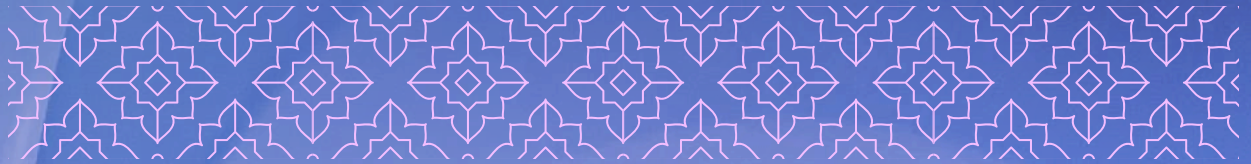


UAE FUTURE TECH TALENT



2024

A guide for technology companies, investors, and policy makers

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
MINISTRY OF ECONOMY



الإمارات العربية المتحدة
وزارة الاقتصاد

INTEGRA SEVEN
FRAGOMEN



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FAHAD AL HASSAWI

CEO, du

The UAE has positioned itself as a focal point of technological advancement within the global economy, showcasing a robust commitment to cultivating a dynamic technology sector, with the ICT market valued at USD 39.72 billion in 2023 and expected to reach USD 67.28 billion by 2028*. Today when rapid digital transformation is the norm, the dialogue surrounding the empowerment of technology talent is more crucial than ever. Through the "UAE Tech Talent Report 2024" report, I am pleased to introduce our explorations and findings in this critical field.

Learnings on uplifting the aspirations of the youth, crafting a collaborative and forward-thinking culture, alongside continuous skill enhancement, have been elemental in our playbook. Our commitment to fostering a culture of innovation is strengthened through workshops, hackathons, and seminars that showcase career opportunities in tech, encouraging creative engagement with emerging technologies. We provide internships and project-based opportunities for practical experience, cultivating critical skills through exposure to advanced technologies and teamwork. Our vision emphasizes building an inclusive and diverse environment where we prioritize and empower Emirati talent while equally welcoming and nurturing all skilled individuals. This initiative supports the advancement of the UAE's digital transformation by equipping a broad spectrum of talents with the necessary skills and opportunities.

Amidst global competition for tech expertise, the UAE's emphasis on nurturing and educating tech talent highlights its strategic approach to sustainable economic development and societal advancement. This year report provides stakeholders—entrepreneurs, established tech giants, policymakers, and talent alike—a comprehensive reflection on current successes and the strategic roadmap required to harness future potentials. From addressing the complexities of skillset alignment to comprehending the international talent migration, our engagement in this pivotal study signals our goal to not just participate in the dialogue but to shape its outcome.



NATALIA SYCHEVA

Managing Director, Integra Seven

I am honored to present the "**UAE Tech Talent Report 2024**", a continuation of our efforts to map and understand the evolving tech talent landscape in the UAE. Building on the insights from last year's "State of Tech Talent in Dubai 2023" report, this year's publication deepens our analysis and broadens our focus to include emerging trends and challenges across the UAE's dynamic tech ecosystem.

We are privileged to have the support of esteemed partners, including Du and Fragomen, whose contributions have been instrumental in bringing this report to life. The Ministry of Economy's inauguration of this edition underscores the significance of tech talent in the nation's broader economic strategy.

Our analysis this year not only offers a comprehensive focus on attracting and retaining tech talent but also on exploring innovative models of tech talent ecosystems, including the strategic establishment of talent hubs that can make top talent more accessible to UAE companies. By engaging with key stakeholders and industry experts, we have continued to break down the challenges facing tech talent acquisition into actionable insights, exploring how strategic initiatives, innovative HR practices, and supportive government policies can collectively address these issues.

The "**UAE Tech Talent Report 2024**" stands as a testament to our ongoing commitment to supporting the UAE's vision of becoming a global leader in technology and innovation. It is our hope that this report will serve as a valuable tool for entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers as they navigate the ever-changing landscape of tech talent in the UAE, driving the nation's tech sector to even greater heights.



His Excellency

JUMA AL KAIT

Undersecretary Assistant for International Trade

What have been the key drivers behind UAE talent attraction policies, and how do they align with the UAE's broader economic goals?

The UAE today is a regional leader, and a top contender for global talent attraction, it is the world's most preferred destination for those seeking new opportunities for career growth and high standard of living.

To keep up with these standards the UAE is effortlessly working on its talent attraction and retention policy and the alignment comes hand in hand by strengthening its economic pull factors, making it an ideal place for business and career growth.



What are the most impactful initiatives introduced by the Ministry to attract top tech talent to the UAE? / What are the upcoming initiatives or programs designed to support UAE companies in accessing top tech talent?

The Ministry has launched several impactful initiatives to attract top tech talent to the UAE, starting with the introduction and modernization of the Residence system, notably through the UAE Golden Visa. This long-term residence option is designed to attract highly skilled workers and professionals, boosting the investment environment and fostering business success and growth.

In addition to the Golden Visa, the Green Visa has been introduced to support self-employment for highly skilled workers. This is complemented by new entry visas, including those for the exploration of job and business opportunities, further enhancing the UAE's appeal to top talent.

Moreover, the Ministry has introduced significant financial security measures such as the Involuntary Loss of Employment Scheme and the Savings Scheme, providing a comprehensive support framework for professionals and ensuring long-term stability for both employees and businesses in the UAE.

In your view, what makes the UAE uniquely positioned to connect businesses with top tech talent, both locally and globally?

The UAE offers a strategic location, a stable economy, and a government committed to fostering business. Whether you're looking at AI, FinTech, or Manufacturing, our market is ripe with opportunities, backed by robust government support, incentives, and streamlined processes. The UAE has successfully established a strong and positive brand, significantly contributing to its ability to attract global talent.

How will the Ministry's upcoming efforts continue to support businesses in accessing top global tech talent?

The Ministry of Economy under the guidance and leadership of His Excellency Dr. Thani Bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi will continue its efforts in strategically positioning the UAE as a global leader by attracting and nurturing key talent segments with the overarching aim of the UAE becoming the Best country to work and live for global talent to enable a growing a sustainable economy.



Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a nation defined by a unique spirit of collaboration, where East meets West, North meets South, and local citizens and foreign residents work together to create a thriving ecosystem. Historically, the UAE has been a hub for financial, trade, commerce, and logistics, as well as a gateway to the Middle East, attracting companies and talent from around the world.

