KORN FERRY



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES WORKFORCE 2025

What Do Professionals in the United Arab Emirates Expect from Work in 2025?

Ranked 17th globally in talent attraction and 1st in the Arab world,* the UAE continues to strengthen its position as a global business hub in the Middle East. With a rapidly growing population and a rising GDP driven by economical diversification efforts, the demand for top talent is higher than ever, and companies must adapt to evolving expectations to attract and retain top talent.

We invite you to explore the insights ahead to gain a deeper understanding of how professionals in the UAE feel about work and what drives their engagement and retention.



*Based on the 2024 IMD World Talent Report

The Workforce 2025 survey results are clear. The workforce is evolving—and fast. Read on to catch up on 2025's critical workforce insights:

1. Generational Gaslighting?

2. A New AI World Order

3. Reward to Retain

4. Trust in Leadership

How We Did It

Korn Ferry surveyed more than 15,000 professionals worldwide to understand how they really feel about work today. The survey included participants from entry-level positions to CEOs across 10 major markets: the US, UK, France, Germany, Brazil, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Japan, and India.

This report presents a snapshot of insights collected from 501 professionals and leaders in the UAE, offering a data-driven analysis of workforce trends, priorities, and challenges in 2025.

FOREWORD

The UAE continues to lead the region in innovation, economic diversification, and workforce evolution. As we shape a future built on technology, sustainability, and global connectivity, the expectations of talent are shifting just as rapidly. This report highlights the critical trends influencing the UAE labor market—from working with different generations, compensation pressures, and talent mobility to the growing demand for purpose-driven leadership, agile work environments, and AI adoption. To remain competitive, organizations must go beyond traditional strategies and embrace data-driven, people-first approaches.

At Korn Ferry, we're proud to partner with UAE public and private sectors as they navigate this fast-changing landscape, ensuring that their people strategies are not only aligned with national goals, but also built to thrive in a future defined by change.



Jonathan Holmes
Managing Director at Korn Ferry Middle East, Africa, and Turkey

1. Generational Gaslighting?

Are there any major problems with having five different generations working together? It depends who you ask.

Generational gaslighting is the act of invalidating or dismissing the experiences, values, or challenges of one generation—often by another.

And soon, we'll have six generations in many companies. By 2033, nearly a third of people over 70 will continue to work, while Generation Alpha (born 2010–today) will start filling up the junior roles. This is making the workforce more multigenerational than ever.

This brings significant benefits, such as more senior employees' experience and knowledge that can be shared down through the workforce. But it can also cause significant dissatisfaction for some.

According to our 2025 Workforce UAE survey, 68% of Gen Z say they need better communication and teamwork training. Yet, only 42% of Gen X think there's a problem. That's a serious perception gap. So, is it being overlooked—or simply ignored?



Generations Defined:

- **Baby Boomers: Born 1946–1964**
- **Generation X: Born 1965–1980**
- **Millennials (Gen Y): Born 1981–1996**
- **Generation Z: Born 1997–2009**
- **Generation Alpha: Born 2010–Today**

When asked: What are the biggest challenges you face when working with colleagues from different generations?

Gen Z is asking for communication and teamwork support, while older generations see the gap as a tech issue, with few Gen Z voices citing tech as the problem.

68%

OF GEN Z IS CRYING OUT FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION AND TEAMWORK TRAINING

Communication Gap

42%

OF GEN X THINK THERE'S AN ISSUE. THAT'S QUITE A PERCEPTION GAP.

