Pulse

UAE 2026

Workforce Readiness Report

What hiring, skills, and talent mobility reveal about the UAE workforce's ability to adapt to disruption

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“Workforce readiness is central to the UAE’s continued economic growth and global competitiveness. In an era shaped by AI and rapidly changing business models, resilience depends on anticipating demand, equipping people with future-ready skills and enabling talent to move across sectors. The UAE is committed to developing national capabilities while attracting the world’s best talent, creating an agile workforce that can translate technological change into higher productivity, new industries and sustainable opportunities in the UAE.”



H.E. Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi

Minister of Foreign Trade of the UAE

1.

Executive Summary & Key Findings



Ali Matar

Head of LinkedIn MENA and EMEA & LATAM Growth Markets Leader

The UAE labor market entered 2026 from a position of strength, before regional conflict put the resilience of the workforce to the test. Hiring fell to 40% below 2025 levels in April, but by August the decline had narrowed to 18%, and 15 of 17 major industries posted monthly growth. The sharpest phase of the downturn appears to have passed, although hiring activity remains below 2025.

Against that backdrop, the UAE retains important sources of workforce resilience. It remains a net attractor of talent, while career transition data shows that no single prior occupation accounts for more than 3.5% of observed transitions into any of six priority sectors. AI is also reshaping demand rapidly: four of the ten fastest growing occupations are AI-specific, while AI Engineering job demand saw an annual increase of 232.4% in August.

The more consequential question is what these signals reveal about workforce readiness. The 2026 disruption provides a test of capabilities and talent pathways built over time, and shifts in skills, AI, and workforce mobility point to how those foundations will need to evolve as demand changes.

"The strongest labor markets are not simply those that recover quickly, but those that can adapt early. For leaders in the UAE, that means understanding where demand is shifting, building the capabilities the economy will need next, and ensuring that talent can move into emerging areas of opportunity."

Key findings

1. Hiring has moved well beyond its April low, but remains below 2025 levels

2. The rebound is broad-based: 15 of 17 major industries posted monthly growth in August

3. AI is rapidly moving from a specialist capability to a broader workforce requirement

4. Readiness relies on both operational and technological skills

5. The UAE's talent attraction and mobility strengthen its workforce resilience

2.

From disruption to stabilization

Hiring was 3% higher year-on-year in January 2026 and approximately flat in February, before conditions deteriorated sharply in March and April. Amid heightened regional conflict and uncertainty, hiring fell to 40% below the previous year in April, marking the low point of the downturn.

