Gentis

MARKET REPORT · NOVEMBER 2026

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

# Talent & Hiring Benchmark 2026

Hiring trends, jobs and talent in a market that went from record optimism to a war shock — and is rebounding, selectively.

**+41%**
Q4 2026 hiring outlook, vs +29% globally

**76%**
of UAE employers struggle to fill roles

**+7.7%**
IMF GDP growth forecast for 2027

**Stéphanie Reniers**
Founder & CEO, Gentis

Data as of 17 November 2026

# Context matters more than volume. Always has.

Gentis is a recruitment firm that hires for context, not volume — and keeps its hires. Today it counts 650 people across 8 countries and 53 nationalities, with retention above 85%.

Stéphanie Reniers started in recruitment in 2007, when the industry ran on one routine: brief, database, a stack of CVs, and hope. Searches dragged into month four, top candidates were gone within ten days, and placements left within six months. She founded Gentis in Brussels in 2011 with three partners, on a different premise.

> **"You can review 200 CVs in a week and still lose the one candidate who fit. The issue was never talent. It was process."**
>
> Stéphanie Reniers, Founder & CEO, Gentis

**2011**
Founded in Brussels with three partners

**650**
People working at Gentis today

**8**
Countries of operation

**53**
Nationalities in the team

**85%+**
Retention of hires

**50–70%**
Shorter time-to-hire for clients

### FOR JOURNALISTS

Stéphanie Reniers speaks on stages and in boardrooms about hiring process, cross-border teams, and bias and discrimination in recruitment — the subject of the book she is writing, drawn from 15+ years of field stories. Available for interviews and expert comment on the UAE and European talent markets.

# Four steps. Context before CVs.

Gentis has worked the same way since day one: understand the environment before sourcing anyone, and stay accountable after the hire.

/1

## Environment

Visit the office. Sit in meetings. Feel the culture before sourcing anyone.

/2

## Alignment

Meet the teams who will work with the hire. Understand what the job brief doesn't say.

/3

## Precision

Source from global networks that reflect the environment. Fit first, CV second.

/4

## Accountability

Present at interviews. Check references both ways. Stay accountable for retention, not just the placement.

**85%+**
retention of hires

**50–70%**
cut in time-to-hire for clients

WHY IT MATTERS IN THE UAE

Applications to relocate to the UAE are at record levels, yet 76% of employers still struggle to fill roles and specialists collect multiple offers. The bottleneck is fit and speed — exactly where a context-first process wins.

# From record optimism to war shock — and a selective rebound

The trigger was the US-Israel war with Iran, from 28 February 2026, and the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz. A ceasefire followed on 8 April; regional tension resurfaced in November.

**+60% → +17% → +41%**

### Hiring sentiment whipsawed

ManpowerGroup's UAE Net Employment Outlook hit +60% for Q2 2026, fell to a record low of +17% for Q3, then rebounded to +41% for Q4 — vs +29% globally.

**−4% / +4%**

### Actual hiring followed

Cooper Fitch: UAE hiring fell 4% in Q2 2026, the sharpest drop since August 2020, then rose 4% in Q3 — the strongest rebound in the GCC.

**−3.9% / +7.7%**

### A dip, then a bounce

The IMF projects UAE real GDP at −3.9% in 2026 and +7.7% in 2027.

**4.81m**

### Talent kept coming

Dubai lost ~61,000 residents in March but reached 4.81 million by late September 2026, +226,885 since January.

**2.8%**

### Pay is moderate and selective

Expected average salary increase for 2027; only 42% of employers plan to grow headcount, down from 48%.

**76%**

### Scarcity is in skills, not people

of UAE employers struggle to fill roles; AI skills are now the hardest to source.