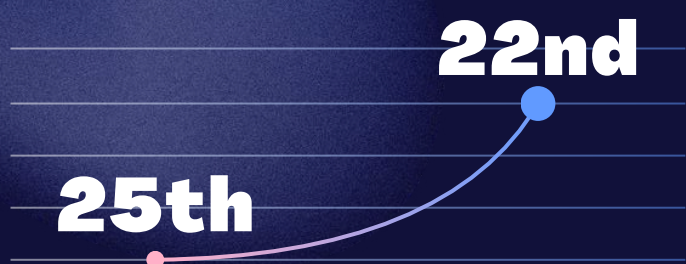
Today, the national vision, "*We the UAE 2031*", focuses on advancing the nation by 2031 across four key areas: society, economy, diplomacy, and the ecosystem. It aims to position the UAE as an attractive and influential global economic hub and partner.

Cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi have positioned themselves at the forefront of technological innovation with initiatives such as the Dubai Economic Agenda 'D33,' which seeks to establish Dubai as one of the top three cities in the world to live, invest, and work.

The digital economy is rapidly reshaping the nation's landscape, with the strength of the technology talent ecosystem at the core of this transformation. Those who understand, develop, and harness technology will ultimately determine the speed and success of this evolution. The "*State of Tech Talent in Dubai*" report, released in 2023, a collaboration between Integra Seven and Wamda, highlighted the city's progress in fostering an environment conducive to innovation.

Reflecting this trend, the UAE advanced from **25th to 22nd** in the **2023 Global Talent Competitiveness Index by INSEAD**, underscoring its growing ability to attract and nurture top tech talent.

2023 | **UAE** >>
Global Talent
Competitiveness
Index
INSEAD



As we envision a bright future of innovation and the digital economy in the UAE, we recognize the essential cooperation of four key stakeholders: technology talent as employees, corporations and startups as employers, and the enabling public sector. Today's UAE *'Tech Talent Study and Report'* is a collaborative effort among these stakeholders, each with a vested interest in contributing to the UAE's thriving economy and society.

Our study reveals that the primary factors driving companies' decisions to operate from the UAE are, first and foremost, access to global and regional markets; second, the safe and secure environment; and third, economic stability and ease of operations.

Prime Factors of UAE being a Market of Choice:

Access to global and regional markets

Safe and Secure Environment

Economic Stability

Ease of Operations



Interestingly, access to talent did not rank among the top factors; instead, it was identified as a significant challenge. This raises a compelling question:

If the UAE could provide seamless access to the tech talent companies need, how many more enterprises might choose the UAE as their launchpad and operational base?



You will find this report particularly valuable if you fall into one of the following categories:



Corporate Employers and Founders:

For corporate leaders and tech founders, the report offers critical insights into the current challenges and growth opportunities within the UAE's technology talent landscape. It will aid in identifying strategic avenues for innovation and expansion.



Technology Talent:

Engineers and tech professionals will benefit from a comprehensive overview of market dynamics, skill demands, and potential career trajectories in a rapidly evolving ecosystem.



Policymaker:

This report is an essential resource for developing strategies to enhance and innovate the tech environment in the UAE. It provides valuable information to support the creation of policies that foster a robust technology sector.

While each audience has unique interests, the report delivers valuable insights for all—whether you seek to understand market trends, explore business opportunities, or grasp the broader talent landscape in the UAE.



The Future of UAE Tech Talent Model

The purpose of this year's study is to identify the current challenges within the UAE's technology talent landscape and to outline the pathways necessary to achieve an aspirational future.



The report delves into a set of tech talent models—ranging from the “*base*,” where talent is sparse and innovation is limited, to the current, where the local digital ecosystem is beginning to flourish. Our ultimate goal is to chart a course towards an aspirational model where the UAE becomes a global hub for specialized tech talent, driving transformative innovation across all industries.

By understanding the hurdles we face today, we can better strategize and implement the changes needed to reach this visionary future.



UAE Future Tech Talent Models



BASE MODEL

Our Past



In this model, the UAE has a thin layer of technology talent, predominantly generic, with a significant lack of specialized professionals.

The country primarily serves as a regional gateway for international companies and a hub for importing solutions rather than developing them locally. The level of research and development and homegrown innovation is low, with companies often focused on reselling solutions rather than creating their own.

As a result, the pace of innovation and the transformation of industries are fairly slow, and the tech ecosystem remains underdeveloped.



CURRENT MODEL

Our Present



In this model, the local digital ecosystem in the UAE begins to thrive, attracting more tech talent and encouraging the establishment of tech companies that focus on the development of localized solutions. However, due to cost constraints, these companies maintain a mixed model, with tech teams partially based in the UAE and partially dispersed across the globe. The ecosystem is growing, but there is still a need for more specialized talent and a more cohesive, centralized approach to innovation.

This scenario represents a positive shift from the past, with increased momentum towards a more robust tech sector, but there are still limitations and challenges to overcome.



ASPIRATIONAL MODEL

Where we want to be



In the aspirational model, the UAE emerges as a global hub for top-tier specialized tech talent, transforming traditional sectors locally. The country has become a leader in innovation, with a strong focus on advanced R&D and the development of cutting-edge technologies. The UAE establishes a strategic network of global talent hubs, allowing companies to source talent worldwide while maintaining a significant presence in the UAE.

This scenario envisions a future where the UAE attracts and retains world-class talent, fostering a dynamic and innovative environment that propels the nation to the forefront of global technology leadership.

In the following pages, we will explore the challenges and solutions that are top of mind for UAE employers and employees to access the visibility of these models and chart pathways for accelerating innovation and business sustainability.



UAE Brand Strength and Talent Attraction



Approximately 80 % of employers consider the UAE's country brand a strong asset in their recruitment strategy, significantly boosting their ability to attract premier technology professionals. The UAE, particularly Dubai, is increasingly recognized as an innovation hub, further enhancing its appeal as a relocation destination for top talent in the Middle East.

According to both the employers and talent, over the past 5—10 years, the UAE's image has evolved significantly from a challenging location to a sought-after market, with Dubai's reputation as a tech hub improving notably. Today, **fewer than 20% of stakeholders** view the UAE merely as a technology reseller rather than a source of innovation. Comparatively, the UAE's brand stands favorably against neighboring countries, such as Saudi Arabia.



The majority of technology professionals with experience in the UAE have experienced a varying degree of “**misinformation**”. This negative perception often fades only after individuals start working in the local market.

To counter possible misconceptions, several respondents suggested establishing an English-language communication and media channel to more effectively enhance the country's global image and correct these misunderstandings.

Employers consistently praise the UAE government's efforts to foster a supportive innovation and talent acquisition environment. Initiatives like promoting AI education and providing incentives for new businesses are considered pivotal in positioning the UAE as a leader in technological advancements.

Abu Dhabi's recent support for entrepreneurial ventures further enriches the region's dynamic business ecosystem, making it an increasingly attractive destination for high-quality talent.

Despite these positive aspects, **100% of employers** cited the rising cost of living and conducting business as major obstacles to attracting top tech talent. The global trend of escalating costs, as reported in Europe and North America, is acutely felt in the UAE, underscoring the financial challenges businesses face and highlighting the need for continued focus on cost-related issues.



