



Playroll

2026 GLOBAL HIRING INDEX

Best Countries To Hire Remote Talent In 2026

Where in the World Should You Hire Next?

Finding the right talent has always taken work. But in 2026, the stakes are higher and the search is broader. Budgets are tighter, the demand for AI and technical skills is outpacing supply in traditional markets, and the niche expertise your business needs is increasingly unlikely to all exist in one place. Where you hire has become one of the most weighty decisions a growing company makes.

The good news is that the options have never been better. You already know the best talent isn't limited to your zip code – but knowing where exactly to find it is the tricky part, and sifting through country-level research takes time. That's what this index solves.

We ranked 170 markets across talent depth, digital infrastructure, regulatory clarity, affordability, and innovation. The countries leading the pack have built environments where international employers can move fast and hire compliantly.



Of course, opportunity and complexity go hand in hand. Labor laws, tax obligations, and statutory benefits differ in every market. Get it wrong and you're dealing with compliance problems that can lead to significant financial and legal risk. That's why we built this index. This report gives you the data to decide where to hire, and Payroll gives you the infrastructure to do it.

Let's dive into the results.

Important To Know



- More countries are building remote-work infrastructure and creating dedicated pathways for international talent.
- Labor regulations are tightening, which raises the stakes on compliance. The markets that combine strong talent pipelines, predictable regulation, and competitive costs are pulling ahead.



1. Singapore

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Country Scores

 **82.8%**

Digital Infrastructure: **95.84%**

Compliance Ease: **89.99%**

Talent Availability: **78.71%**

Talent Affordability: **56.23%**

Innovation **57.92%**

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
17.25% - 32.25%

Minimum Wage:
Sector-specific

Average Salary:
SGD 6,000-6,400 p/month

Public Holidays:
10 Days

Working Hours:
44 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Singapore is one of the fastest and most predictable markets to hire in globally, with a regulatory environment built for international companies. English is the working language, and the talent pool is highly skilled across tech, finance, and life sciences. It's the natural launchpad for any APAC expansion.

Best Use Cases

- Regional leadership & HQ roles
- Client-facing & enterprise teams
- High-skill positions

Key Trade-offs

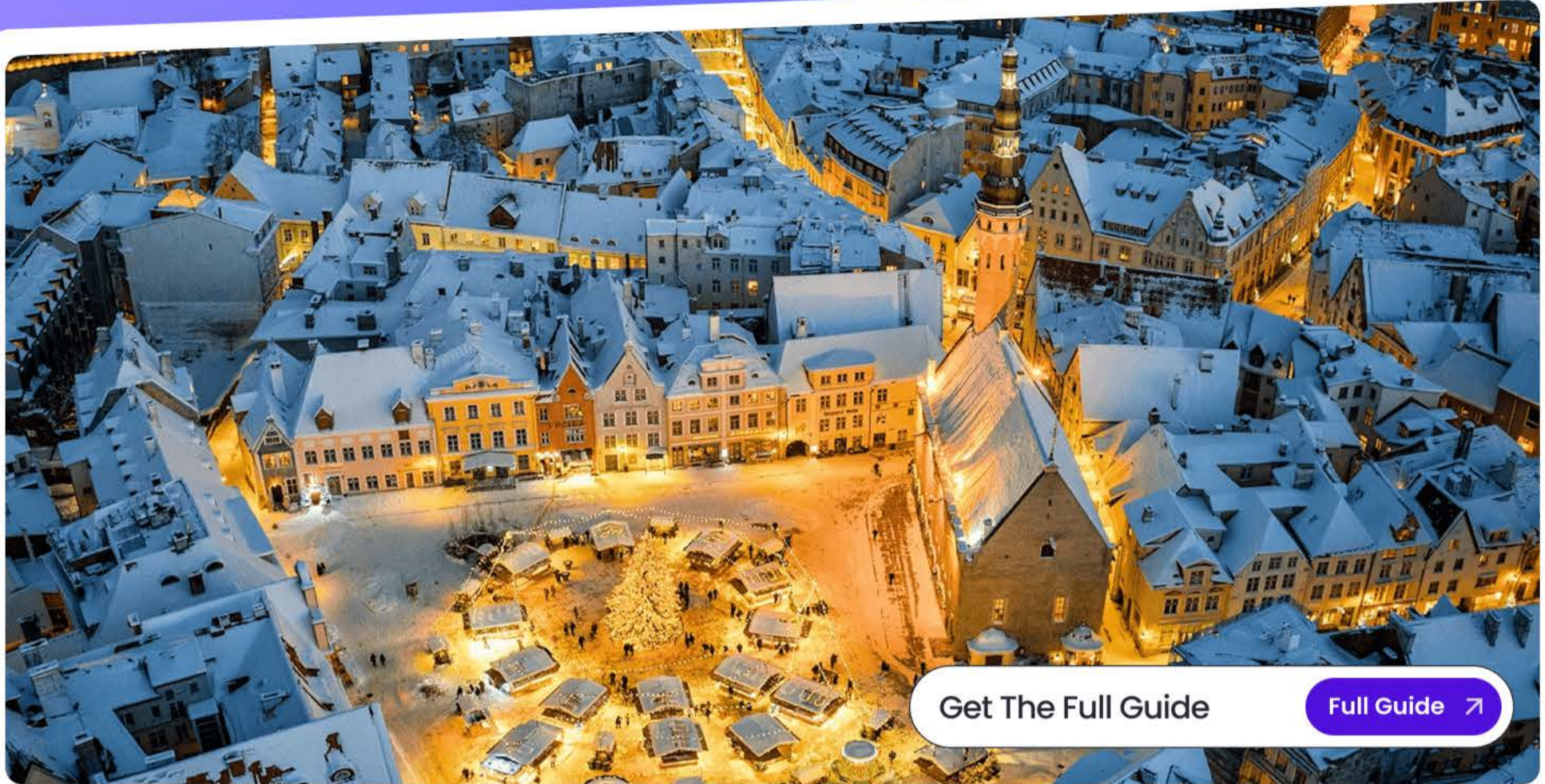
- Higher salary benchmarks vs. the rest of APAC
- Competitive talent market