**190,000+**

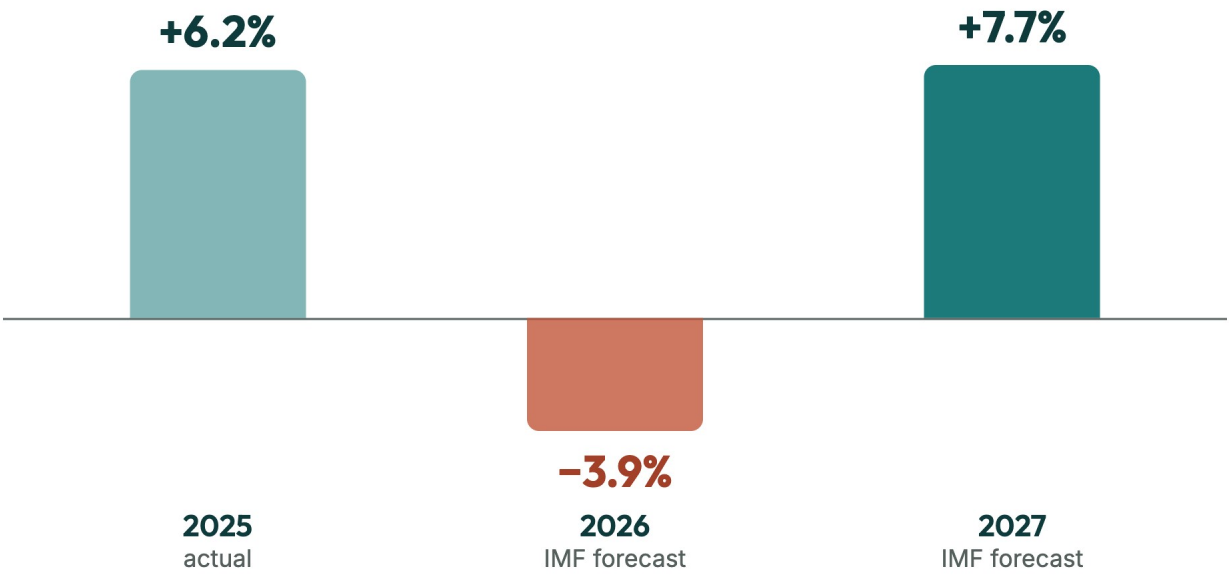
### Policy pressure rises

Emiratis now work in the private sector; firms with 50+ staff must add 2% a year or pay AED 10,000 per missing hire per month.

# A contraction in 2026, a rebound forecast for 2027

The UAE does not publish consistent labour-market data, so private surveys are the main forward-looking indicators. Costs are the other story: in Q3 2026 UAE firms raised prices at the fastest pace since May 2011.

### UAE real GDP growth: a war-year contraction, then the strongest rebound in the region




Source: IMF World Economic Outlook & Regional Economic Outlook, October 2026. The World Bank projects −1.6% (2026) and +9.5% (2027).

### Dubai population: the war dent was erased within months

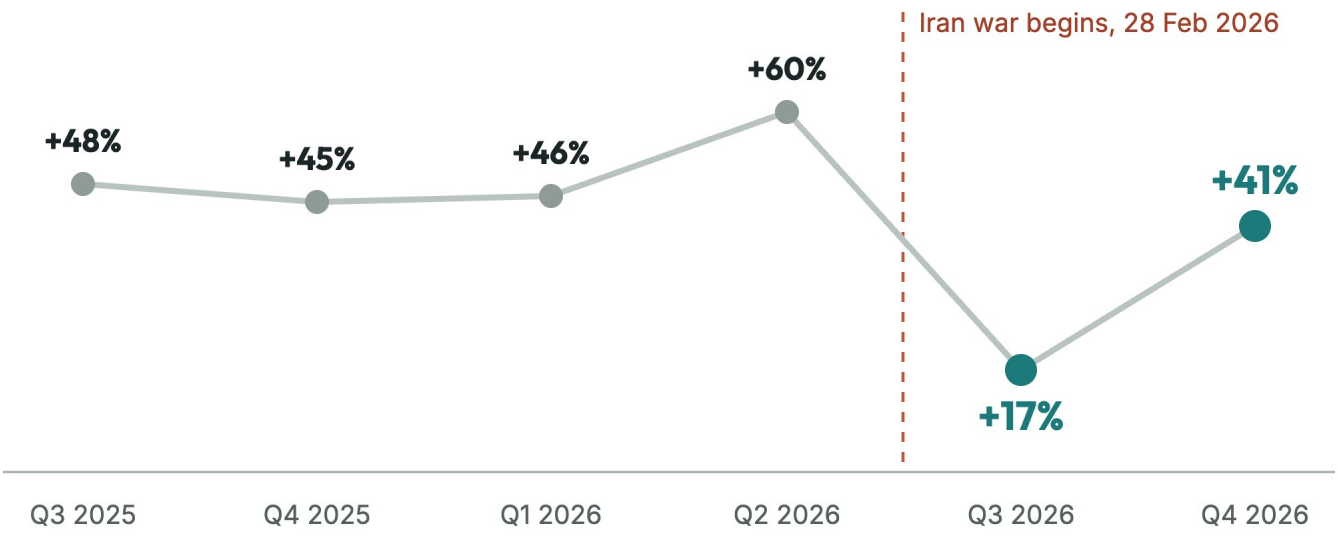
| | |
|---|---|
| Population, end 2025 | **4.58 million** |
| Residents lost in March 2026 (peak of attacks) | **~61,000 (−1.3%)** |
| Population, late September 2026 | **4.81 million** |
| Added since January 2026 | **+226,885** |
| Largest age group | **30–34 years (15.45%)** |
| Expat share of population | **~80%** |

