

BI-ANNUAL LOCAL INTELLIGENCE REPORT

MEA

Recent Employer Interactions

UAE

- Estee Lauder:
 - Looking to hire interns mainly and AD-hoc hiring based on needs
- Roland Berger ME:
 - Big round of layoffs are coming in the next few months
- AT Kearny:
 - Big Round of layoffs are coming in the next few months
- Amazon:
 - Region is impacted by the global layoffs
- ServiceNow:
 - Growing in the region and will have roles opening

Hiring Signals & Market Sentiment (Local & Observed)

UAE:

- Hiring a lot in Data/AI related roles
- Slow down in Consulting roles (Many of the consulting firms are doing big layoff rounds)
- Most in Demand profiles are MBA/MiM profiles with regional experience and Arabic speakers preferred
- Employers are open to any seniority level, up to 0-15 Years of experience
- Big Priority in Tourism/Hospitality/AI/Data science/Digital Roles

KSA:

- The market is shifting to execution mode, and 2026 hiring looks tougher and more selective.
- Demand is shaped by budgets, which are:
 - Reprioritised and tightened
 - Recalibrated across some large-scale initiatives
 - Concentrated around tourism growth and capability-building
- Tourism is a priority growth engine, with investments concentrated in flagship tourism destinations (Red Sea and other Giga Projects)
- Talent development, leadership, and capability-building are high-demand service areas
- Demand is concentrated in mid-level and senior profiles, where specialised talent and proven experience are strongly valued by employers

Changes in Employer Behavior

UAE:

- A focus on regional experience has been increasing over the last year, some Entry-level roles are reserved for Nationals, with Emiratization increasing but not to the levels where they don't need international talent
- Recruitment processes vary from company to company, there is not a one size fits all. It is common though in the region to sometimes not hear back from companies or HR even after the interview has been done.
- Salaries remain high in Consulting (MBB and Boutique) as well as Financial Services. There has been a slowdown in salaries in the last year or so due to the high supply of talent in the market as well as increased demand from international talent looking to relocate to the market.
- There is still appetite for international talent, however there is an increase in talent with local or regional experience. In certain roles as well there is a requirement for the Arabic Language or a preference, especially in consulting or any other industry dealing with Governmental Entities.

KSA:

- Increased selectivity, tied to ROI and execution needs.
- Shift from rapid expansion to execution mode.
- Hiring is project-based and fluctuates depending on delivery phases and changing priorities.
- Multinationals tend to hire nationals first due to Saudization.
 - Saudi-origin companies that have Saudization covered can be more open to non-nationals.
 - Many hires are still role-dependent.

Upcoming Opportunities & Pipeline

UAE:

- Demand for AI/Data related roles are on the rise and many opportunities in this area
- Intern to fulltime conversion is possible usually it comes as a 6 month internship with a possibility for full time employment based on performance. For shorter internships or summer internships, these are usually not converted into full time roles.
- The UAE is looking to increase its population by 2030 and has an agenda to increase foreign investment, attracting foreign talent and boosting the digital economy.
- Roles with digital expertise and data will be on the rise.

KSA:

- Hiring demand is project-based and fluctuates with delivery phases.
- Tourism and destination-related projects (The Giga Projects) are expected to continue driving demand.
- Intern-to-full-time conversion is limited, except for nationals and possibly existing residents (Iqama holders).
- Upskilling, leadership, and capability-building are high-demand areas, especially in tourism, hospitality, and giga projects.
- Expo 2030 and World Cup 2034 look to be drivers of growth for the kingdom and will generate many opportunities, however the bulk may be from national talent as opposed to international.

Strategic Notes for Advisors & Career Team

UAE:

- Strong demand:
 - Financial Services Profiles, Marketing and Sales, Data and AI, consulting profiles for Industry. Junior to mid-senior level.
- Low demand:
 - Consulting roles in general have a low demand. Some tech roles are also low in demand due to integration of AI and global tech layoffs.
- Nationality eligibility:
 - Certain nationalities may experience difficulties in obtaining work permit in UAE (Syrian, Lebanese some other nationalities may find difficulty in obtaining visas) Nothing from official sources however the reality on the ground.

KSA:

- Strong demand:
 - Mid-level and senior profiles
 - Experience and execution capability is highly valued
 - Sector-specific expertise (e.g., hospitality, tourism, giga projects, construction, or project delivery)
- Low demand:
 - Junior roles for non-Saudis and non-resident (Iqama) holders
- Nationality eligibility:
 - Varies by company type and role, as different sectors follow different Saudization rules

Red Flags & Risks

UAE:

- Very competitive market with high supply of talent available and many layoffs producing excess talent in the market.
- Networking and meeting as many people as possible is the best way to crack into the UAE market. Reaching out to alumni on linkedin for conversations can help.
- Some processes may be cancelled due to organizational re-prioritization and budgets.
- Visa trends are not always publicly communicated, certain nationalities may not get work permits although nothing public or official is communicated. These tend to be countries that have conflicts or instability in them (Lebanon, Syria, etc..)

KSA:

- Junior and generalist roles are highly competitive.
- Hiring processes may be paused or delayed due to budget reprioritisation.
- Project-based hiring can change as priorities shift.
- Nationality requirements are not always visible in public job postings.