The Reality Behind Talent Abundance

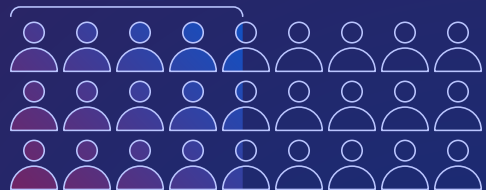
As Larry Page once observed, "Big companies have always wanted to grow and dominate. That's just the nature of being a big company. It's the same for startups." With this insight in mind, our analysis of key tech talent trends offers a comprehensive overview tailored to employers of all sizes – from emerging startups to large multinational corporations.

Actively Looking Outside

While **nearly half (48%)** of UAE employers, multinationals and startups combined assert that there is an abundance of local talent, actions speak louder than words.

Over 95% of companies in the UAE actively seek talent from outside the region, according to our study. The trend is consistent with another study conducted in 2022, where around **52% of UAE employers** acknowledged a talent shortage in certain tech specializations.

48%



95%



The rapid pace of technological advancement and digital transformation across industries in the country has heightened the demand for specialized skills in fields like data science, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. Unfortunately, the local talent pool often falls short, driving employers to recruit internationally for professionals who can meet these critical needs.

Although two-thirds of employers agree that there is a general abundance of tech talent within the UAE, securing specialized, senior-level professionals is the real challenge. This is particularly true for niche roles such as blockchain specialists, AI experts, and developers with machine learning expertise.



Despite the high volume of applicants for tech positions, finding candidates with the requisite qualifications and experience remains difficult. While junior and non-specialist roles are relatively easy to fill, senior and specialized positions remain a significant challenge, underscoring the gap between the available talent pool and the market's specific demands.

According to the discussion with UAE companies, the role of the government in creating incentive and benefit schemes for companies and individuals continues to be a subject of debate. Contrary to popular belief, not all UAE businesses support the idea of government incentives to attract talent, such as financial incentives, tax benefits, or relocation support.

Our study found that savvy UAE businesses ranked incentive programs at the bottom of the list of factors that would make the market more attractive to tech talent, expressing caution about the long-term sustainability of generic incentive programs.

However, nearly 30% of employers expressed strong interest in the government establishing a strategic program to attract top talent directly to the UAE. They envision a program providing incentives to individuals rather than companies, coupled with the creation of a dedicated database of specialized professionals.

This resource would support the immediate needs of businesses and enhance the UAE's long-term competitiveness in key industries by ensuring that the right expertise is readily available. Businesses are also more supportive of targeted research grant programs, similar to those in the EU, linked to specific PhD individuals working on niche technologies.



Offering streamlined options for changing employers within the UAE, thereby enhancing employee flexibility and mobility, was identified as a top priority for the UAE government to consider. Simplifying this process reduces administrative burdens and shortens the time involved in switching jobs, which, in turn, supports talent retention in the region. Employees are more likely to remain satisfied and committed when they can easily pursue better job opportunities without bureaucratic hurdles.

This flexibility especially appeals to dynamic and ambitious professionals who prioritize career progression and diverse experiences.

Interview with

JULIA ONSLOW-COLE

Partner, Head of Global Government Consulting and Strategy



1

How do you see the immigration services landscape in the UAE evolving, especially in the context of attracting top tech talent?

The UAE continues to solidify its status as a global business hub and leader in innovation and technology. Its evolving immigration landscape has been key in supporting this growth, with the government introducing policies to attract top global tech talent. Tech professionals benefit from initiatives like the Golden Visa, offering several pathways for specialized talent, tech entrepreneurs and freelancers. Additionally, the UAE's digital nomad program aligns with international best practice.

These initiatives are part of the broader strategy positioning the UAE as a leader in technology and innovation, making it one of the world's premier places to live and work. As innovation and digitisation continue to drive global strategies, we anticipate further positive developments in UAE immigration. The UAE's digital governance initiatives also aim to digitize and streamline the way residents interact with the authorities for government services, a key feature of smart cities, highly valued by tech talent.

2

Are there any tech-specific immigration solutions or services that Fragomen offers to cater to the unique needs of this sector?

Fragomen is a recognized leader in immigration technology, continuously seeking innovation. In the UAE, we've pioneered bespoke case management software and automation to streamline various aspects of the immigration process to support the delivery of services for the tech sector. Beyond operational efficiencies brought by RPA, Fragomen offers services tailored to the needs of tech businesses, big or small. These include a customized Golden Visa offering for specialists, business owners, and highly skilled students and graduates.

Those interested in this option can use Fragomen’s free [Golden Visa assessment tool](#). We also assist tech. freelancers and entrepreneurs in securing digital nomad visas and remote work permits; allowing them to work remotely in the UAE. We also offer a tailored business set-up solution for tech. entrepreneurs and firms, helping them obtain commercial licenses and registrations and maintain compliance, freeing them to focus on their business.



How does Fragomen collaborate with UAE government entities to streamline immigration processes and support national goals in talent acquisition?

We work closely with UAE government entities, advising on immigration policy and ensuring our services align with the UAE’s talent attraction goals. Our regular dialogue with key stakeholders facilitates discussions with employers, allowing them to hear directly from government on initiatives related to talent attraction. For instance, at the Global Compact on Migration’s Regional Review for Arab states Murtaza Khan, Managing Partner MEA, discussed the private sector’s specific mobility needs. This kind of open dialogue ensures government also hears from key employers about challenges they face. This allows us to help our clients navigate the immigration landscape smoothly, and aligns with the UAE’s objectives of attracting top talent.

ABOUT FRAGOMEN

Fragomen is the world’s leading provider of immigration and global mobility services with nearly 5,500 professionals and staff in 60+ offices located in the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, Middle East and Africa. Fragomen offers clients targeted and trusted solutions that help them achieve their local, regional and worldwide business goals. Fragomen professionals have extensive experience in working with multinational businesses, conglomerates, local employers, start-ups and individual investors.

In the Middle East and North Africa region Fragomen provides end to end immigration and global mobility services including work and residence permit services, document services, business travel, social security, corporate structuring services, business setup, corporate compliance, business expansion, destination services and more.

FRAGOMEN

UAE Recruitment Trends: The Role of AI and Emerging Focus Areas

One employee succinctly noted, "AI skills will be crucial, almost becoming hygiene for tech roles." This sentiment echoes the growing importance of AI in the recruitment landscape, resonating positively among both tech founders and large corporations. Within the scope of this study, the role of AI in tech talent recruitment has taken center stage, with companies increasingly integrating AI-driven tools into their hiring processes.