Source: Dubai Data & Statistics Establishment via Gulf News, The National, AGBI.

# A 43-point drop in one quarter — the largest ever recorded for the UAE

Hiring intent is back to +41% for Q4 2026, well above the +29% global average. But the mix has changed: employers now recruit for new skills, not volume.

### UAE Net Employment Outlook (% planning to hire minus % planning cuts)




Source: ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey, 525–557 UAE employers per quarter.

**25% planned cuts for Q3**

Up from 7% three months earlier; 42% still planned to hire. Geopolitics was the top reason cited.

**Small firms hit hardest**

Companies with 10–49 employees fell to −7%, while large employers stayed the most confident.

**Logistics turned negative**

Trade & logistics dropped to −8% as Hormuz closed; finance, healthcare and public sector kept hiring.

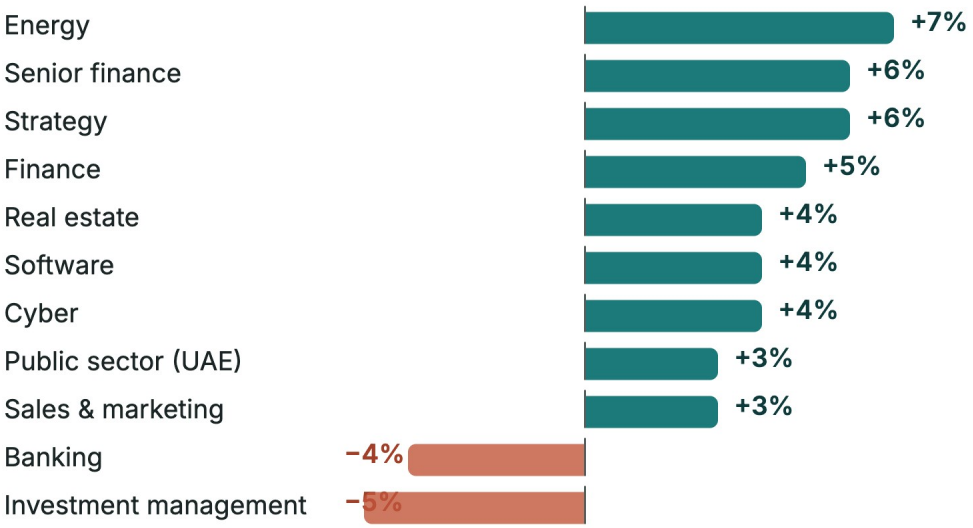
**Q4: biggest rebound in the region**

+24 points quarter on quarter. Globally, 62% of employers adding staff cite new roles and skills; only 32% backfill.

