Hiring Pulse

April – June 2026

recruise

Contents

Q2 2026 HIRING PULSE

Quarterly synthesis of India GCC hiring. Three findings, full data backing, every figure sourced.

The Big Picture

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The second quarter was defined by a rare combination: employer confidence at a sixteen-year high, and a supply bottleneck tightening underneath it. India's Net Employment Outlook reached 68% for the quarter, the strongest reading since 2008. Demand, in other words, is not the problem this cycleSupply is.

Key takeaways:

- **Employer confidence reached its highest level since 2008.** India's Net Employment Outlook hit 68% for the quarter, the strongest reading on record.
- **GCCs out-hired IT services for the third year running.** Global Capability Centres added roughly 200,000 net employees in FY26, almost twice what IT services firms added, with AI and cloud roles leading the demand.
- **AI skill supply is now the binding constraint.** Talent scarcity reached 82% and AI skills became the single hardest capability to find. India faces a 53% AI skills deficit.
- **April opened strong, May held steady, and the demand concentrated in fewer skills.** White-collar hiring stayed resilient while the value shifted into AI, GCC, and senior bands.

The read for the quarter is that intent is high and getting the talent is the hard part. Compete on speed and supply, not on whether to hire, because everyone in the market has already decided to.

Executive Summary

Q2 2026 AT A GLANCE

India posted among the strongest Net Employment Outlooks globally. The Net Employment Outlook reached its highest level since the survey began in 2008 — the Q2 2026 peak; MEOS Q3 2026 has since eased to 48% — led by GCCs, an insurance and BPO surge, and a hiring base that now turns on AI skill supply.

NET EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK
68%
Highest since 2008

AVG SALARY HIKE 2026
9.1%

TALENT SCARCITY
82%

GCCS IN INDIA
2,117

AI/ML ROLES (MAY, YOY)
+22%

AI SKILLS DEFICIT
53%

MONTHLY HIRING MOMENTUM

April opened the quarter strong, May held steady with value moving into AI and senior roles, and June closed up 6% YoY as AI accelerated and GCC demand concentrated in the South.

April 2026

Strong open. White-collar hiring rose 6% YoY. Non-IT sectors led, with insurance, BPO/ITES and real estate the standout movers. AI/ML demand kept building into the new fiscal year.

May 2026

Steady, with value shifting up. Index held at 2,836 (vs 2,807 a year earlier). AI/ML roles +22% YoY, high-salaried roles (30 LPA+) +27%, freshers +7%. Insurance +19%, BPO/ITES +9%, healthcare +6%.

June 2026

Strong close, AI accelerating. Index reached 3,027 (vs 2,854 a year earlier), up 6% YoY. AI/ML +25%, senior roles (30 LPA+) +27%, freshers +8%. GCC hiring held in the South (Chennai +19%, Hyderabad +15%) but was –1% nationally; BFSI –12% and IT –3% softened.

Source: MEOS, Naukri JobSpeak, Nasscom-Zinnov, EY (public, Apr–Jun 2026).

The Market Read

Employer confidence is at a 16-year high.

Hiring intent this quarter was the strongest India has recorded in sixteen years, with the Net Employment Outlook at 68%. That confidence is broad, but it is not evenly distributed, and the sharpest signal sits inside AI. Year on year, AI hiring rose 44% in Hyderabad, 34% in Delhi NCR and 31% in Chennai, while Bengaluru and Pune held high off an already large base. The Tier-2 story is real too: Coimbatore and Surat outgrew the metros on overall hiring as GCC overflow and services demand spread out.

The point for a hiring leader is that this level of intent is a window, not a constant. When every employer in the market is confident at once, they are all competing for the same confident-quarter hires, and the strongest candidates clear fast.

What hiring leaders should act on:

Move on intent while it holds. Pre-brief your mandates now, shorten approval cycles, and be ready to make decisions at market speed, because in a quarter like this the cost of a slow process is not a delayed hire, it is a lost one.