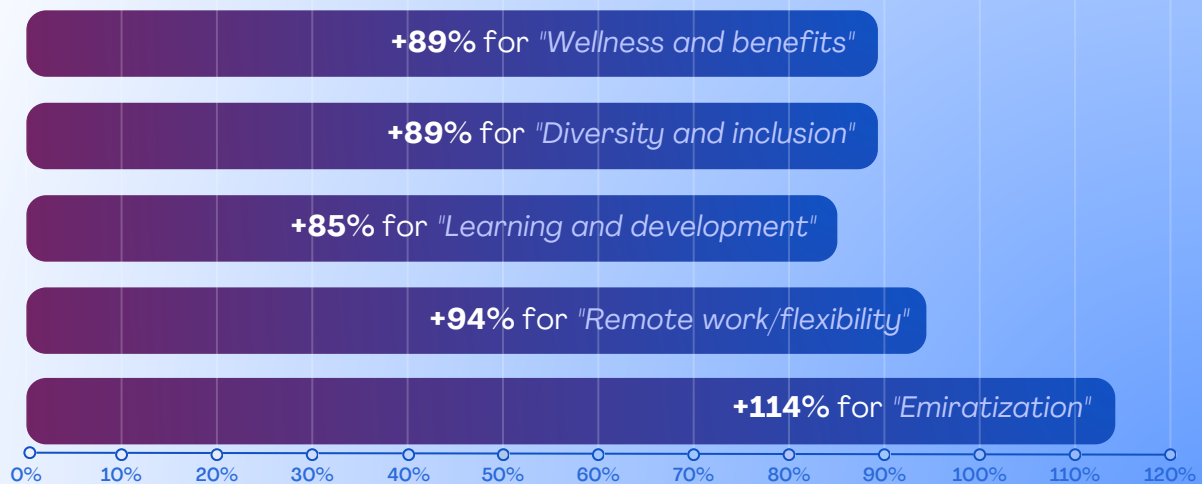
Notably, there has been a remarkable **90% increase** in the use of AI-driven recruitment tools over the past 24 months (2022-2024).




+48%
Use of AI-driven
recruitment tools



During this period, UAE employers have also shifted their recruitment language to better align with evolving workforce values and regulatory demands. Terms such as "remote work/flexibility," "wellness and benefits," "diversity and inclusion," and "learning and development" have seen significant upticks in usage, reflecting both the current priorities of the workforce and the urgency of compliance with nationalization efforts:





Discussions around “**Emiratization**” have surged, over 100% increase in mentions across social media, job portals, and forums. The latest Emiratisation regulations, announced in November 2023, mandate that all private sector businesses with a workforce of 20 to 49 employees must hire at least one Emirati by 2024 and increase this number to two by the end of 2025. Additionally, mainland entities registered with the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) and employing more than 50 workers must achieve a 2% annual increase in the number of Emirati nationals in their workforce.

Failure to comply may result in substantial fines and other penalties, such as the suspension or cancellation of work permits and business licenses.

It's worth noting that while **most companies report finding it "easy" to comply with UAE labor laws**, Emiratization compliance presents a distinct challenge. When asked to rate various compliance indicators, employers identified Emiratization as a pressing concern. They expressed that *“the sudden implementation of workforce localization strategies, without a gradual approach, could significantly impact a company's ability to meet its recruitment needs.”*

In the context of this study, considering the abundance of local youth, there are several long-term measures that could help balance demand and supply, ultimately easing the compliance burden for businesses.

Interview with

ARTEM GLADKIKH

Founder & CEO Signum.AI



1

Can you share your journey in building a successful tech team? What were some key challenges you faced, and what strategies or approaches led to your successes?

Since diving into the IT industry in 2014, my journey has been one of constant evolution and adaptation to new challenges. In the early stages, one of the toughest hurdles was finding qualified talent in an insanely competitive market, especially in tech hubs, where demand far outpaced supply. Traditional hiring methods like job boards quickly became ineffective, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of noise.

To navigate this, we pivoted to relying heavily on personal recommendations and part-time or project-based engagements. This strategy, while slower, allowed us to assemble a team that was not just skilled but also highly aligned with our company culture.

2

How do you believe artificial intelligence is transforming the way companies attract and retain talent? Are there specific examples or trends that you think are particularly impactful?

Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing the talent management landscape, and its impact is particularly profound in how companies attract and retain top talent. In today's volatile economic climate, where high employee turnover is a significant concern, AI offers a strategic advantage. We've observed a trend where employees, especially those in key positions, are increasingly looking for stability and new opportunities amid economic uncertainties. This has made retention more critical than ever.

At Signum.AI, we've developed a solution that leverages AI to analyze patterns in employee behavior, such as social media activity and engagement in professional development courses. By interpreting these data points, our AI can predict when an employee might be considering a move. This predictive capability allows companies to intervene proactively, offering incentives or career development opportunities to retain their top performers before they consider leaving.



What motivated your decision to live in Abu Dhabi while managing an international tech business? What aspects of the city and country have personally and professionally appealed to you?

Choosing to base myself in Abu Dhabi while leading an international tech business with offices in New York and Abu Dhabi was a strategic choice, shaped by a blend of personal and professional priorities. On a personal level, Abu Dhabi offers an unparalleled quality of life. The city's safety, coupled with a more reasonable cost of living compared to that in other major global hubs like New York, allows for a balanced lifestyle. The state-of-the-art infrastructure here lets me focus on scaling the business without the distractions and stress often associated with more congested and expensive cities.

From a professional standpoint, Abu Dhabi is rapidly emerging as a global nexus for innovation, particularly in the financial and technology sectors. The government's proactive approach to creating a business-friendly ecosystem, along with initiatives like Financial Week, positions Abu Dhabi as a fertile ground for growth, providing invaluable opportunities for networking and staying at the forefront of industry developments.

ABOUT SIGNUM.AI

Signum.AI is a technology company that specializes in artificial intelligence-driven solutions designed to help businesses optimize their operations, particularly in the areas of talent management, market research, and customer engagement. The company leverages advanced AI algorithms to analyze large datasets, providing insights that help predict trends, behaviors, and potential risks.





Hiring Tech Talent

Navigating Relocation Challenges

The UAE has been progressively reforming its visa regime since April 2022, facilitating a growing influx of talent - a development widely praised by employers and employees alike.

However, notable discrepancies arise among different stakeholders. Smaller companies, including tech startups, generally find the visa process to be "quick," "easy," and "very efficient," reflecting minimal challenges in securing visas.



VISA PROCESS



Small Companies



Quick



Easy



Very efficient



Large Companies



Lack of predictability



Access to immigration services

In contrast, larger organizations with over 500 employees report distinct challenges, particularly regarding the predictability of visa updates and access to immigration services. The study further reveals that companies based in Dubai typically express little to no dissatisfaction with the speed of visa processing.