FUN FACT

Singapore has the biggest retractable dome in the world, with the ability to shelter 55,000 spectators from sun and rain easily.



2. Estonia



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Country Scores



Digital Infrastructure:	97.36%
Compliance Ease:	77.37%
Talent Availability:	73.94%
Talent Affordability:	61.04%
Innovation	73.59%

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
33.80%

Minimum Wage:
€946 p/month

Average Salary:
€1,900–€2,050 p/month

Public Holidays:
13 Days

Working Hours:
40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Estonia has built a global reputation as Europe’s most digitally advanced small nation. Its e-Residency program and digital-first infrastructure make it remarkably easy to set up and manage employment remotely. The workforce is strong in software development, cybersecurity, and digital services – at costs that remain competitive for the calibre on offer.

Best Use Cases

- Software development & engineering
- Cybersecurity and digital services
- Startup and tech-focused roles

Key Trade-offs

- Less suited for large-volume hiring

FUN FACT

Estonia has the most startups per capita in Europe, with 4.6x as many start-ups per capita as the European average.



3. Finland



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Country Scores

 **81.6%**

Digital Infrastructure: **97.59%**

Compliance Ease: **80.33%**

Talent Availability: **73.44%**

Talent Affordability: **54.77%**

Innovation: **58.40%**

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:

10.61% - 12.11%

Minimum Wage:

None

Average Salary:

€3,700–€3,900 p/month

Public Holidays:

20 Days

Working Hours:

40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Finland's world-class education system produces a tech-fluent, highly skilled workforce that punches well above the country's 5.5 million population. Clear labour regulations, near-universal high-speed broadband, and a culture built on autonomy and work-life balance translate to strong employee retention. Deep expertise spans telecoms, engineering, and a fast-growing startup scene.

Best Use Cases

- Engineering and telecoms roles
- R&D and deep tech
- Remote-first team expansion

Key Trade-offs

- Higher salary expectations than Eastern Europe

FUN FACT

Finland has been ranked the world's happiest country for the last seven years.



4. Denmark



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Country Scores



Digital Infrastructure:	97.78%
Compliance Ease:	80.42%
Talent Availability:	76.71%
Talent Affordability:	54.58%
Innovation:	60.34%

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
33.80%

Minimum Wage:
€946 p/month

Average Salary:
€1,900–€2,050 p/month

Public Holidays:
13 Days

Working Hours:
40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Denmark's "flexicurity" model makes it one of the smoothest labour markets in Europe – genuinely easy to hire and restructure, while employees benefit from strong social protections. The workforce is highly skilled and collaborative, with deep expertise in clean energy, pharma, life sciences, and design innovation.