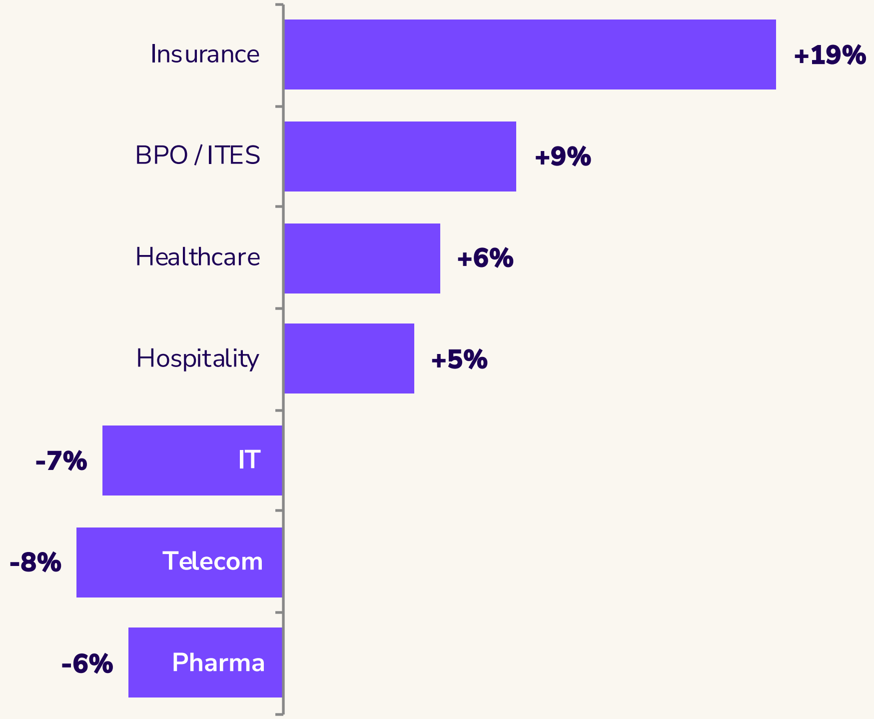
Where the demand is concentrated

CITY DEMAND & AI PULL

City	Overall	AI hiring	Key sectors
Hyderabad	+6%	**+44%**	GCC engineering, IT, AI/ML, digital ops
Delhi NCR	Flat	**+34%**	BFSI, consulting, e-commerce, AI
Chennai	+5%	**+31%**	GCC (+25%), manufacturing, shared services
Bengaluru	Flat	**High**	IT, analytics, AI/ML, product, GCC core
Pune	+4%	**High**	IT, GCC (+16%), automotive EV
Coimbatore	+8%	**Rising**	Tier-2 GCC overflow, BPO, fintech
Surat	+9%	**Rising**	Tier-2 services, textiles-to-tech

AI hiring growth (YoY, May 2026). Tier-2 hotspots Coimbatore and Surat outgrew the metros on overall hiring as GCC overflow and services demand spread out.

SECTOR HIRING GROWTH (YOY)



Source: Naukri JobSpeak, Nasscom-Zinnov, EY (public, Apr–Jun 2026), Recruise Intelligence.

FINDING TWO

GCCs *out-hired* IT services for a third year.

For the third straight year, the GCCs out-hired IT services, adding almost twice the net employees the services firms did in FY26. The scale behind that is now substantial: around 2,117 centres employing 2.36 million professionals, generating $98.4 billion in revenue, with more than 1,200 already running embedded AI and ML capability and 58% investing in agentic AI. Some 83% are actively scaling GenAI projects, which tells you where the hiring is going.

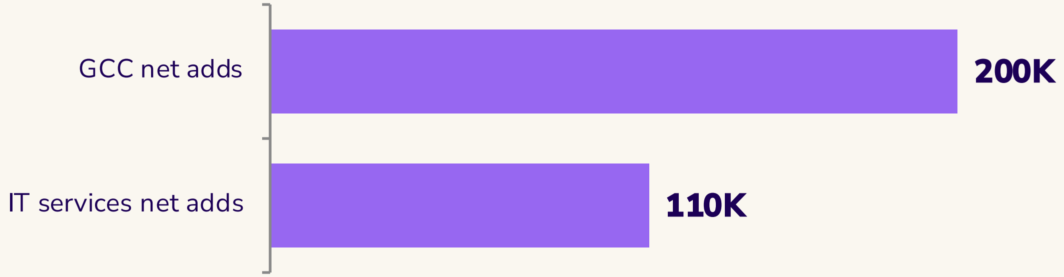
The demand within the channel is concentrated. GenAI, MLOps, cloud platform engineering and cybersecurity led GCC hiring, and the nano-GCC trend continued, with specialised centres of 30 to 200 staff in chip design and clinical data science multiplying. The centres also pay a premium of roughly 12 to 30% over comparable non-GCC roles, so they set the market price wherever they compete.