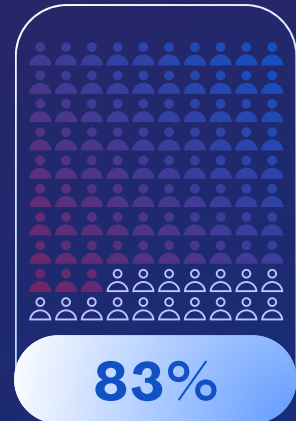
Regarding "access to relocation services," this aspect poses significant challenges for employers aiming to attract talent to the UAE. The difficulties in relocating employees efficiently and cost-effectively can diminish Dubai's appeal as a business hub, adding hurdles to managing employee relocations and impacting operational efficiency.

Supporting these findings, over 50% of employers reported encountering barriers when transferring newly hired employees to the UAE. This underscores the need for more streamlined and supportive relocation services to preserve the UAE's competitive edge in attracting top tech talent.

The solution lies in fostering closer collaboration and communication between the private sector and the government, as well as ensuring access to professional relocation services.

Offshoring

The data reveals **that 83% of UAE employers across various company sizes view offshoring talent as a key strategy for sustainability and growth.** However, it's essential to clarify that in this context, offshoring doesn't necessarily mean outsourcing tech development to third-party companies. Instead, it involves building and managing dedicated teams in other markets that are integral to the company. These teams work in close collaboration with the core team in the UAE but are based in locations where talent is more accessible and cost-effective. This approach enables companies to maintain operational control while leveraging global talent pools to meet their needs.



The scarcity of specialized local tech talent, coupled with the high living costs, makes offshoring an even more attractive option. This strategy has already proven successful among leading companies in the UAE.

Popular destinations for establishing these offshore teams include Turkey, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, India, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Looking forward, Africa is also emerging as a promising location, with its rapidly evolving tech talent landscape offering new opportunities for businesses to explore and capitalize on.



A common misconception about attracting technology talent is that it primarily involves drawing in tech startup founders. However, it's important to clarify that not every tech founder has an engineering background. In fact, over 50% of the founders behind the UAE's most funded and successful tech scale-ups do not come from an engineering background.

This underscores the point that to build a successful tech company or drive the digital transformation of a legacy organization; you don't necessarily need to be an engineer. What matters is having the savvy to assemble a strong engineering team, starting with finding the right CTO or Tech Lead, whether locally or internationally, to turn your vision into reality.

Interview with

AMIT VEER

Founder & CEO, Coffeee.io



1

How has AI been changing tech talent assessment and recruitment using the case study of Coffeee?

AI has made the online assessment impossible to cheat without any human intervention. With AI-powered facial recognition, expression assessment, and background and noise monitoring, it's impossible to get help during an assessment. Moreover, the quality of the assessment is also aided by the agility that AI brings to the solution by increasing or decreasing the degree of assessment difficulty depending on the quality of the talent.

2

Coffeee's business has been growing rapidly, filling the demand for tech talent globally. How do successful innovation hubs manage the supply and access to the tech talent necessary for digital economy growth?

Talent availability has been the biggest challenge facing global companies that want to grow fast using technology. Most tech hubs have been either low on talent availability or have been impacted by rising costs. This has impeded growth and slowed down innovation. Fortunately, several global talent supply hubs have emerged to the rescue of such companies. Offshoring tech hiring aids product development significantly thanks to the massive availability of talent and much lower costs. Eastern Europe, Africa, SEA (Southeast Asia), and India are some of the major hubs solving it for the world. India is the biggest powerhouse of tech talent with nearly 6 million talented developers and one of the lowest cost structures globally.

Global capability centres have become the norm with India hosting more than 55% of global GCCs that house more than 1.6 million employees building global tech and business. We will see a lot more of this as the West continues to feel the pressure of shipping products faster and yet keep the costs down.



What are the common risks and challenges faced by fast-growing companies when building tech capabilities overseas, and how are these risks effectively mitigated in today's business environment?

There are indeed numerous challenges when expanding tech capabilities across borders. One of the most significant hurdles is discovering the right talent. It's not just about finding skilled individuals; it's about figuring out the most effective process to screen, assess, and ultimately hire them. Then there's the matter of infrastructure—ensuring that the physical setup and IT infrastructure are both cost-effective and scalable can be quite daunting.

Compliance is another major challenge, particularly when it comes to payroll, insurance, and maintaining employee engagement after hiring. These are critical components that can often be overlooked but are essential for the smooth operation of any overseas expansion.

However, these challenges can be effectively managed by partnering with a capable tech-enabled platform. Such a partner can provide a large pool of high-quality talent, offer efficient talent assessment processes, and manage compliance and post-hiring engagement by acting as the employer of record. This approach not only simplifies the entire process but also introduces flexibility, especially through contract hiring. It allows companies to scale their workforce up or down in response to business needs, without the burden of long-term commitments, thereby keeping costs in check.

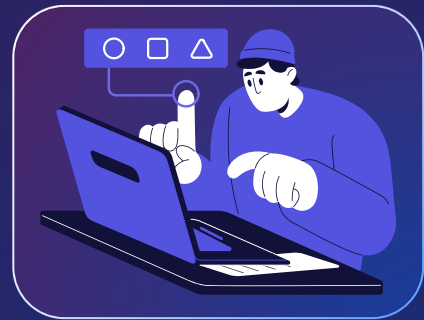
ABOUT COFFEEE.IO

Coffeee.io is an AI enabled staff augmentation platform building transformative tech offshoring solutions for global enterprises. The company uses cutting-edge technology to match skilled developers and IT professionals with companies in need of their expertise by providing a streamlined, efficient, and data-driven approach to hiring.



Untapped Potential – UAE Youth

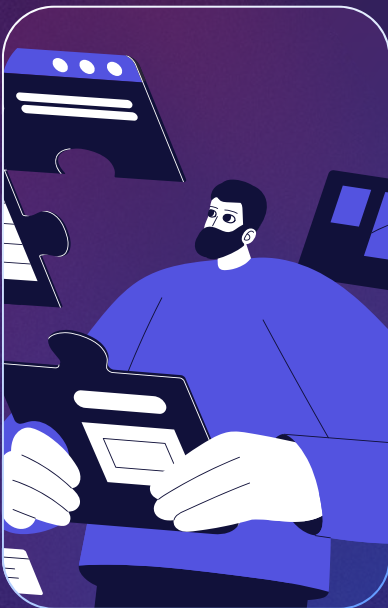
The youth in the UAE, both Emirati and expatriates aged between 15 and 35, constituting up to 50% of the population, represent an immense yet largely untapped potential. These young individuals, born, raised, and educated in the country, have the capacity to be key contributors to the innovative economy, whether as skilled employees of large corporations or as founders of groundbreaking startups. However, a significant challenge persists.