Best Use Cases

- Clean energy & sustainability roles
- Life sciences and pharma
- Senior and specialist positions

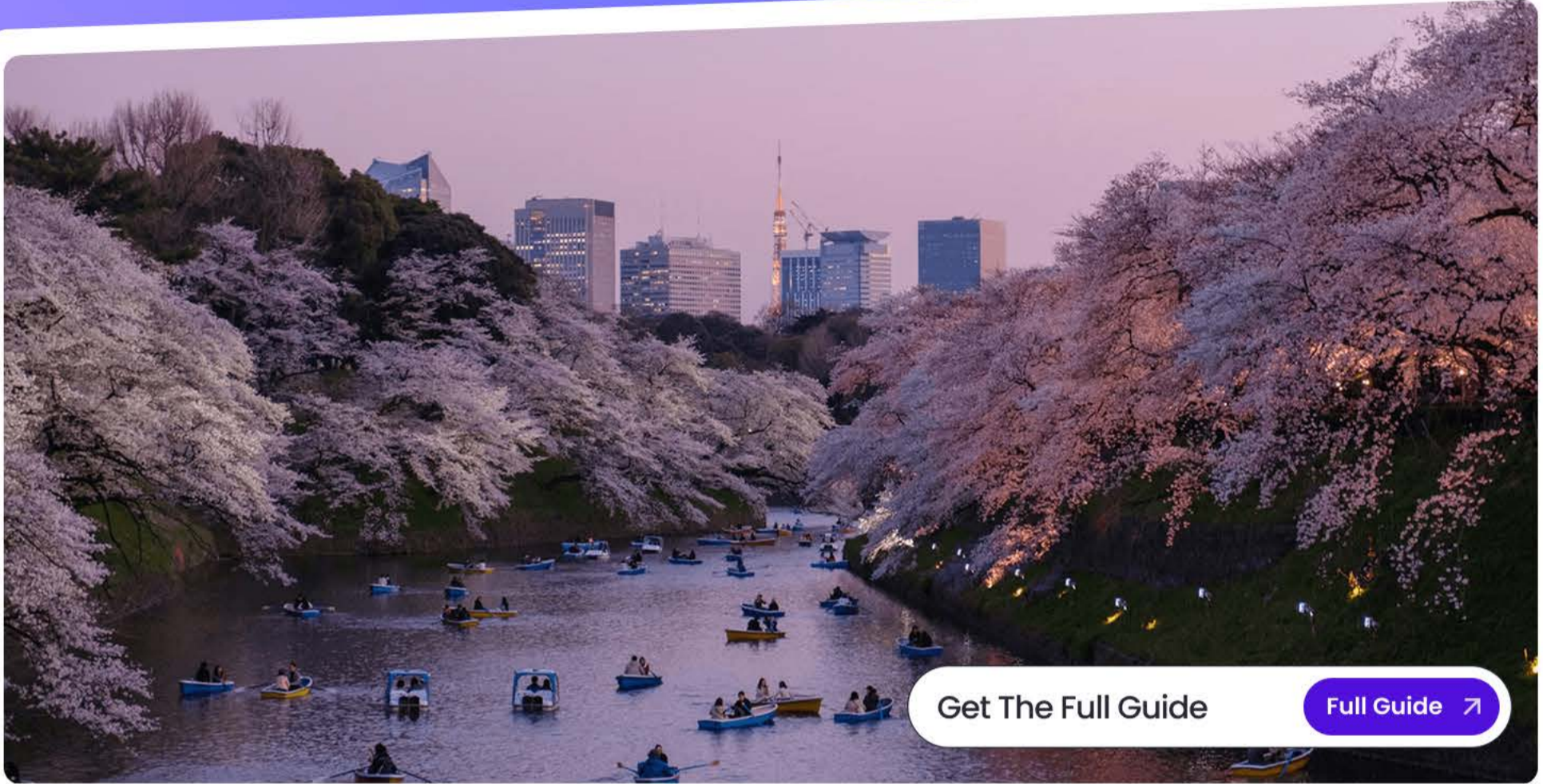
Key Trade-offs

- Premium salary and cost expectations
- High employer social contribution costs

FUN FACT

First acknowledged in 1219, the Danish flag remains the oldest state flag in the world.

5. Japan


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Country Scores

80.7%

Digital Infrastructure: **92.88%**

Compliance Ease: **76.54%**

Talent Availability: **72.40%**

Talent Affordability: **51.91%**

Innovation: **81.26%**

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
16.20%

Minimum Wage:
¥1,118 per hour

Average Salary:
JPY 340,000–360,000 p/month

Public Holidays:
16 Days

Working Hours:
40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Japan has deep expertise in robotics, advanced manufacturing, automotive engineering, and life sciences, and recent regulatory reforms have made the market meaningfully more accessible. The talent pool is vast and known for exceptional attention to quality. For companies targeting Asia's second-largest economy, the barriers are lower than they've been in decades.