What hiring leaders should act on:

Treat the GCC channel as your primary pipeline, not a parallel one. Benchmark offers against the GCC premium, build first for GenAI, MLOps, cloud and product engineering, and assume that for any AI or cloud hire, a capability centre is already in the race.

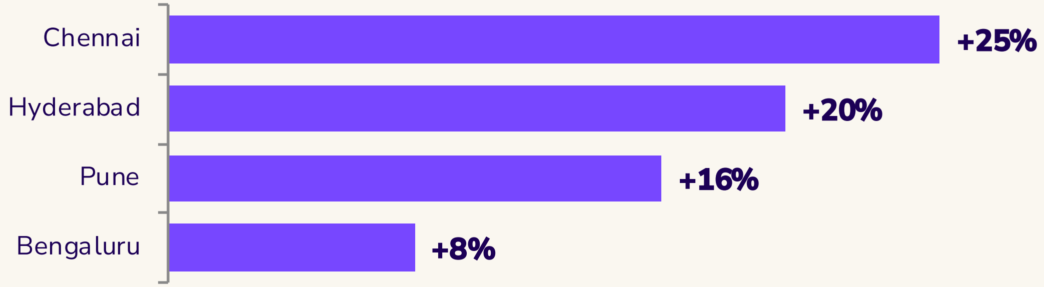
GCC Net Hiring and Sector Pull

THE HIRING BASE



Net employee adds, FY26. GCCs added almost twice what IT services firms did, the third straight year of GCC-led net hiring.

GCC HIRING GROWTH BY CITY (YOY)



GCC SCALE

GCCS IN INDIA (FY26)

2,117

PROFESSIONALS EMPLOYED

2.36M

SCALING GENAI PROJECTS

83%

GCC SALARY PREMIUM

~12–30%

What is driving the GCC pull

GCCs generated $98.4 billion in revenue in FY26 and more than 1,200 had embedded AI and ML capabilities. 58% are investing in agentic AI. GenAI, MLOps, cloud platform engineering and cybersecurity led the hiring, and nano GCCs of 30 to 200 staff focused on chip design and clinical data science kept growing.

Source: Naukri JobSpeak, Nasscom-Zinnov, EY (public) + Recruise Intelligence (proprietary), Apr–Jun 2026.

AI skills are the hardest hire in the market.

The bottleneck this quarter was not demand, it was supply. Talent scarcity in India reached 82%, well above the 72% global average, and AI skills became the single hardest capability to find, against a 53% AI skills deficit and AI demand up 300% since 2024. AI model development, named by 39% of employers, tops the hard-to-find list. Across the sector scarcity read, AI/ML and AI literacy run high almost everywhere, from IT and BFSI to professional services, e-commerce and automotive.

Because the shortage is this broad, external hiring alone cannot close it, and employers know it: the first response to scarcity has shifted to building capability rather than buying it. That is the practical path when the finished profile does not exist in enough volume to hire your way out.

What hiring leaders should act on:

Win on the two things you can control. Move fast and lead with a sharp employee value proposition, because the scarce AI profiles clear the m arket quickly and choose on more than pay. In parallel, build internal AI capability and brief for the adjacent skills you can convert, rather than holding out for a perfect profile the market cannot supply.

Skill Scarcity by Sector

SECTOR	AI/ML	AI literacy	Cloud	Cyber	Data Engg	Full-stack
Automotive / EV	High	High	Mid	Mid	High	Mid
BFSI / Insurance	High	High	Mid	High	High	Mid
IT & Tech services	High	High	High	High	High	High
Prof. services	High	High	Mid	High	High	Mid
Construction / RE	High	Mid	Low	Mid	Mid	Low
Healthcare / Pharma	High	Mid	Mid	Mid	High	Low
Manufacturing	Mid	Mid	Low	Mid	Mid	Low
E-commerce / Retail	High	High	High	Mid	Mid	High

Scarcity at 82%

Talent scarcity in India reached 82%, against a global average of 72%. AI skills are now the single hardest capability to find.