Interestingly, although we didn't include any direct questions about education in this year's study, the topic surfaced prominently during interviews and discussions. This highlights the persistent and urgent nature of education-related challenges within the UAE's tech talent landscape.

Respondents identified several key concerns regarding the education system's role in cultivating top tech talent in the UAE, where the dominant theme was that **“Fresh graduates often lack practical work experience.”**

Rhetorical Question – Who is Responsible?



Employers:

Many employers fall short of providing sufficient entry-level opportunities or internships that bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical experience. Several factors contribute to this issue: designing and implementing effective internships requires significant time and resources, including compliance with labor laws and coordination with universities.

Companies often find it challenging to navigate these complexities, especially when their HR departments are already stretched thin or when university internship cycles do not align with their operational needs.



Academic Institutions:

These may not be adequately preparing students for the realities of the job market, focusing more on theoretical knowledge than on practical skills.



Students:

Some are not fully utilizing available opportunities to gain experience during their studies, such as internships, part-time work, or extracurricular activities that build relevant skills.

Moreover, some respondents noted that no UAE university ranks within the top 30 globally, highlighting the need for improvements in higher education.

To address this, it is suggested that partnerships with renowned international universities be fostered, potentially enabling access to recent graduates with higher levels of expertise. Strong university engineering and research programs are especially emphasized as vital for cultivating a skilled tech workforce. Adopting models like Canada's IRAP, which subsidizes salaries for PhD and tech hires, could significantly support companies and enhance the talent pool.



Interview with

FATEMA AL AFEEFI

Head of Employee Experience and HR Digitalization at du



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How does du plan to stay ahead of the curve in supporting youth and Emiratisation in an ever-evolving tech landscape?

At du, we understand that maintaining a competitive edge in the fast-paced tech landscape requires proactive measures to support youth and drive Emiratisation initiatives. Our focus extends beyond simply filling positions; we are dedicated to empowering the next generation of Emirati talent through various strategic initiatives and partnerships.

One of the ways we stay ahead is by actively engaging with educational institutions across the UAE to better align our curriculum with the rapidly changing demands of the tech industry. We participate in university roadshow, recruitment fairs such as Ru'ya Careers UAE and collaborative projects, ensuring we attract emerging talent and foster interest in careers within the technology sector.

Additionally, we offer internships and project-based opportunities that provide hands-on experience, allowing young Emiratis to apply their academic knowledge in real-world settings. Through exposure to cutting-edge technologies and collaborative teamwork, we enable them to develop critical skills that are essential in the digital age.

By promoting a culture of innovation, we encourage youth to explore diverse career paths in technology. Our initiatives include workshops, hackathons, and seminars that not only showcase potential career opportunities but also empower students to think creatively and engage with emerging technologies. This comprehensive approach builds a pipeline of skilled professionals ready to contribute to the UAE's digital transformation.

↓ 2

What are some of the most valuable lessons du has learned in creating programs that resonate with and engage technology talent?

In our journey of developing talent programs aimed at technology professionals, we have learned several key lessons that shape our approach.

First and foremost, understanding the aspirations of young talent is crucial. Engaging in meaningful dialogues with emerging professionals helps us tailor our initiatives to their needs and career goals, enhancing their overall experience. For instance, we've discovered that many young Emiratis value mentorship opportunities and seek clear pathways for career development. Programs like Future X exemplify our commitment to addressing these aspirations by pairing graduates with experienced professionals for guidance.

Another important lesson is the significance of creating an inclusive and innovative environment. By fostering a collaborative culture that encourages creative problem-solving and risk-taking, we empower our talent to contribute ideas and solutions that drive business and technological advancements. Encouraging open communication and idea-sharing creates a sense of ownership among participants and strengthens their commitment to the organization.

Finally, providing continuous learning and upskilling opportunities has proven vital in keeping talent engaged and motivated. As the tech landscape evolves, staying ahead requires constant adaptation. Our training programs equip employees with the latest skills and knowledge, reinforcing our commitment to their professional growth and ensuring they are prepared for the challenges ahead.

↓ 3

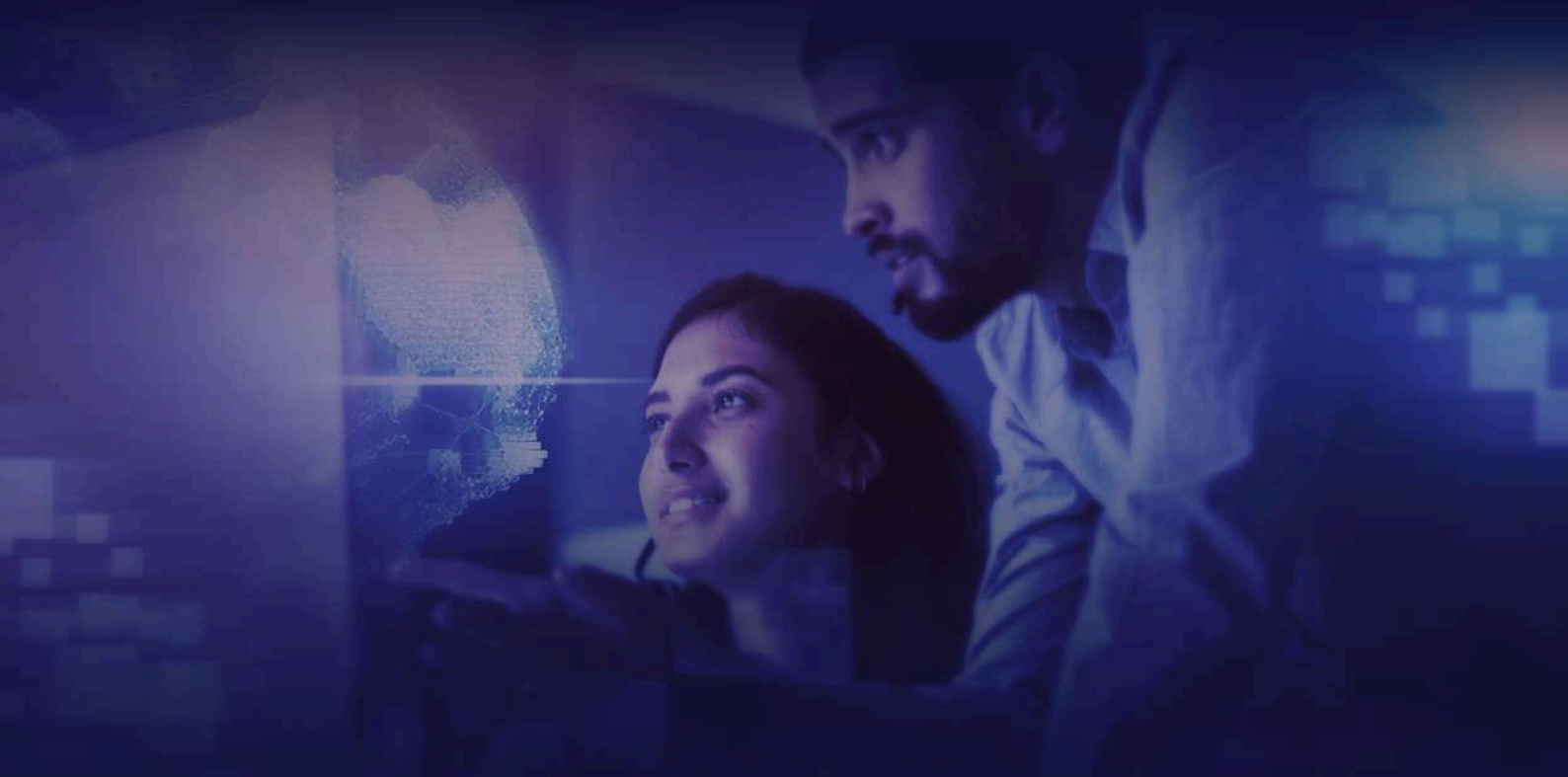
Could you elaborate on du's approach to Emiratization and how it differs from other companies in the UAE?