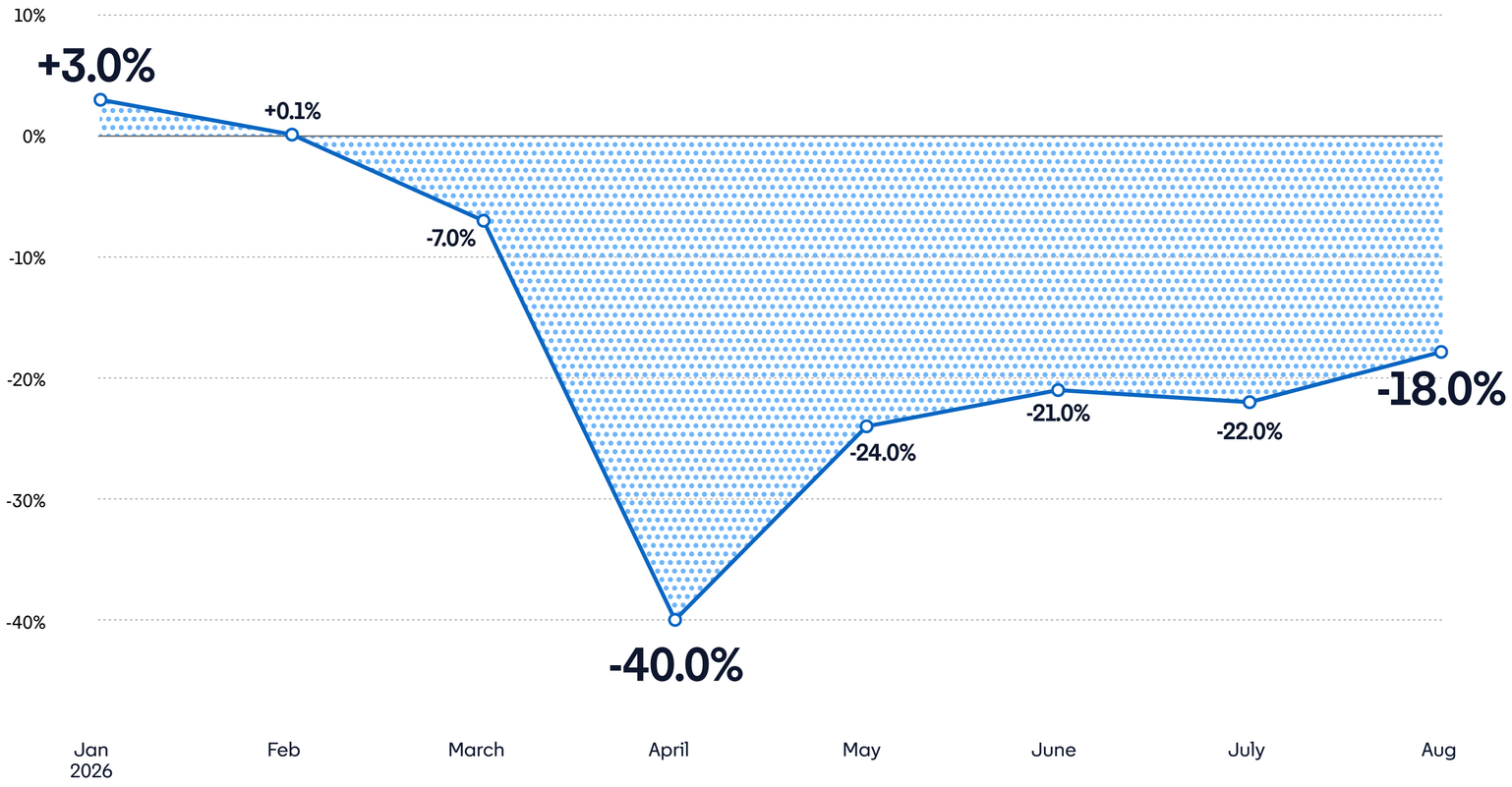
Hiring has stabilized from its April low, but recovery remains incomplete

By the summer the labor market had begun to stabilize. Hiring returned to positive month-on-month growth in May, June, and August, while job postings and labor market tightness also showed signs of improvement.

The available indicators suggest the sharpest phase of the disruption had passed by summer, but they do not yet point to a full rebound.

Hiring has stabilized from its April low, but remains below 2025 levels

Comparison with the same month of the previous year (YoY)



Source: LinkedIn Pulse

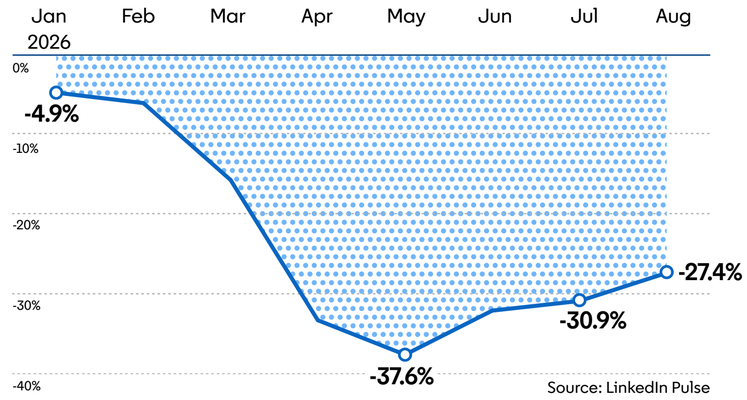
The data provides employers and policymakers with an additional perspective on how the structure of demand is evolving as conditions improve.