Deficit at 53%

India faces a 53% AI skills deficit AI demand is up 300% since 2024.

Skill-first hiring

AI model development (39%) tops the hard-to-find list. Employers are reaching for upskilling before external hiring.

Source: Nasscom-Zinnov (public, Apr–Jun 2026). Cell ratings are Recruise Intelligence data.

The People Read

With talent scarce and expensive, the response is showing up in two places: *how employers pay, and how they lead.*

With confidence high and the scarce skills hard to find, the question worth asking is how employers are actually responding, and this quarter the answer showed up on two fronts.

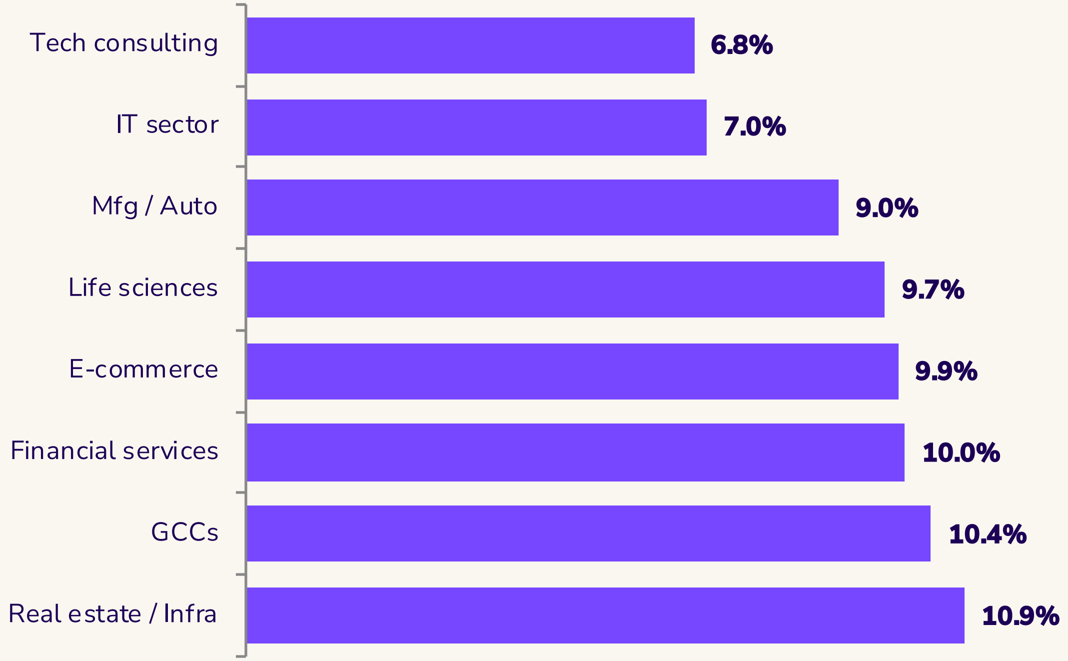
On pay, the headline increment settled around 9.1%, but that average hides where the money is really going. The value has moved up the band. Hiring for senior roles above 30 lakhs grew 27% year on year in May, while AI and cybersecurity skills held a clear premium over everything else. Attrition, at the same time, has calmed to about 13.6% across India Inc, well down from the pandemic peak, which gives employers a little more room to keep the people they already have.

On leadership, the response to scarcity has shifted from buying talent to building it. More employers now name upskilling as their first answer to a skills gap than name pay or flexibility, and internal mobility has become a quicker, cheaper route to senior capability than the open market. The job itself has changed with it. Directing AI work, rather than just sponsoring it, is now part of what a senior leader is expected to do, and roles that did not exist eighteen months ago, like GenAI product owner, are becoming standing mandates inside GCCs.

The two reads that follow take pay and leadership in turn.

Compensation and Attrition

SECTOR SALARY HIKE PROJECTIONS 2026



India Inc. avg 9.1% · Real estate & infra lead at 10.9%, with GCCs close behind at 10.4%. Sector spread of 4.1 points, from real estate at the top to tech consulting moderating at 6.8%. AI and cybersecurity skills still command sharp premiums over base pay.