Best Use Cases

- R&D, engineering, and manufacturing
- Life sciences and healthcare tech
- APAC market entry roles

Key Trade-offs

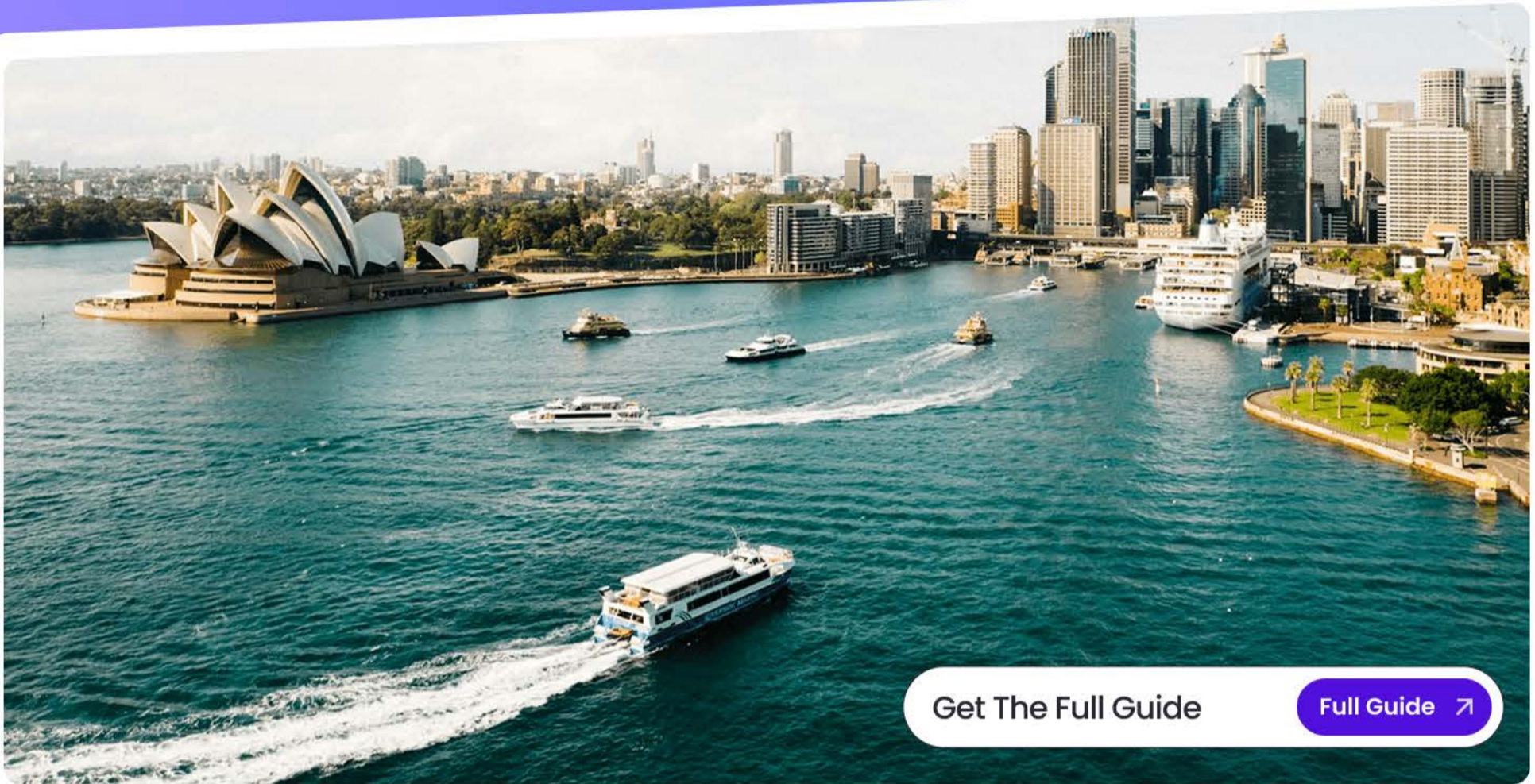
- Language barrier for non-Japanese-speaking roles
- Compliance complexity, even after recent reforms

FUN FACT

Japan's bullet trains, or shinkansen, can whisk you from north to south at speeds up to 320 km/h.