Employer demand regained momentum over the summer

Hiring provides a measure of realized labor market activity. Job postings offer a complementary view of employer demand and can provide an earlier indication of how recruitment intentions are changing. After falling sharply through May, postings recovered over the summer and by August were around 6% below the early-2026 baseline.

The balance between jobs and applicants, another indicator of labor market tightness, has also improved. Jobs per applicant were 37.6% lower year-on-year in May, with the gap narrowing to 27.4% by August.

YoY change in jobs per applicant 2026



Source: LinkedIn Pulse

Job postings declined sharply through May before recovering over the summer

Selected monthly averages. Jan–Feb 2026 Baseline = 1.00



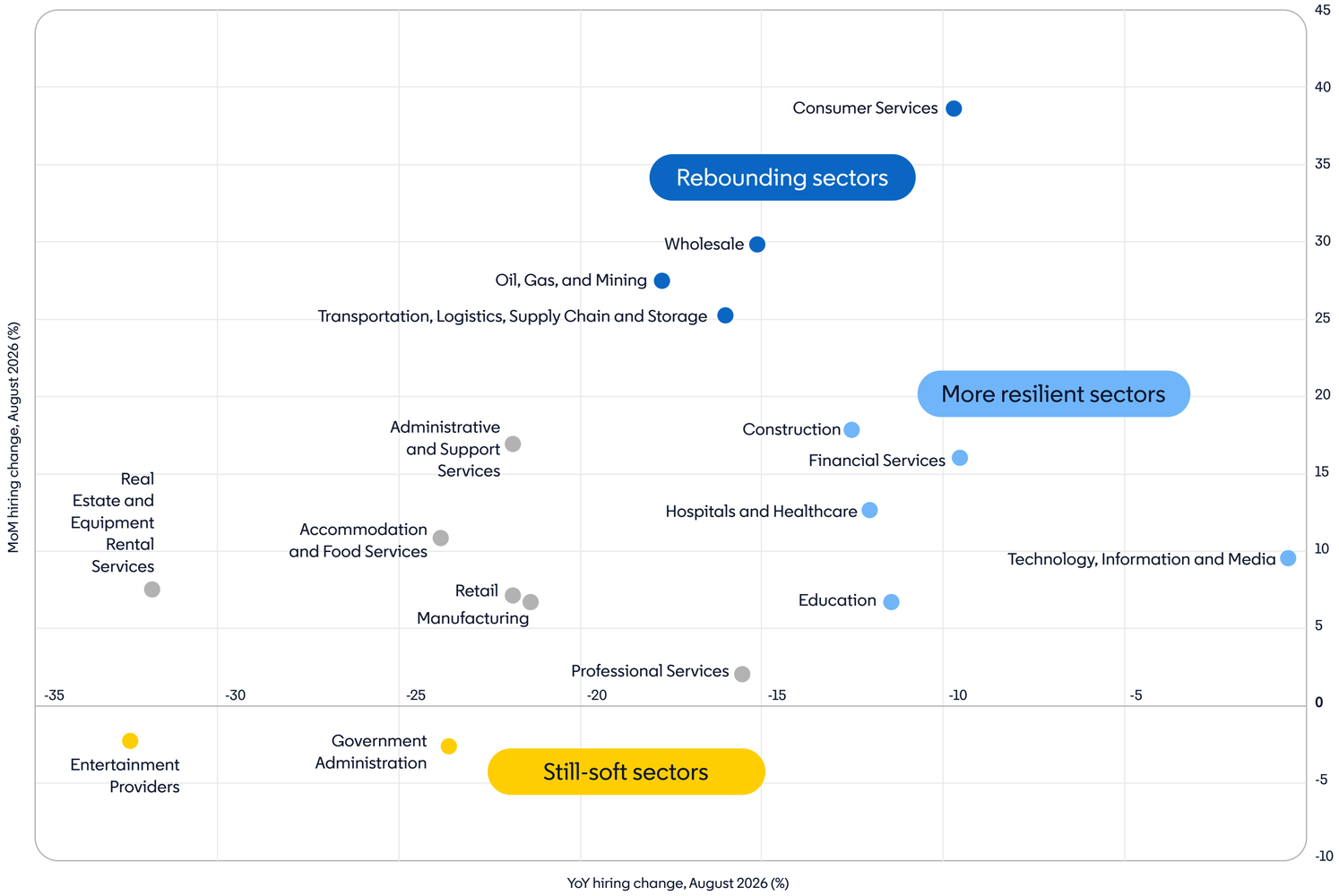
Source: LinkedIn Pulse

Hiring improved across most industries, but unevenly

By August, 15 of 17 major industries recorded positive month-on-month hiring growth. The breadth of that improvement suggests that the rebound was not concentrated in only a small number of sectors. At the same time, every major industry remained below its August 2025 hiring level, underscoring the uneven nature.

The sector picture reveals two distinct patterns. Technology, Information & Media was closest to its year-earlier level (−0.5% YoY; +9.0% MoM). Consumer Services, by contrast, recorded one of the strongest monthly rebounds (+38.7% MoM), while remaining 9.8% below August 2025. Together, these sectors illustrate the difference between relative resilience and recent recovery momentum.

LinkedIn Hiring Rate change by UAE industry, August 2026



Source: LinkedIn Pulse

3.

The skills shaping the next phase