# Energy, finance and strategy lead the rebound

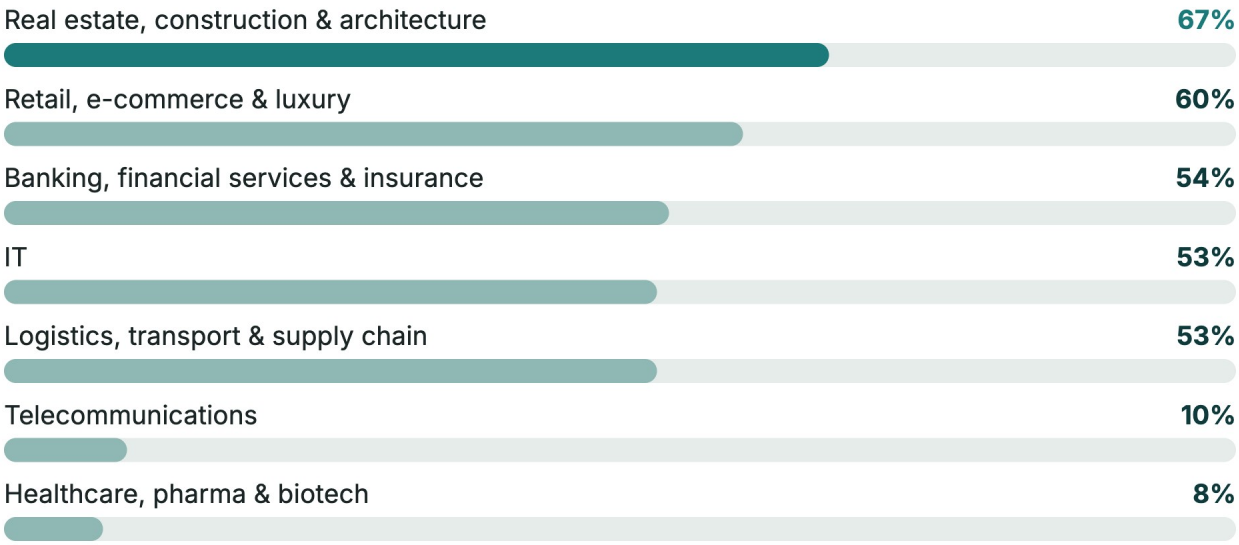
Actual UAE hiring rose 4% in Q3 2026, the best gain in the GCC. For 2027, only 42% of employers plan to grow headcount (48% a year ago), 26% expect cuts, and average growth is just +0.9%.

### Hiring change in Q3 2026, GCC, quarter on quarter




Source: Cooper Fitch Gulf Employment Index, Q3 2026, via Khaleej Times.

### Share of UAE employers planning to grow headcount in 2027




Source: Cooper Fitch UAE Salary Guide 2027, via Khaleej Times.

# Moderate raises, aimed at the top and at scarce skills

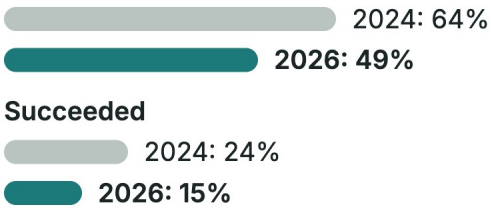
46% of UAE organisations plan to raise salary ranges in 2027 (43% in 2026), 42% expect no change and 12% expect decreases. Reward is shifting to bonuses and variable pay.

2027 FORECAST

**2.8%**

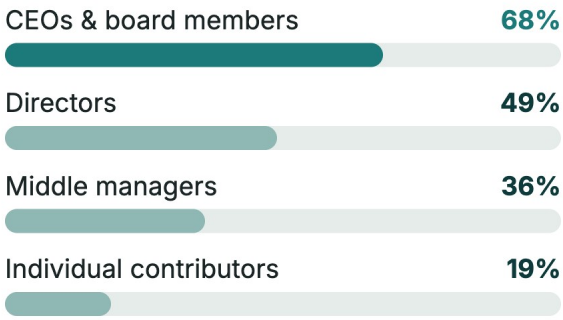
average expected salary increase in the UAE. Cooper Fitch's CEO thinks the real figure could be closer to 4%.