6. Australia



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Country Scores



Digital Infrastructure: 95.41%

Compliance Ease: 82.28%

Talent Availability: 77.01%

Talent Affordability: 41.69%

Innovation: 56.61%

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
33.80%

Minimum Wage:
€946 p/month

Average Salary:
€1,900–€2,050 p/month

Public Holidays:
13 Days

Working Hours:
40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Australia offers a large, English-speaking talent pool backed by world-class universities, a transparent regulatory environment, and strong time zone overlap with key Asian markets. Tech, healthcare, financial services, and mining technology are thriving sectors. Cultural alignment with Western business norms makes cross-border collaboration easy from day one.

Best Use Cases

- APAC bridge and regional roles
- Tech, healthcare, and financial services
- Client-facing English-speaking teams

Key Trade-offs

- High salary benchmarks, especially in major cities
- Geographic distance from EMEA operations

FUN FACT

Australia is the only country on Earth that spans an entire continent, often called the ‘island continent’.



Country Scores

 **79.9%**

Digital Infrastructure: **93.80%**

Compliance Ease: **78.49%**

Talent Availability: **78.05%**

Talent Affordability: **48.40%**

Innovation: **58.66%**

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
24.84% - 36.3%

Minimum Wage:
€14.71 p/hour

Average Salary:
€3,600–€3,900 p/month

Public Holidays:
11 Days

Working Hours:
48 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

The Dutch workforce is among Europe's most multilingual – most professionals speak English alongside Dutch. It's a long-standing European HQ destination, home to global names like Booking.com, ASML, and Adyen. The 30% tax ruling for skilled international hires significantly reduces the cost of attracting foreign talent in their first five years.

Best Use Cases

- European HQ and leadership roles
- Multilingual customer and enterprise teams
- Tech, logistics, and fintech