An essential marker of workforce readiness is whether skills and roles are evolving as the nature of work changes.

AI provides one of the clearest signals of how quickly workforce requirements can shift. Four of the ten fastest-growing occupations identified in the UAE are AI-specific, spanning engineering, consulting, and leadership roles.

Alongside these occupational shifts, LinkedIn's data shows strong growth in AI Engineering and AI Literacy talent concentration, as well as increased AI Engineering job demand. As of August 2026, AI Engineering talent concentration went up 27% year-on-year and AI Literacy talent concentration rose 113.7% over the same period. These are distinct indicators of how AI capabilities and roles are becoming more prominent in the UAE labor market.

4 of the 10 fastest-growing occupations in August 2026 are AI-specific

1. Social Media Content Creator
2. Digital Content Creator
3. **Artificial Intelligence Engineer**
4. Platform Engineer
5. Doctor
6. **Head of Artificial Intelligence**
7. Assistant Principal
8. **Artificial Intelligence Consultant**
9. Principal
10. **Manager of Artificial Intelligence**

AI Engineering job demand

↑ **232.4%** YoY August 2026

4.1% of UAE job postings on LinkedIn

AI Engineering talent concentration

↑ **27.0%** YoY August 2026

0.75% of the UAE workforce

AI Literacy talent concentration

↑ **113.7%** YoY August 2026

Source: LinkedIn Pulse

But workforce readiness extends beyond technology

The skills gaining ground across the UAE point to a workforce shift that extends beyond technology. Among the fastest-growing skills being added by UAE LinkedIn members are capabilities linked to compliance, reporting, coordination, and efficiency, such as Compliance Operations, Regulatory Audits, Executive Reporting, and Operations Coordination.