### Fewer professionals negotiate pay — and fewer succeed

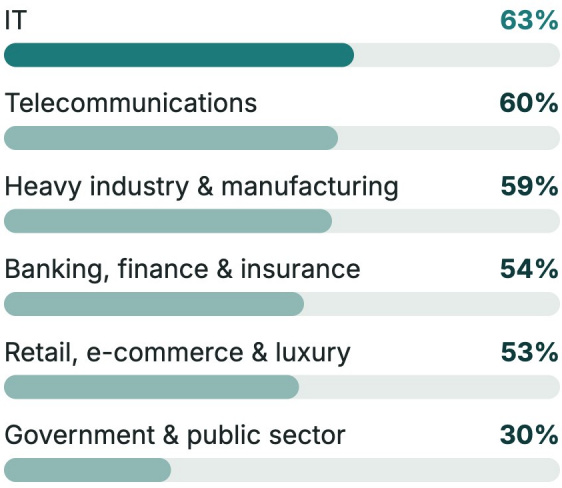



Source: Michael Page UAE Salary Guide 2026.

### Who expects a raise in 2027: the higher the role, the likelier the rise




### Organisations planning pay increases in 2027, by sector

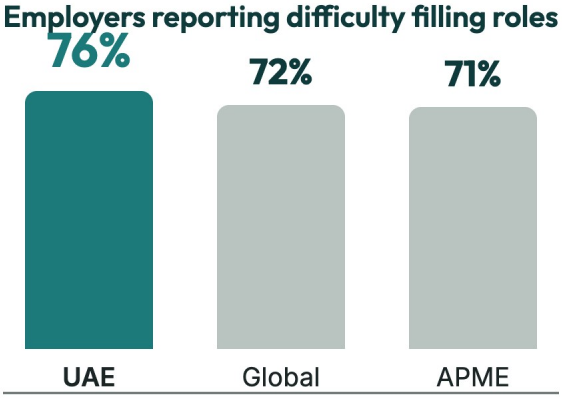



Source: Cooper Fitch UAE Salary Guide 2027 (1,091+ organisations, 500,000+ employees), via Khaleej Times. In IT, 25% also expect decreases.

# The UAE lacks fit, not candidates

Applications to relocate to the UAE are at unprecedented levels, yet specialists still collect multiple offers. The scarce profile combines a function with deep sector experience.

### Employers reporting difficulty filling roles




Source: ManpowerGroup 2026 Global Talent Shortage Survey.

### Hardest skills to find

| | |
|---|---|
| AI model & app development (APME) | 27% |
| AI literacy (APME) | 26% |
| Sales & business development (UAE) | 20% |
| Technical & engineering (UAE) | 15% |
| AI, data & technology (UAE) | 10% |

Source: ManpowerGroup 2026; Cooper Fitch 2027 guide.

### UAE respondents reporting a talent shortage, by sector

| | |
|---|---|
| Aviation, defence & aerospace | 60% |
| Information technology | 40% |
| Hospitality | 40% |
| Real estate & construction | 33% |
| Government & public sector | 9% |

Source: Cooper Fitch UAE Salary Guide 2027. Overall, 64% see enough local talent.

### Mobility & retention

**2 in 3**
UAE professionals open to changing jobs in 2026 (Michael Page)

**46%**
plan to ask for a raise, down from 71% — job security now outranks pay

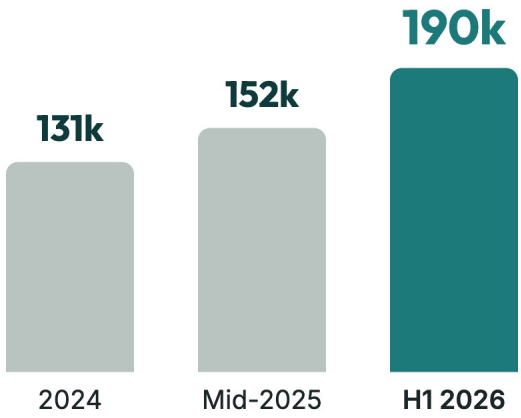
**+9,800**
net millionaire inflow to the UAE in 2025, the world's highest (Henley)

**+105%**
growth in generative AI course enrolments in the UAE (Coursera)

# Two rules shape every UAE hiring plan

Emiratisation quotas keep rising and are strictly enforced, and since June 2026 the Wage Protection System leaves no grace period for late salaries.