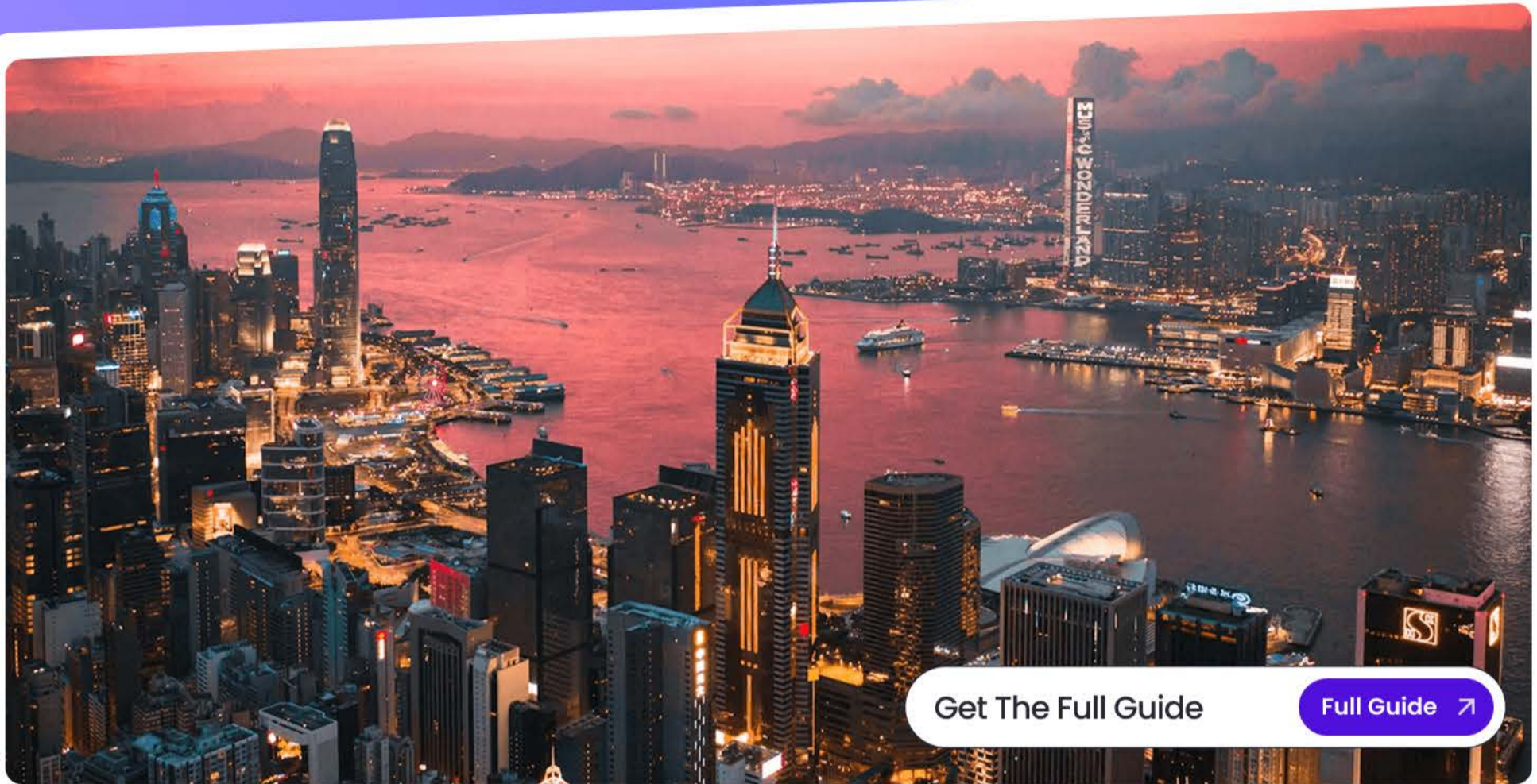
Key Trade-offs

- High cost of living drives salary expectations
- Competitive talent market in Amsterdam and surrounds

FUN FACT

The Netherlands produces 80% of the world's flower bulbs and the flower industry makes up over 5% of the Netherland's GDP.

8. Hong Kong


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Country Scores

 **79.6%**

Digital Infrastructure: **95.32%**

Compliance Ease: **79.62%**

Talent Availability: **76.04%**

Talent Affordability: **61.10%**

Innovation: **33.85%**

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
10%

Minimum Wage:
€946 p/month

Average Salary:
€1,900–€2,050 p/month

Public Holidays:
13 Days

Working Hours:
40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Hong Kong is one of Asia's deepest financial centers, with a common-law legal system that makes employment structures familiar to international employers. Exceptional depth in finance, legal, and professional services, with strong digital connectivity and a time zone that bridges European and Asian business hours. Recent talent attraction schemes have broadened the talent pool.

Best Use Cases

- Financial services and professional services
- Greater China and broader APAC regional roles
- Legal and compliance functions

Key Trade-offs

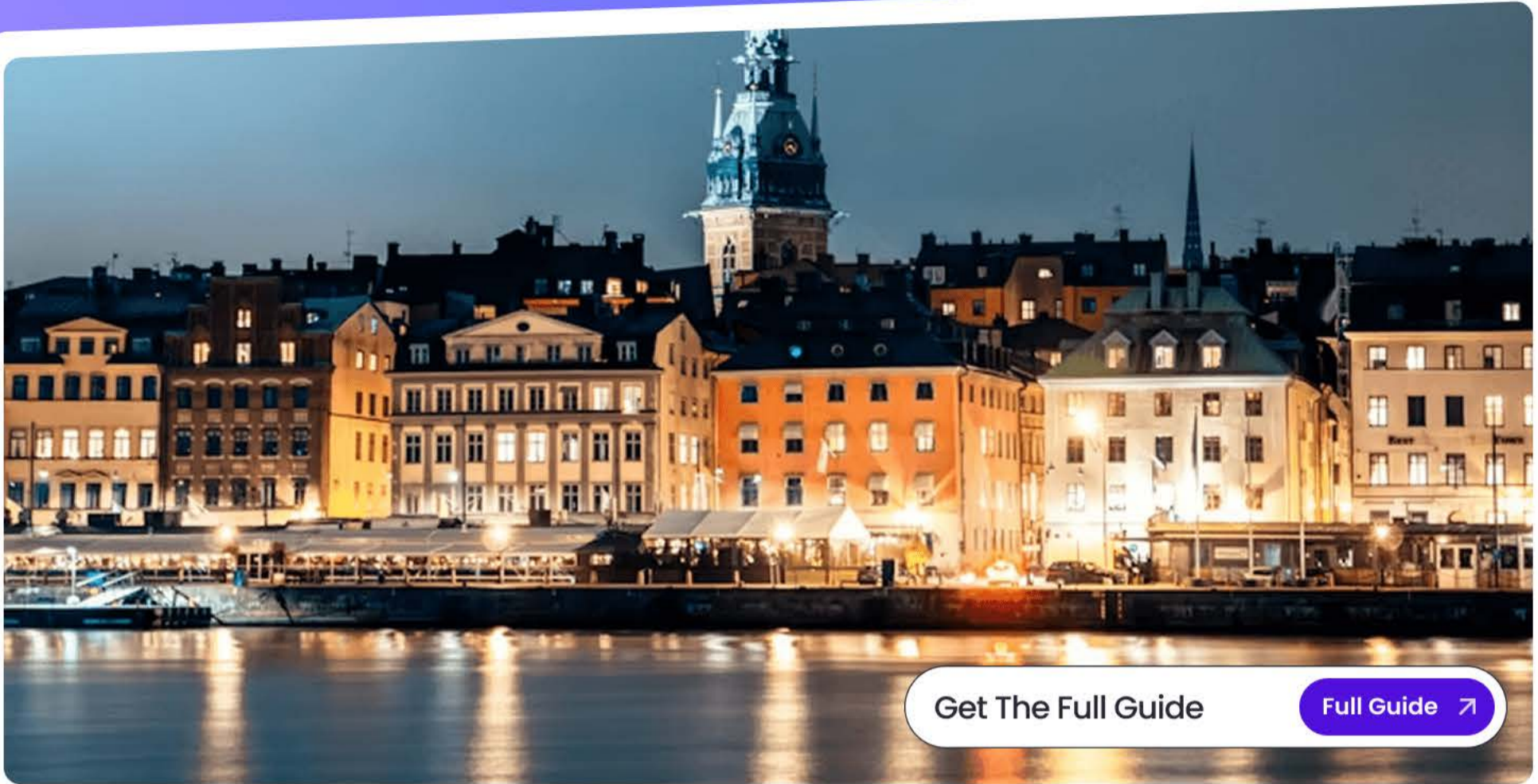
- High cost base for salaries and real estate
- Evolving political and regulatory environment