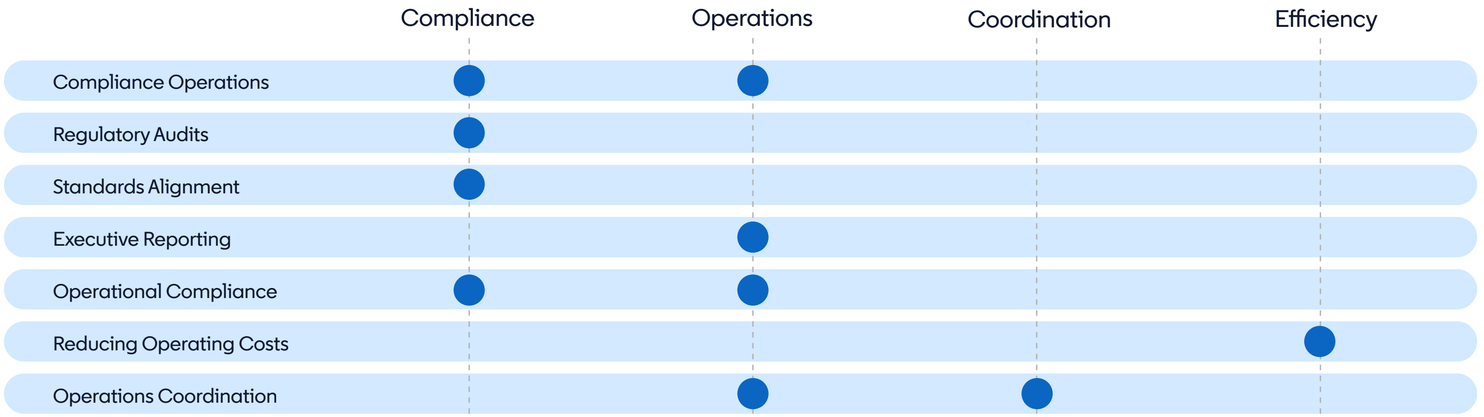
What stands out is how consistently some of these skills appear across very different parts of the economy.

Operational Efficiency ranks among the six fastest-growing skills in all six priority sectors analyzed*, while Report Preparation and Records Management each feature in five.

These are member-reported skill additions -not direct evidence of employer demand or a skills shortage- but they point to the growing importance of the operational capabilities that help organizations apply new technologies effectively and adapt as business requirements evolve.

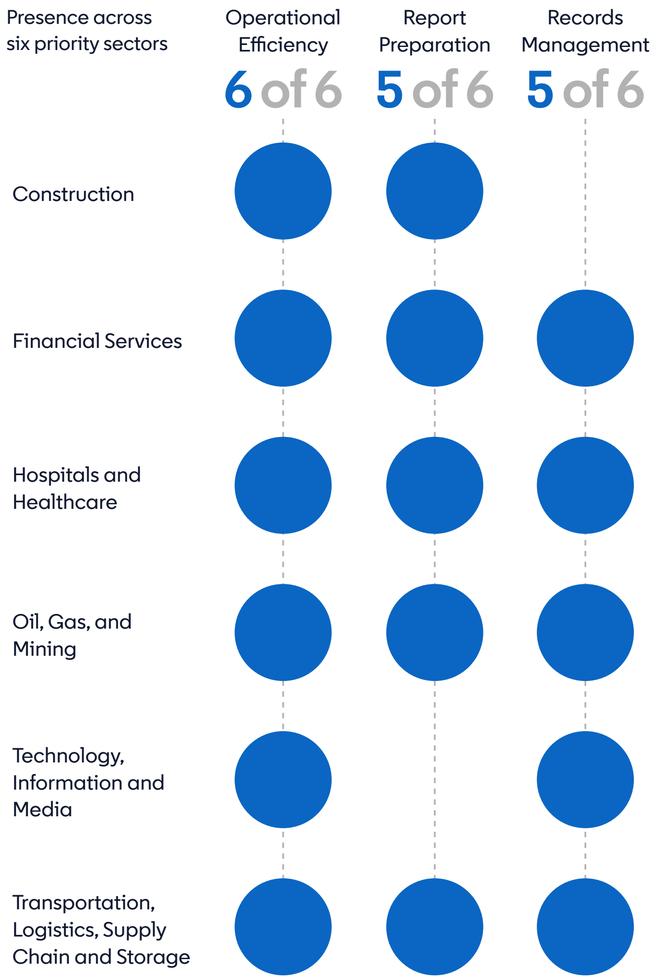
*Priority sectors analyzed: Technology, Information & Media, Financial Services, Transportation, Logistics, Supply Chain & Storage, Oil, Gas & Mining, Construction, Hospitals & Healthcare.