du's approach to Emiratization is rooted in a deep commitment to developing homegrown talent who can lead the telecommunications sector in the future. Unlike other companies that may focus solely on hiring for entry-level roles, we take a holistic view of Emiratization by investing in long-term skills development and leadership training for Emiratis.

Our initiatives go beyond traditional recruitment; we actively seek to build partnerships with educational institutions and participate in workshops that spark interest in tech careers among Emirati youth. By engaging proactively with the community, we promote careers in technology not only as jobs but as avenues for innovation and impact within the UAE.

Another distinguishing aspect of our approach is our focus on creating a nurturing environment that supports continuous professional development. We offer various training programs, internships, and skill-building workshops tailored to the interests and needs of young Emiratis. The goal is to create well-rounded professionals who are prepared for both current and future roles in the tech landscape.

Furthermore, we foster a culture of innovation and collaboration within our workforce, ensuring that Emiratis feel valued and empowered to contribute creatively.



Retaining Best Talent

The UAE has demonstrated a strong commitment to retaining top talent, a priority many employers share. Large organizations typically hold an advantage in this regard, offering more comprehensive benefits and greater job security compared to young startups.

The hypothesis that technology talent often uses job opportunities with UAE-based startups as gateways to enter the country before transitioning to a larger corporation is supported by 50% of the study's participants.

Factors Driving Talent to Seek Opportunities Abroad:

Talent leaving the UAE is driven by several key factors, with the lack of clear pathways for permanent residency or naturalization being the most significant. The absence of permanent citizenship or passport opportunities for non-Emirati citizens, coupled with no indication of long-term stability measures such as pension schemes, leads many to seek more secure futures in other countries. The high cost of living is another critical issue, with expensive housing, education, healthcare, and daily expenses putting a financial strain on employees, prompting them to relocate to more affordable regions.

Other reasons include the pursuit of better job opportunities outside the UAE and the desire for enhanced career progression prospects. Family-related factors, such as reunification and children's education, also play a significant role in employees' decisions to leave. Lastly, concerns over limited resources in the event of job loss, despite some safety nets, leave employees feeling vulnerable, further motivating them to explore opportunities in countries with more comprehensive unemployment benefits and job security measures.

REASON	SCORE (MAX 100)	IMPORTANCE
Lack of clear pathways for permanent residency or naturalization	100	HIGH
High cost of living	97	
Better job opportunities outside of Dubai	87	
Family-related reasons	80	MEDIUM
Better career progression prospects	77	
Limited recourses in the event of loss of employment	60	
Cultural or lifestyle preferences	34	LOW

The traditional concept of loyalty has evolved significantly, a shift accelerated by the 2020 pandemic. In today's dynamic workforce, loyalty is no longer defined by long-term tenure alone. In fact, 28% of employers have either implemented or are considering implementing Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) as a key measure to enhance retention. However, the majority of these employers noted a significant gap in available information and education on how to effectively implement such schemes.

This lack of guidance can hinder the successful adoption of ESOPs, potentially limiting their impact on employee retention and engagement.



Charting Pathway to the Future Model

In light of the UAE's ambition to solidify its position as a global leader in the digital economy, a series of solutions could be formulated based on the study conducted to enhance the nation's tech talent ecosystem. Those are designed to attract, retain, and develop top-tier talent from around the world while harnessing the local potential in alignment with the UAE's long-term economic vision.

By focusing on the creation of talent hubs, fostering specialized ecosystems, and aligning academic and professional requirements, we aim to address current challenges and position the UAE as a premier destination for companies and business leaders.

Hubs & Nods Program to Enable Strategic Talent Offshoring:

Explore the development of a Hub & Nods Ecosystem where UAE-based companies could seamlessly connect with leading Tech Talent Hubs in priority markets. Establish agreements or partnerships with other countries, talent platforms, universities, and peer governments to streamline the process for tech professionals to work for the UAE and for UAE companies to build local tech teams.

Specialized Tech Talent Ecosystem:

Introduce a dedicated portal (via collaboration with existing market leaders) specifically for the tech talent interested in working for the UAE companies with and without relocation options. Integrate a "digital economy reserve" program within the portal that maintains a pool of interim top tech professionals who can be quickly deployed to meet urgent needs in the UAE's digital economy.

Prioritization of Youth Professional Experience:

Develop and Distribute an Internship Toolkit. Create a comprehensive, user-friendly toolkit for companies to run and organize internships effectively. This toolkit should cover best practices, legal requirements, and program management. Distribute it through licensing authorities during license issuance or renewal and Chambers of Commerce.

Align Academic and Professional Requirements. Collaborate with educational institutions to review and adjust student requirements for professional experience. Ensure that academic and business cycles are synchronized, offering flexibility for multiple shorter or extended internships to accommodate various industry needs.

Long-Term Job Stability Measures:

Develop pension or retirement savings plans for non-Emirati workers, allowing them to save for retirement and transfer benefits if they relocate or return to their home countries.

Introduce Simplified Visa Pathways for Intra-Company Transfers and Short-Term Assignments:

Simplified visa pathways for intra-company transfers and short-term assignments facilitate the smooth movement of talent within multinational organizations.

Assisting with regulatory compliance:

Establish regular consultations between public sector regulators and private sector companies. These dialogues should address compliance challenges and develop practical solutions that align with industry needs. Additionally, comprehensive assessments should be conducted to evaluate how well local talent aligns with the skills and competencies required by various industries. Use these insights to design targeted support programs that assist companies in meeting regulatory requirements while bridging skill gaps effectively.