### Emiratis working in the private sector




Source: MoHRE via WAM, Gulf News, Aletihad. ~32,000 companies employ Emiratis; 95% met H1 2026 targets.

### Emiratisation (Nafis) in practice

**+2% a year**
Firms with 50+ employees must raise Emiratis in skilled roles by 1% each half-year.

**AED 120,000**
yearly cost per unfilled Emirati position (AED 10,000 a month).

**Up to 80% off**
selected MoHRE fees for compliant companies. Nafis extended to 2040.

### Wage Protection System (Resolution 340/2026, in force 1 June 2026): late salaries now escalate fast




- **DAY 1** — Salary due on the 1st of the month
- **DAY 2** — MoHRE warnings and notifications
- **DAY 5** — New work permits suspended
- **DAY 16** — MoHRE files labour disputes for workers

Source: Clyde & Co, Mondaq, The National.

# What the data means for anyone hiring in the UAE

UAE employers are moving from volume hiring to precision hiring. That favours a context-first process over a CV-first one.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Fit over volume**<br>Applications are at record levels, yet employers still struggle to hire. The bottleneck is matching function and sector context, not sourcing more CVs. | **76% struggle to fill roles** |
| 2 | **Speed on specialists**<br>Energy, AI, finance and real estate specialists receive multiple offers. A long process loses them. | **Energy hiring +7% in Q3** |
| 3 | **Retention is the selling point**<br>Candidates now value security and clarity over a higher salary. The stability of the hire is what clients pay for. | **2 in 3 open to moving** |
| 4 | **Emiratisation as a service line**<br>Every client with 50+ staff must add Emirati talent each half-year, with real money at stake. | **AED 120,000 a year per missing hire** |
| 5 | **Plan for volatility**<br>Sentiment can swing 40+ points in a quarter. Sector exposure should drive pipeline priorities. | **−43 pts in one quarter** |

> **“The issue was never talent. It was process. And nobody was saying it out loud. So now I do.”**
>
> Stéphanie Reniers, Founder & CEO, Gentis

# Sources

Every figure in this report comes from the published surveys and official sources below.

**ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey** — Q3 2025 – Q4 2026, UAE & global (via PR Newswire, AGBI, EnterpriseAM, Semafor, SceneNow)

**ManpowerGroup Global Talent Shortage Survey 2026** — 39,000+ employers in 41 countries (via People Matters)

**Cooper Fitch Gulf Employment Index** — Q2 & Q3 2026 (via Khaleej Times, EnterpriseAM)

**Cooper Fitch UAE Salary Guide 2027** — 1,091+ organisations, 500,000+ employees (via Khaleej Times)

**Michael Page UAE Salary Guide 2026** — 500+ roles in 18 sectors (via Arabian Business)

**IMF World & Regional Economic Outlook** — October 2026 (via Khaleej Times, Ahram Online, Gulf Today)

**World Bank** — 2026–2027 UAE growth forecasts (via Khaleej Times)

**Dubai Data & Statistics Establishment** — population data 2025–2026 (via Gulf News, The National, AGBI)

**Ministry of Human Resources & Emiratisation** — Emiratisation updates and Resolution 340/2026 (via WAM, Clyde & Co, Mondaq)

**Henley & Partners Private Wealth Migration Report 2026** — (via PR Newswire, Khaleej Times)

**Coursera** — UAE generative AI enrolment data (via People Matters)

The UAE does not publish consistent labour-market statistics; survey-based indicators reflect employer intentions. Gentis company figures are stated by Gentis. Data as of 17 November 2026.

PRESS & INTERVIEWS

## Talk to Stéphanie Reniers

Founder & CEO of Gentis. Expert comment on the UAE and European talent markets, hiring process, and bias in recruitment.

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