ATTRITION & DEMAND SIGNALS

INDIA INC. ATTRITION 2026 (Aon projection)	IT SERVICES ATTRITION
13.6%	**~13–15%**
HIGH-SALARIED ROLES (MAY, YOY)	**FRESHER HIRING (MAY, YOY)**
+27%	**+7%**

Reading the comp signal

Attrition is projected at ~13.6% for 2026 for India Inc., down from the 21.4% pandemic peak, though IT services, historically the highest-exposure sector, has eased to ~13–15%. Hiring for senior, 30 LPA-plus roles grew 27% YoY in May, so the value in the market moved up the band even as headline volume held steady.

Source: Naukri JobSpeak, Nasscom-Zinnov, EY (public, Apr–Jun 2026), Recruise Intelligence.

Leadership and Culture Outlook

Leadership in 2026 turns on AI fluency and human judgment together. Upskilling is now the first response to scarcity, ahead of external hiring, and senior bands are where the competition is sharpest.

Upskilling leads the response. 37% of employers name upskilling and reskilling as their primary answer to talent scarcity, ahead of pay and flexibility.

Flexibility as a lever. Schedule flexibility (26%) and location flexibility (25%) follow upskilling as the levers employers reach for to close gaps.

Fresher base holding. Fresher hiring grew 7% YoY in May, concentrated in customer-facing roles, keeping the entry pipeline alive through the quarter.

Internal mobility. With external AI talent scarce, internal mobility is a faster and lower-cost path to senior capability than open-market hiring.

AI literacy is a leadership skill. Senior leaders are now expected to direct AI work, well beyond sponsoring it.

Senior demand is rising. Hiring for 30 LPA-plus roles grew 27% YoY in May. The fight has moved into leadership and principal-level bands.

New GCC role types. Roles like GenAI product owner and AI ethics lead, which did not exist 18 months ago, are now standing mandates inside GCCs.

Women in tech focus. Women hold ~28–35% of GCC tech roles, with a ~19% overall gender pay gap (28.5% in tech roles) still a live challenge.

Source: Naukri JobSpeak, Nasscom-Zinnov, EY (public, Apr–Jun 2026), Recruise Intelligence.

Where to Act This Quarter

With intent this high, the win goes to whoever *moves fastest and builds what they can't buy.*

The picture this quarter is straightforward. Confidence is as high as it has been in years, and the constraint has moved to supply. There is plenty of intent, but the people to meet it are scarce, and AI skills scarcest of all. Most of that demand is flowing through the GCCs.

For a hiring leader, that changes what matters most. When intent is this strong, everyone chases the same people at once, and a slow process is what loses them. Pre-brief your mandates, strip out the approval steps you can, and be ready to decide at the speed the market is moving. Treat the GCC as your main competition on the roles that count, and build first for the GenAI, cloud and platform skills leading the demand.

On AI roles in particular, you will not hire your way out of an 82% scarcity market, so run a fast, well-pitched search alongside a real plan to build the capability in-house. Upskilling and internal moves reach senior skill quicker and cheaper than the open market, and the adjacent people you can convert are often a better bet than holding out for a finished profile the market cannot supply.

The demand will not always run this hot. While it does, the advantage sits with the employers who move quickly and grow the talent they cannot buy.

Recruise Global

Want to hire talent that makes a real difference to your organisation?
Cut through the hype to get to what really matters.

About Us

Recruise is a global intelligence-led talent partner for enterprises, with offices in Bengaluru and Austin. For two decades, we have been a trusted partner to Fortune 2000 companies, scaling mid-market global capability centres, and the senior professionals who lead them — across Technology, Pharma, Life Sciences, and BFSI.

We combine deep sector expertise and proprietary hiring intelligence to deliver measurable impact across talent acquisition, executive search, and GCC transformation. Our work is reinforced by industry-leading research, deep market insights, and thought leadership across a wide range of sectors including Digital Services and ER&D, Enterprise Software, Internet of Things, Healthcare, Pharma, Lifesciences, Retail, Automotive, BFSI and Media & Telecom.

From scaling innovation to navigating disruption, global leaders turn to us to build, buy, and grow technology-led businesses that are ready for what's next.

Executive Search

Experienced Talent

Contract Staffing

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