R&D Specific Grant Programs:

Partner with leading academic institutions and research labs to attract top-tier talent for research positions, potentially offering incentives or research funding to facilitate collaboration with local industries.

Each of the proposed solutions must be thoroughly investigated, as alongside their evident benefits, they also present potential challenges in development, implementation, and governance. Our objective is to provide comprehensive information that serves as a platform and blueprint for dialogue among all stakeholders. This collaborative approach will enable us to move forward toward a more advanced and resilient tech talent model for the UAE.



Methodology

The study, conducted from February to August 2024, utilized a mixed-methods research design that integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research included series of interviews, focus group discussions, and a survey. Market analysis targeted firstly, UAE-based companies across nine economic sectors, as well as entrepreneurship, and, secondly, technology talent working for the UAE enterprises both onsite and remotely.

Additionally, an AI-driven monitoring tool enabled the collection and analysis of data from over 50,000 companies in the Middle East, with a particular focus on the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Research team was comprised of specialists from Integra Seven, Fragomen, and Signum Ai, bringing unique expertise and technical skills.

The companies selected to partake in this study range from a selection of 9 economic sectors and entrepreneurship (startups/scaleups):

- ICT, Advanced Technology & Space
- Energy (incl. Clean Energy)
- Food & Water Security
- Traditional & Advanced Manufacturing
- Transportation & Logistics
- Financial Services
- Science & Education
- Healthcare
- Cultural & Creative Industries
- Tech Startups (scaleups)

Data collection was conducted through multiple channels:

Qualitative Data:

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were organized with tech professionals, HR leaders, and industry experts.

Quantitative Data:

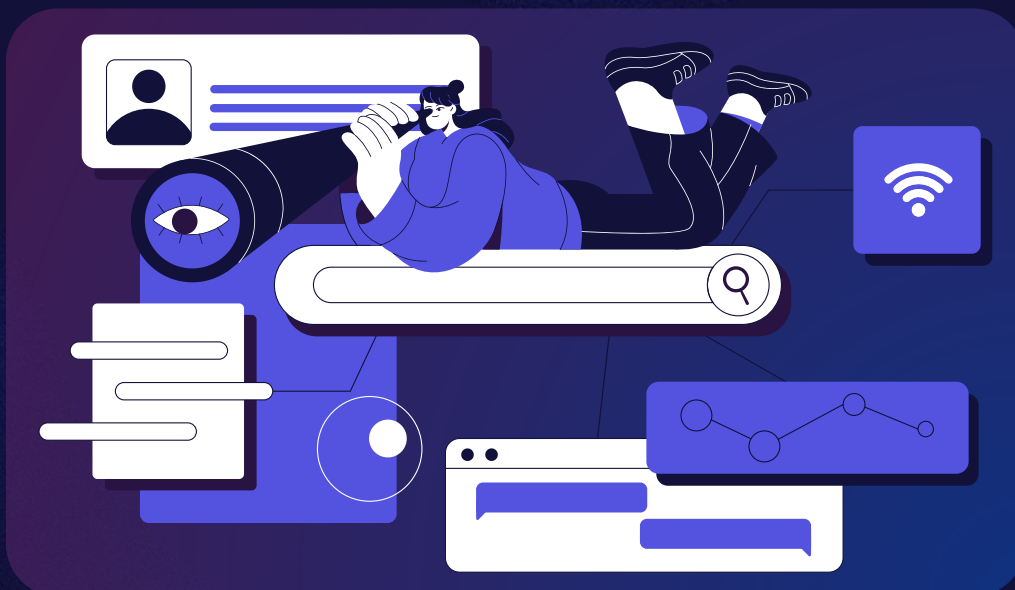
A survey was distributed to a broader audience of employers to capture statistical data on various aspects, such as market regulatory challenges and attraction and retention strategies.



The analytical methods used in this study include:

Thematic Analysis:

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were coded and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns. Statistical Analysis: Quantitative survey data were analyzed using statistical techniques to identify trends, correlations, and significant factors affecting tech talent attraction and retention.



Data collection through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys allowed for rich qualitative insights and robust quantitative data to be gathered. Thematic analysis helped uncover common themes and patterns from the qualitative data, while statistical analysis identified significant trends and correlations from the survey responses. This comprehensive methodological approach ensures that the findings and recommendations of this report are well-supported and actionable, providing valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders in the tech talent ecosystem of the UAE.

With the support of Signum.ai, an AI-driven monitoring platform, additional data collection and analysis were performed, specifically focusing on technology job market trends in the Middle East. The process included:

- **Identifying Target Companies**
- **Collecting Job Postings**
- **Identifying Relevant Keywords**
- **Analyzing Social Media Mentions**
- **Identifying Patterns and Trends**
- **Trend Analysis**
- **Sentiment Analysis**

The initial step involved collecting data on approximately 50,000 companies across various industries within the Middle East region.

Next, job postings were scraped from key job boards such as Indeed, Bayt, GulfTalent, and Naukrigulf. The focus was on extracting information on job titles, descriptions, required skills, company names, locations, and posting dates. This process resulted in a comprehensive dataset of 15,000 job postings, with 8,500 from the UAE and 6,500 from Saudi Arabia. This data offered detailed insights into the hiring needs and trends within the region.

To refine the analysis, a list of relevant keywords related to key job roles and emerging skills in HR topics was developed.

In addition to job postings, LinkedIn and Twitter were monitored for mentions of the identified keywords: this involved tracking posts, comments, and discussions related to hiring and job market trends. Over a five-year period, data was collected on the frequency and context of keyword mentions, helping to understand the evolving landscape of job roles and skills in real time.

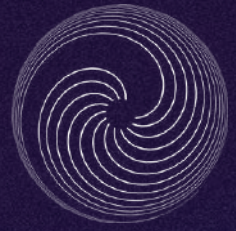
The collected data was then analyzed to identify patterns in job postings and social media mentions. This analysis determined the most frequently mentioned job roles and skills and assessed the growth in popularity of specific job roles and skills based on the increase in mentions over time. By comparing the demand for specific roles and skills between the UAE and Saudi Arabia and segmenting the data by industry, sector-specific trends and regional hiring hotspots were identified.

To provide a more granular view, job postings were mapped to specific locations to identify regional hiring hotspots. This spatial analysis highlighted areas with high demand for certain roles and skills, providing valuable insights for the study.

Finally, sentiment analysis was performed on LinkedIn posts and tweets to gauge industry sentiment. This analysis identified key discussion topics and concerns among employers and job seekers, providing a deeper understanding of the job market's qualitative aspects.

The deployed approach of the study approach ensures a robust and consistent dataset, providing valuable insights into the current state and the future trends of UAE tech talent.

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