38%

OF GEN Z FEEL THERE'S A SKILL TECHNOLOGY GAP AMONG THEIR OLDER COLLEAGUES

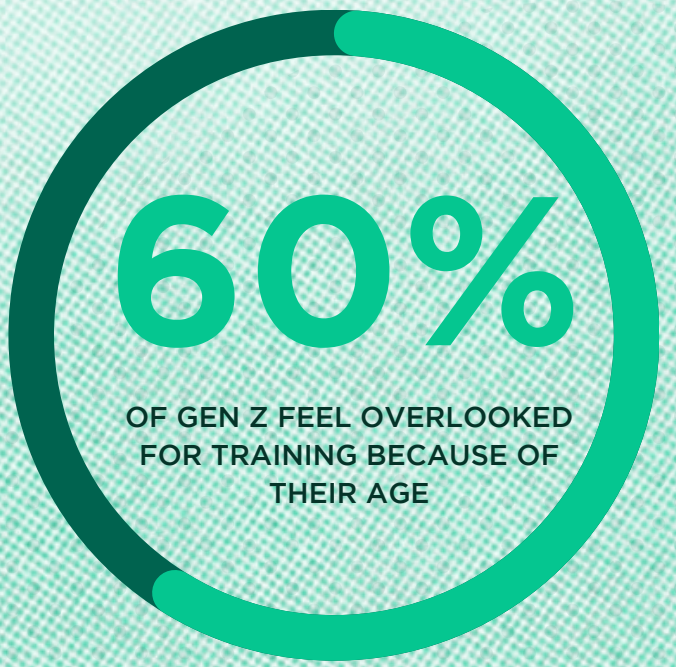
Digital Divide

61%

OF GEN X AND BABY BOOMERS BELIEVE THAT TECHNOLOGY TRAINING IS KEY TO BRIDGING THE SKILLS GAP.

Around 60% of Gen Z surveyed in the UAE feel they're overlooked for training opportunities because of their age, while 56% believe they're passed up for senior positions due to age as well. This points to a growing perception of being undervalued in the workplace.

Measuring employee perception is essential to understanding how teams feel about their work, leadership, and growth opportunities. By incorporating listening tools—like pulse surveys, feedback platforms, and one-on-one check-ins—organizations can gather real-time insights and act on what matters most. These tools not only surface hidden concerns but also show employees that their voices are heard, fostering a more engaged and empowered workforce.



Business Impact:

Providing training on communication and teamwork is critical to ensure these generations can collaborate to solve business challenges. Focusing the generations around shared goals and values can help to bring them together.

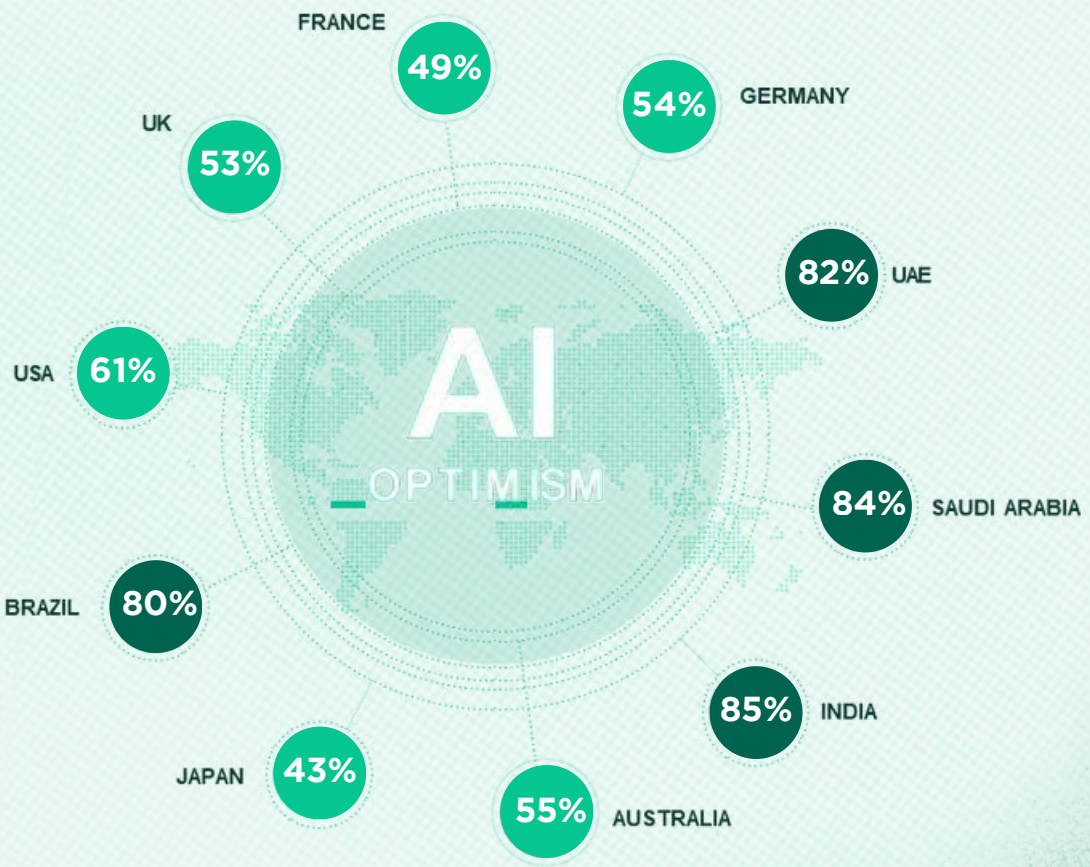
Tailoring training and rewards to meet the needs of different generations can also help bridge gaps.