FUN FACT

The Tsing Ma Bridge is the world's longest road and rail suspension bridge.



9. Sweden



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Country Scores



Digital Infrastructure:	95.40%
Compliance Ease:	80.23%
Talent Availability:	76.17%
Talent Affordability:	47.81%
Innovation:	39.98%

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
31.42%

Minimum Wage:
None

Average Salary:
SEK 41,000–44,000 p/month

Public Holidays:
13 Days

Working Hours:
40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Sweden has produced an extraordinary number of global tech companies, with deep talent in software engineering, gaming, fintech, cleantech, and industrial automation. The workforce is collaborative and highly English-proficient. Government investment in a national AI strategy adds institutional backing to an already strong innovation culture.

Best Use Cases

- Software engineering and gaming
- Fintech and cleantech
- Innovation and R&D roles

Key Trade-offs

- High employer tax
- Salary expectations among the highest in Europe

FUN FACT

Sweden is home to the world's first ombudsman, a government official who investigates complaints made by citizens.



10. Spain


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Country Scores

 **78.7%**

Digital Infrastructure: **97.36%**

Compliance Ease: **77.37%**

Talent Availability: **73.94%**

Talent Affordability: **61.04%**

Quick Facts

Employment Cost:
30.57%

Minimum Wage:
€1,184 p/month

Average Salary:
€2,250–€2,400 p/month

Public Holidays:
14 Days

Working Hours:
40 hours p/week

Why Hire here?

Madrid and Barcelona have evolved into genuine tech and creative hubs, with vibrant startup ecosystems and a growing pool of homegrown and international talent. Hiring costs are lower than northern European neighbors, with strong depth in software engineering, UX, and multilingual customer-facing roles. Spain's popular digital nomad visa has widened the accessible talent pool further.

Best Use Cases

- Multilingual customer and sales teams
- Software engineering and UX
- European team expansion

Key Trade-offs

- Slow administrative and bureaucratic processes
- Some regional variation in labor law application

FUN FACT

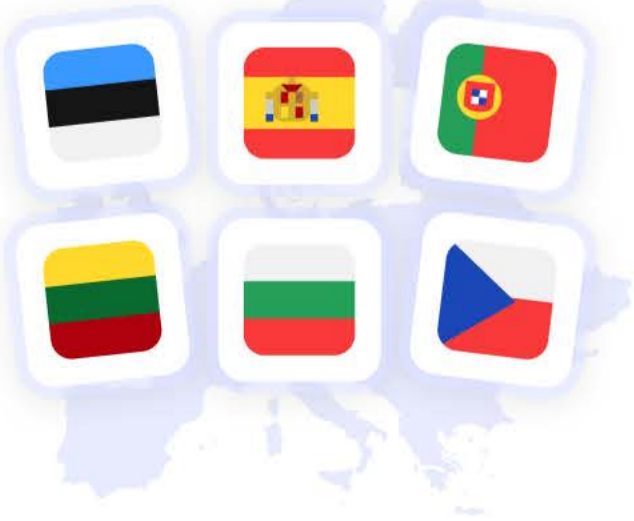
Spain boasts an impressive 45 UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Results

1 Europe's Rising Middle Is Rewriting The Map

Six of the top 20 – Estonia, Spain, Portugal, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Czech Republic – are markets that barely registered on most hiring radars a decade ago. What's changed is a combination of EU-backed infrastructure investment, government strategies to attract global business, and digital nomad visa legislation drawing waves of skilled international workers.