7 of the UAE's 10 fastest-growing member-added skills in 2026 are operational and compliance-related



Source: LinkedIn Pulse

Member-added skills recurring across priority sectors, August 2026



Source: LinkedIn Pulse

There are signs of alignment between skills being built and what employers need

Workforce readiness depends not only on whether professionals are building new skills, but also on whether those skills reflect what employers need.

The comparison between member-added skills and skills listed in job postings suggests partial alignment rather than a complete match. Some core capabilities show up on both sides, indicating that parts of the workforce are developing skills that are also being sought in the labor market. But the two datasets measure different things and should be read directionally.

The more important readiness question is whether the skills professionals continue to build can keep pace with how employer needs are evolving.

Top 15 most-added skills on LinkedIn vs. top 15 skills listed in job postings in UAE in 2026



Source: LinkedIn Pulse

4.

Talent mobility as a source of workforce resilience

As skill requirements evolve, employers have several ways to respond: develop existing workers, recruit from different occupational backgrounds, or draw on talent from outside the country.

The ability of talent to move towards changing areas of demand is therefore an important part of how a workforce adapts.

In the UAE, those pathways are visible both in the range of occupations from which workers enter priority sectors and in the country's continued ability to attract talent from abroad.

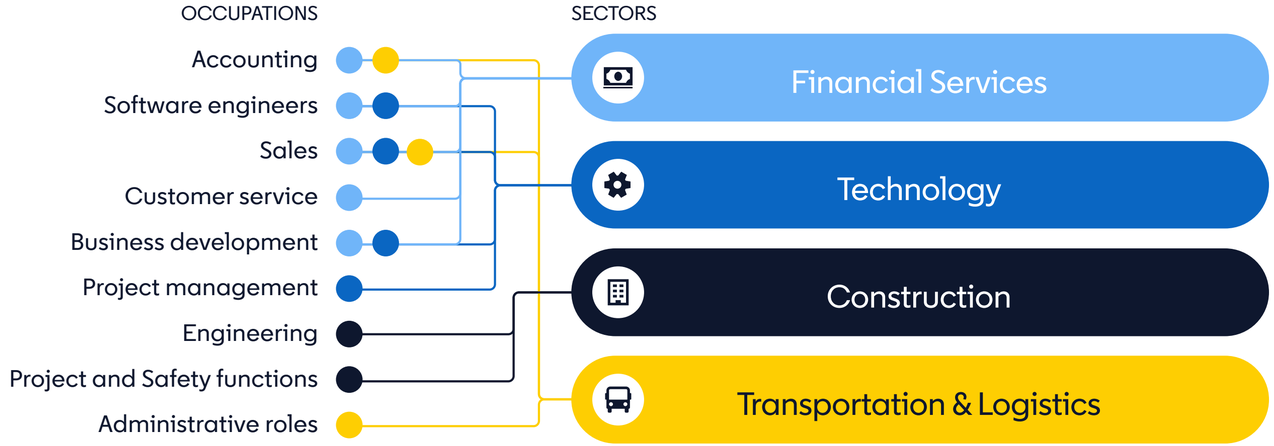
Workforce mobility can widen the effective talent pool

Career-transition data shows that people entering the six priority sectors* come from a diverse range of occupational backgrounds. **No single prior occupation accounts for more than 3.5% of observed transitions into any of the six sectors analyzed**, suggesting that entry is not concentrated around a small number of traditional feeder roles, and that workers are already crossing occupational boundaries.

That diversity matters. It means employers can look beyond conventional career paths and previous job titles when recruiting for growing or changing areas. Skills-based hiring, with greater emphasis on transferable skills and adjacent experience, can therefore become an important part of how organizations identify and recruit talent.

