

WONDERFUL WORK

POWERFUL INSIGHTS

JULY 2025

This is the fourth in a market intelligence series from Tonic, designed to help businesses navigate the evolving world of work.

At Tonic, we believe in creating Wonderful Work That Works. Work that inspires, engages, and delivers real impact. Through this series, we bring you sharp, data-driven insights into talent trends, employer branding, and workplace culture, with a special focus on KSA & the UAE.

NAVIGATING THE TALENT TRENDS THAT IMPACT EMPLOYERS IN THE GCC

THE GLOBAL TALENT INFLOW: SHIFTING THE UAE'S EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE

The UAE has positioned itself as a hub for global talent. Visa reforms, favourable economic policies, and a focus on digital infrastructure have attracted professionals from around the world. But with this growth comes a change in dynamic: attracting talent is easier, but retaining and engaging that talent is now the challenge.

In this issue, we explore how the unprecedented influx of inbound talent is reshaping employer branding and talent management across the UAE. We explore how this shift is influencing recruitment, retention, and productivity, and how employers can align their brand strength with the expectations of a diverse, global workforce.

BOTTOM LINE:
THE UAE'S COMPETITIVENESS NOW RELIES ON HOW WELL EMPLOYERS UNDERSTAND AND DELIVER AGAINST GLOBAL TALENT EXPECTATIONS.



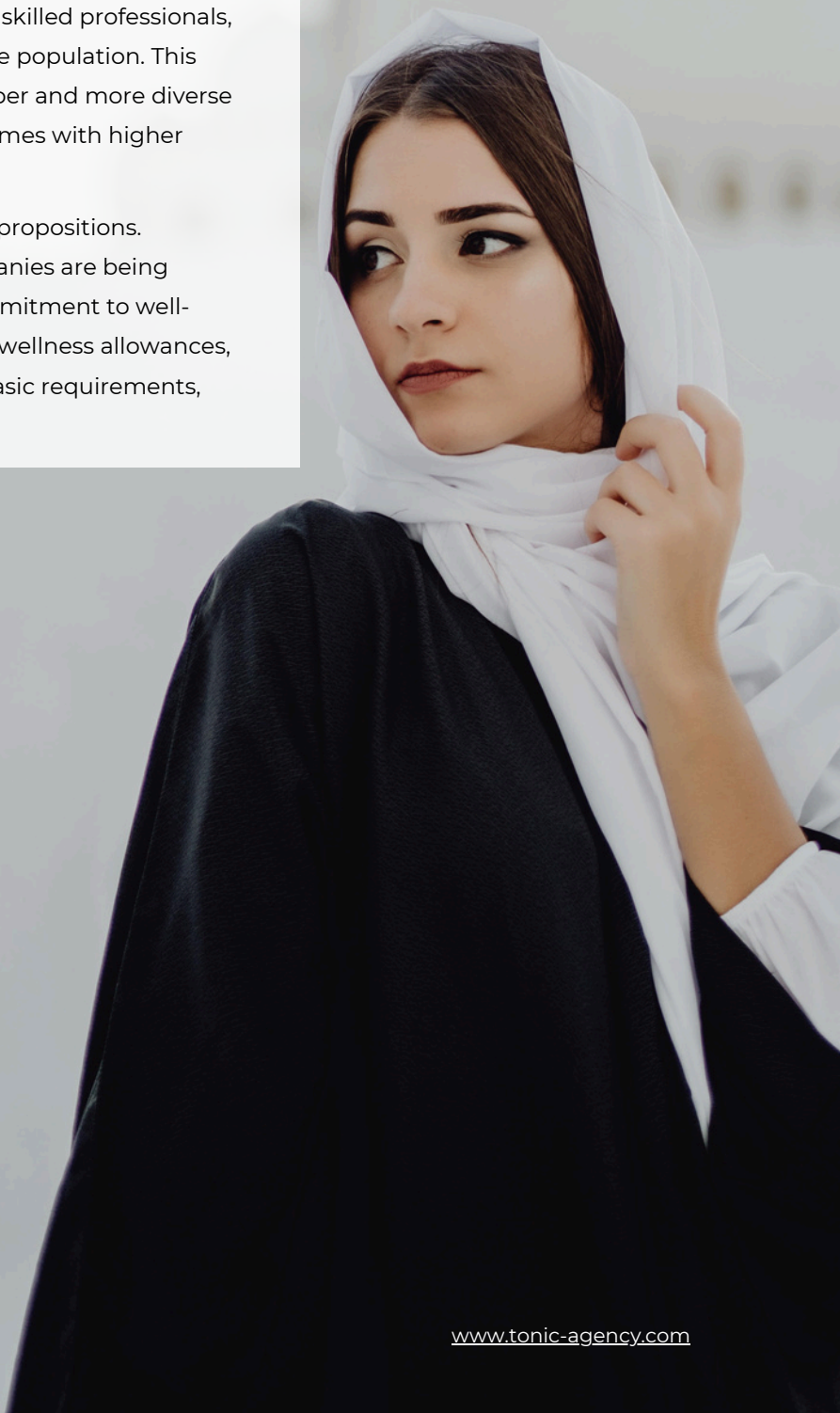
**MOBILITY HAS
CHANGED THE
RULES: IT'S
TIME TO ADAPT**

INBOUND TALENT: WHAT'S CHANGED AND WHY IT MATTERS

What attracts global talent today? In a world where professionals have more mobility and choice, the answer is increasingly nuanced. The UAE government's visa reforms, including 10-year Golden Visas, 5-year Green Visas, and Remote Work Visas, have fundamentally transformed the landscape, making it easier than ever for professionals to move to the UAE first and seek jobs later. These initiatives have drawn an unprecedented influx of skilled expatriates, with Dubai alone seeing a 98% increase in Golden Visas in 2023 over 2022, and a further rise of 27% in 2024, and freelance registrations in MENA jumping 78% in one year.

