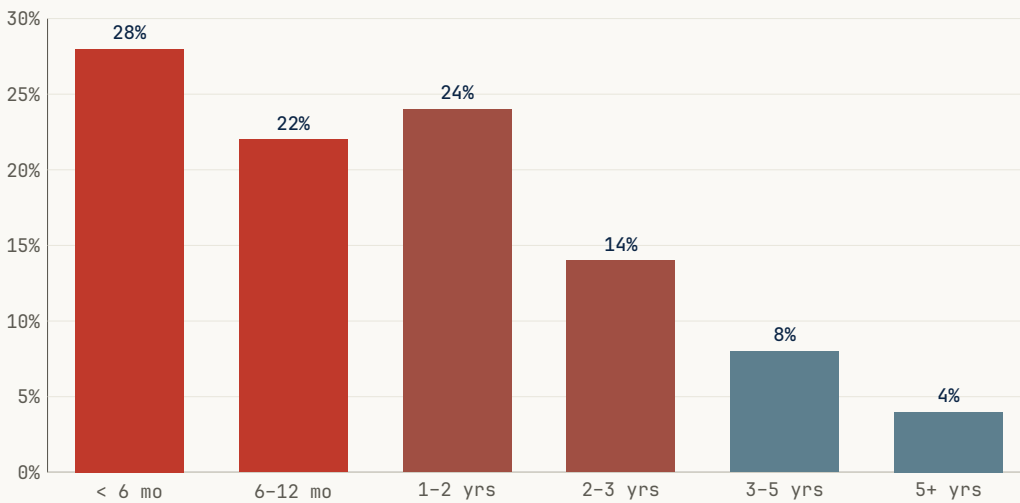
### IMPLICATION

***Target the 3–8 year career window with fast-track promotions, leadership development, international research rotations (that bring people back), and equity-like retention mechanisms.***

EXHIBIT 3.7

# The First-Year Window — When Brain Drain Happens

**Timing is the single most actionable finding. The first year after entry into an Austrian AI role is the critical risk window: 49.9 % of all brain-drain departures happen within 12 months. Build-tier workers leave fastest, with a median tenure of just 0.75 years. Only 3.8 % of brain-drain movers stay five years or more — meaning that if Austria retains someone for three years, it has almost certainly kept them permanently.**



Source: Revelio Labs via WRDS · tenure between hire and observed departure abroad

## KEY FINDINGS

- 49.9 % of brain drain happens within the first year. The retention intervention must start on day one, not at the first performance review — by then, half the potential leavers are already gone.
- Only 3.8 % of brain-drain movers stay 5+ years before leaving. This creates a clear strategic implication: if you can retain someone past year 3, you've almost certainly kept them for good.
- Build-tier workers leave fastest (median tenure 0.75 years before departure). The first nine months are the critical retention window for Austria's most strategically valuable AI professionals.

## IMPLICATION

***Make retention radically front-loaded. Onboarding, mentorship, research access, project ownership, and promotion visibility should all begin in month one. The traditional 'prove yourself for two years, then we'll invest in you' model is precisely wrong for AI talent.***

# Method, sources, definitions.

**This chapter uses Revelio Labs workforce data accessed via WRDS to follow career trajectories of AI workers observed in Austria between 2018 and 2025. Brain drain is defined as a next observed position outside Austria. Domestic churn is a next position inside Austria at a different employer. Two cautions: Revelio is not a census (it reflects professional-profile coverage), and 2025 transitions remain preliminary.**

## PARAMETERS

Primary segment	austria_located (17,348 trajectories)
Core AI sample	Build + Enable + Integrate (12,350 trajectories)
Brain-drain definition	Next observed position outside Austria
Domestic churn	Next position inside Austria, different employer
Salary data	Machine-imputed USD · EUR at ECB annual avg rate
Cohort analysis	By year of first Austrian AI role observed
Seniority scale	1–7 (Entry/Junior to C-suite/Executive)
Destination countries	20+ tracked individually