In a fast-moving labor market, the combination of transferable skills and workforce agility can help employers respond more quickly as demand shifts.

Occupational pathways into priority sectors in 2026



*Priority sectors analyzed: Technology, Information & Media, Financial Services, Transportation, Logistics, Supply Chain & Storage, Oil, Gas & Mining, Construction, Hospitals & Healthcare.

Source: LinkedIn Pulse

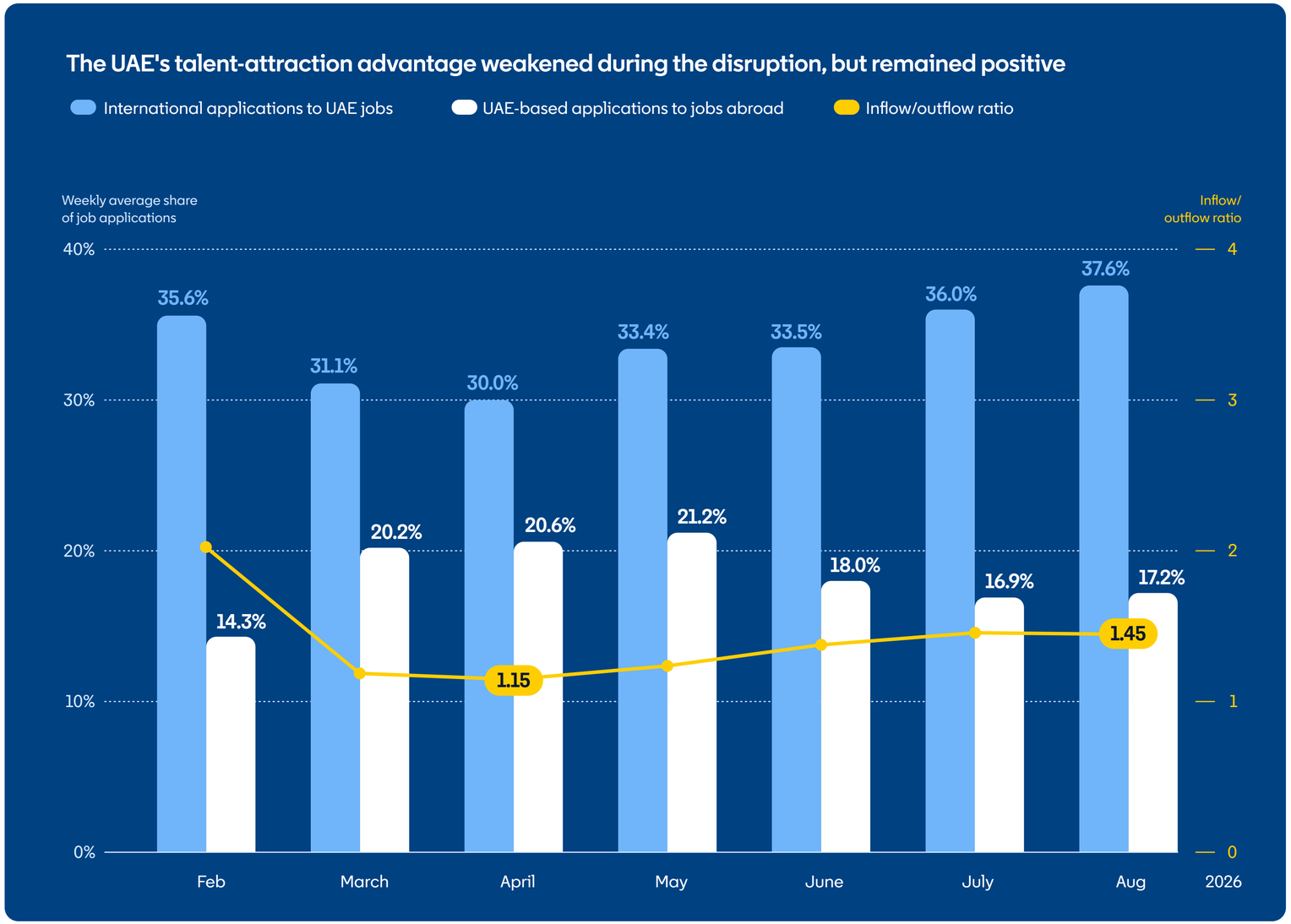
International talent remains an important source of workforce depth