This influx has solidified the UAE's status as a global talent magnet, ranking #1 worldwide for attracting skilled professionals, with expatriates comprising about 89% of the population. This means employers now have access to a deeper and more diverse candidate pool. However, this abundance comes with higher expectations from incoming professionals.

These expectations are reshaping employer propositions. Competitive pay is no longer enough. Companies are being judged on their culture, leadership, and commitment to well-being. Benefits like robust health insurance, wellness allowances, and flexible hours are increasingly seen as basic requirements, not added perks.



RECRUITMENT, RETENTION & PRODUCTIVITY: NAVIGATING THE SHIFT

Recruitment Outcomes

The talent influx has led to shorter hiring times and lower recruitment costs for many employers. Over 52% of UAE employers report getting more applications per job, and 43% can hire faster due to the immediate availability of candidates. Companies can now be more selective and find closer matches to job requirements. However, while general hiring is easier, skills gaps persist in high-demand areas like AI, meaning the "war for truly specialised talent rages on," and top experts can still command high salaries.

Retention & Turnover

Long-term visas increase loyalty by giving stability and a sense of future in the UAE. However, they also untether employees from company sponsorship, making job-hopping easier. This elevates the importance of employer satisfaction and engagement to earn the loyalty of talented people no longer "locked in" by visa status. If compensation doesn't keep pace with rising living costs, or if companies neglect career development and work-life balance, they risk higher turnover. Investing in professional development (66% of UAE employees more likely to stay) and work-life balance (82% say it's important) are crucial for retention.

Productivity & Performance

The influx of fresh skills can accelerate projects and innovation, especially in tech, healthcare, and education. Filling critical vacancies quicker reduces downtime and burnout. But, potential drags include adjustment periods for new hires, high turnover disrupting continuity, and challenges in managing culturally diverse, hybrid teams. Critically, hiring solely on the cheapest option can backfire, leading to poor performance and the need to re-hire. Smart hiring and retention strategies are key to sustained productivity gains.

HOW ARE EMPLOYERS ADAPTING NOT JUST TO HIRE, BUT TO BUILD RESILIENT, FUTURE READY WORKFORCES?

REFRAMING EVP

Many are revising their EVPs, recognising that perks like remote work are now baseline expectations and focusing on deeper factors like leadership, mission, and development pathways

EMBRACING FLEXIBILITY

A striking shift is the widespread adoption of hybrid and remote work options. The UAE has facilitated this through initiatives like the Virtual Working Program, turning the country into a base for digital nomads. UAE-based employers are also embracing remote work to tap overseas talent, gaining access to a wider talent pool and boosting their employer brand.

INCENTIVES FOR SENIOR HIRES

Golden Visas are being offered as part of leadership packages to secure long-term commitment from top talent.

STRATEGIC RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Some companies, particularly in saturated job functions, have been able to hire at similar or lower salaries, redirecting these savings into employee benefit programs and training to improve engagement and stem attrition.

FOCUS ON NICHE SKILLS

Despite the general influx, salaries for in-demand roles like data scientists and cybersecurity experts have actually risen, as companies compete for these scarce skills.

SECTOR SPOTLIGHT: TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL SERVICES IN THE UAE

The tech sector in the UAE is experiencing rapid growth. Inbound workforce mobility has transformed how tech businesses scale. The combination of flexible visas and a globally appealing lifestyle has drawn skilled professionals, including developers, engineers, and data scientists, to the UAE in record numbers, especially specialists from India, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

While general hiring has become easier, with many employers reporting shorter hiring times and lower recruitment costs due to the increased talent pool, competition for high-demand skill sets remains intense.

So, despite a general influx, there's a paradox: many candidates are available, but not all possess the specialised senior level experience needed for roles in the digital, knowledge-driven economy. The booming AI sector has a surplus of junior tech workers but a shortage of seasoned experts.

Employers are adapting quickly to these trends. Some tech firms in Dubai are offering hybrid work and stock options to attract globally mobile developers from Europe and Asia. UAE-based employers are also embracing remote work to tap overseas talent, enabling a tech startup in Abu Dhabi to hire a developer in Eastern Europe remotely, or a Dubai consultancy to retain an employee who moves abroad. This further breaks the bottleneck of talent and boosts their employer brand.

In a sector defined by speed, the message is clear: access to talent is no longer the primary barrier. Instead, keeping that talent, and creating the right environment for it to thrive, is where the real challenge lies. Employers known for inclusive culture, innovation, and employee well-being are those to which inbound talent will gravitate.

JULY'S FINAL THOUGHT

The UAE's open-door talent policy has created a globally competitive employment market. For employers, it brings fresh opportunity, but also raises the stakes.

Candidate availability is up; selectivity is sharper. Hiring talent is not the issue. Retaining it is. And that hinges on understanding what modern professionals value: fairness, growth, flexibility, and purpose.

Success lies in alignment. Between what you promise and what you deliver. Between what your people expect and what they experience. In this new era, employer brand isn't just a message, it's a strategy.