2. A NEW AI WORLD ORDER

AI isn't just changing the way we work. It's reshaping the work itself.

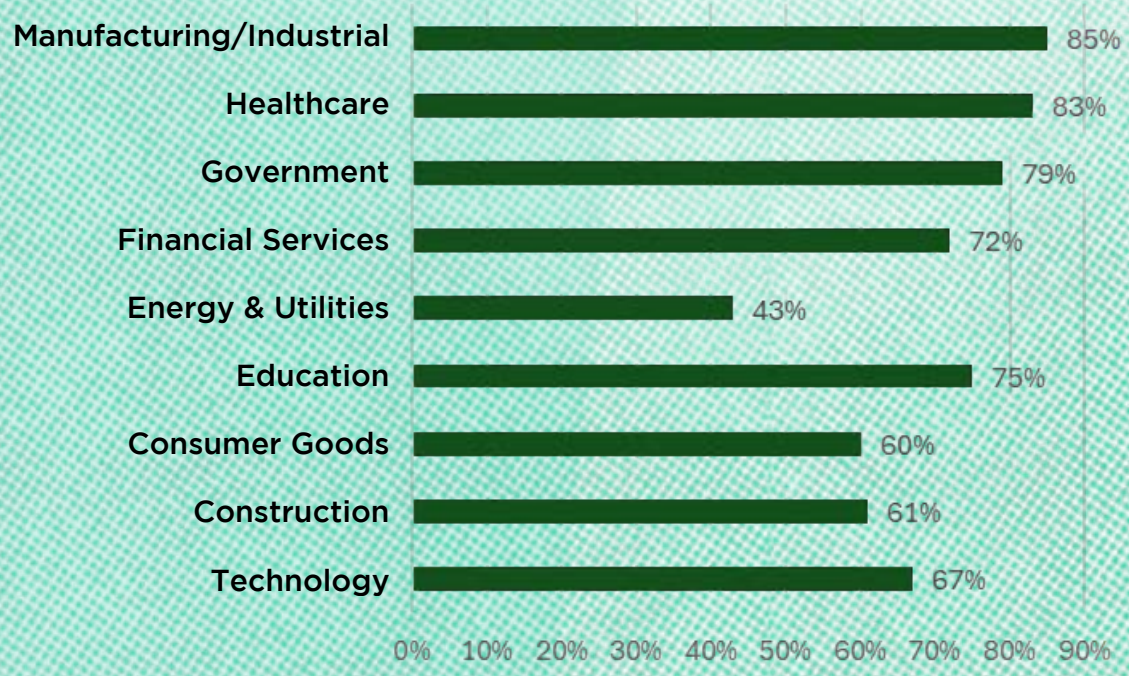
Almost everyone is grappling with AI in one way or another, but the countries powering ahead in the shift to AI might surprise you. While the US, Europe, and Japan have historically driven digital innovation, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and India, leading as the most AI-ready workforces.

One of the clearest examples of the UAE's optimism toward AI is the UAE National AI Strategy 2031. The nation aims to become a global leader in artificial intelligence by embedding it across key sectors such as healthcare, education, and transportation. This forward-thinking vision is underscored by the appointment of the world's first Minister of State for AI, reflecting a strong national commitment to innovation and future readiness.