The UAE's ability to attract talent internationally provides an additional source of workforce depth, particularly where local talent pipelines may take time to develop.

That attraction was tested during the 2026 disruption, but it did not reverse. The UAE remained a net talent attractor throughout: its inflow-to-outflow ratio fell from 2.03 in February to 1.15 in April, before recovering to 1.45 by August.

Cross-border job-search behavior tells a similar story. The share of applications to UAE jobs coming from outside the country fell from 35.6% in February to 30% in April, before rebounding to 37.6% by August, above its pre-disruption level.

The ability to continue drawing talent from abroad gives employers access to a broader pool of skills, complementing the occupational mobility already visible within the UAE. Sustaining that advantage, particularly during periods of disruption, is an important component of workforce resilience.



Source: LinkedIn Pulse

Three areas of focus for building workforce resilience

1.

Build skills in line with demand

Track changing roles and requirements using hiring and skills signals together. This means building capacity not only in rapidly evolving areas such as AI, but also in operational efficiency, compliance, and execution, before emerging needs become workforce constraints.

2.

Widen the talent pool

Look beyond familiar job titles. Career transition data shows that workers can move into areas of demand from varied occupations and sectors. Greater emphasis on transferable skills can help employers identify potential across a wider talent pool.

3.

Keep talent moving

Make it easier for workers to move towards areas of emerging demand through reskilling, redeployment, and clearer progression pathways, while sustaining access to international talent. Greater mobility can help businesses respond when the skills they need change.



Methodology & Acknowledgments

Methodology and definitions

LinkedIn Hiring Rate (LHR) is a measure of hires normalized by LinkedIn membership. It is computed as the percentage of LinkedIn members who added a new employer in the same period the job began, divided by the total number of LinkedIn members in the corresponding location.

Labor Market Tightness (LMT) is the ratio of job postings that attract at least one application to the distinct members who applied to those job postings in the relevant labor market. A higher ratio means more qualifying jobs per applicant.

The indexed job postings measure weekly job postings on LinkedIn relative to their average weekly level from January 5 to March 1, 2026, with the baseline set to 1. A value of 0.94, for example, indicates that the weekly job postings was 6% below the baseline average.

The fastest growing skills are those recording the largest year-on-year increases in their share of skills added to LinkedIn member profiles in the population analyzed. This measure reflects changes in members' reported skills, rather than employer demand or verified skill proficiency.

The fastest growing occupations are those recording the largest year-on-year increases in their share of LinkedIn members in the population analyzed. This measure captures changes in the relative prevalence of occupations, rather than growth in job postings or hiring.

AI Engineering Talent are LinkedIn members who either have explicitly added at least two AI engineering skills to their profile, or are or have been employed in an AI-related occupation.

AI Literacy Talent are LinkedIn members who have explicitly added at least two AI literacy skills to their profile.

AI job demand is measured by calculating the share of job postings that qualify as AI roles by country and month. A job posting is labelled as requiring AI talent if it either lists at least two AI engineering skills, or is associated with an AI occupation. Talent demand is defined as the proportion of all job postings in a country that meet these criteria.

Job transitions capture movements between occupations observed through positions listed on LinkedIn member profiles after a previous job has ended. Career transition analysis does not cover moves within the same occupation.

Inflow-to-Outflow ratio is member inflows into the country divided by member outflows from it for the reporting period. A ratio above 1 means more LinkedIn member inflows than outflows.

Acknowledgments

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