MOST PROFESSIONALS AND LEADERS IN FAST-GROWING MARKETS FEEL POSITIVE ABOUT AI'S IMPACT ON THEIR ROLES, UNLIKE MANY OF THEIR WESTERN COUNTERPARTS.

When asked: How well do you feel your organization is incorporating AI and providing training to support its use in your work?



Perceived Adequacy of AI Training across Industries

Business Impact:

With insufficient AI training, leaders often misjudge where it could be most effective, leading to a disconnect between their vision and the actual day-to-day application.

At the same time, AI adoption might not be straightforward, as many organizations face regulatory and ethical hurdles that can slow progress.

Our data shows that employees in manufacturing (85%), healthcare (83%), and government (79%) feel they are receiving adequate AI training. This suggests these sectors are more proactive in preparing their workforce for AI adoption. In contrast, industries like energy & utilities (43%) and consumer goods (60%) lag behind, pointing to uneven investment in AI upskilling.

3. Reward to Retain

According to Korn Ferry's latest Workforce survey, 80% of employees in the UAE are now willing to switch jobs for better pay. However, our 2024 UAE Salary survey of 843 companies showed an average salary increase of just 4%, signaling that pay alone isn't enough. Employees are also seeking benefits, job security, and growth.

With expatriates projected to make up 88.5% of the population by 2025, the UAE remains one of the world's most diverse and competitive talent markets. While this growing expat community drives economic momentum—supported by a projected 5% annual GDP growth—rising living costs, especially in housing and education, are pushing professionals to prioritize stability when considering their next move.

2 out of 3 UAE respondents say that rising living costs are outpacing their salaries.



We asked: What would most likely make you leave your current job?

Here are the top 5 voted answers in UAE:



> *"Employees are facing increased costs of living, especially in housing and children's education. However, salaries haven't kept pace with these rising expenses, and, as a result, benefits and pay has become the leading reason for leaving companies." - Vijay Gandhi, Regional Director—Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) for Korn Ferry Digital*

#1 Pay and compensation

#2 Job security

#3 Career advancement

#4 Employee benefits

#5 Learning and development opportunities

The recent introduction of corporate tax in the UAE is reshaping business strategies, with some companies slowing down hiring to manage costs. At the same time, the growing influx of people moving to the UAE for opportunities is putting additional pressure on the job market. As a result, job security has become a growing concern among professionals. Many are now more inclined to switch industries in search of stable opportunities and long-term security.



Employees who feel the cost of living is outpacing their salary are:

- More likely to leave their job within three months.
- Increasingly focused on the full compensation package (salary and benefits).
- More willing to stay in a job they dislike if the pay is high enough.

Business Impact:

Employers need to realign pay with regional cost of living and market rates. Without action, they risk losing top talent and weakening their competitive edge. Benchmarking rewards against global and regional data—while tracking employee sentiment through listening tools—is essential to staying competitive.

5. Trust in Leadership

44% of employees in the UAE are not comfortable sharing personal issues that affect their work with their managers. This represents a substantial portion of the workforce who may lack the psychological safety necessary to open up, potentially impacting their well-being and performance.



3 OUT OF 5 SURVEYED SAY THEY WOULD STAY IN A JOB BECAUSE THEY HAVE A MANAGER THEY TRUST

Business Impact:

The lack of psychological safety can lead to decreased productivity, higher turnover, and lower engagement. This impacts team collaboration, absenteeism, and overall business performance.

Ready to Reframe Your Thinking?

Recognize some of your own 2025 workforce challenges in this list? Find out how companies are turning these insights into action by watching our webinar to get practical strategies your organization can use today.

We'll show you how to shift 2025's challenges into your competitive advantage by aligning your pay, organizational structure, and HR policies with evolving expectations.

Want to dive deeper? Talk to one of our experts and start turning insights into impact.



The full Workforce 2025 Global Insights report can be found here—read it now to discover more!

FIND OUT MORE



Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.

Business Advisors
Career Makers

© 2025 Korn Ferry All Rights Received