Estonia and Lithuania have emerged as genuine tech and fintech hubs, with Estonia's e-Residency program now serving over 110,000 global entrepreneurs. Spain and Portugal have leveraged quality of life and visa policy to build thriving remote-work ecosystems. Bulgaria and the Czech Republic offer multilingual talent at a fraction of Western European costs, and boast university graduation rates in STEM subjects that rival their wealthier neighbors.



The EU's 2021–2027 cohort policy committed €392 billion to closing regional development gaps, and that investment is showing up in fibre broadband penetration, startup ecosystem density, and the quality of local talent pipelines. For employers that still think of "hiring in Europe" as a choice between Berlin and Amsterdam, the opportunity set has expanded dramatically.

2 Asia-Pacific Offers An Unmatched Hiring Spectrum

Five APAC markets feature in the top 20, and what makes the region stand out is the variety. Singapore's business-friendly regulation makes it a natural launchpad for companies entering the region. Japan brings deep innovation credentials across robotics, manufacturing, and AI. Its workforce is among the most technically credentialed in the world, with over 600,000 STEM graduates annually. Hong Kong remains a gateway to Greater China and global financial services despite shifting political dynamics, with a legal system and financial infrastructure built for international commerce.

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Results

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Australia and New Zealand offer stable, English-speaking talent pools with strong compliance frameworks and straightforward cultural alignment for Western businesses.

Australia's Employer Nomination Scheme and New Zealand's Accredited Employer Work Visa provide predictable pathways for international hires that larger markets increasingly can't match.

No other region gives you this range of options – from ultra-efficient city-states to large industrial economies to English-speaking common-law jurisdictions – within a shared time zone band. Whether you need a regional hub, specialist technical talent, or a compliant foothold in a new market, APAC has a credible answer.



3 Familiar Markets No Longer Have A Monopoly

Many businesses look to the U.S. and UK when they think about international hiring, and for good reason. The U.S. remains home to some of the most sought-after engineering, product, and finance talent on the planet. The UK's concentration of expertise in fintech, life sciences, and creative industries is genuinely hard to match.

But in 2026, though they score highly, neither cracks the global top 10. Understanding why is a useful context for your global hiring strategy.

In the U.S., the H-1B visa system has become strained, with policy shifts adding uncertainty to long-term workforce planning for visa-dependent roles. Beyond immigration, employment law varies significantly at state, county, and city level, and employer healthcare costs average over \$7,000 per employee annually.

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Results

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None of this makes the U.S. the wrong place to hire – but it's a market where going in with the right infrastructure matters.

The UK has its own friction points post-Brexit. Skilled Worker visa sponsorship carries meaningful costs and admin overhead, and salary thresholds rose sharply in 2024, narrowing the range of qualifying roles. Again, the wealth of talent is undeniable. The pathway to tap into it just requires more planning than it once did.

Markets combining expert talent, strong digital infrastructure, and regulatory environments built for international employers are showing up in more places than most hiring teams have on their radar. The index isn't a reason to look away from traditional markets, but it's proof to broaden the net.

"85% of CEOs feel that compliance requirements have become more complex in recent years."

4 Compliance Ease Is Now A Competitive Differentiator

The regulatory environment is increasingly shaping hiring outcomes – and the stakes are rising. 85% of CEOs say compliance requirements have become more complex in recent years, with scrutiny intensifying across industries.

Markets with clear employment frameworks, where the rules around contracts, termination, social contributions, and data privacy are well-defined, are pulling ahead. Legal complexity, where it persists, creates measurable drag on hiring speed and decision-making.

For companies building international hiring strategies, this has a direct implication. Working with an Employer of Record in high-complexity markets significantly reduces time-to-hire and the risk of misclassification. As hiring reaches into more geographies, the ability to move quickly – and compliantly – into new markets is becoming a genuine competitive edge.

How Do You Compliantly Hire Globally?



Companies offering remote roles can access candidate pools up to 340% larger than local hiring alone.

Hiring beyond your home country gives you access to people you wouldn't reach otherwise – different skill sets, different perspectives, and availability that lets your team work effectively across time zones. It also gives you more flexibility to shape your workforce around what you actually need.

- Access untapped talent beyond your home market.
- Cover more time zones so work moves forward around the clock.
- Hire faster without being limited to a single local talent pool.
- Enter new markets by putting people on the ground where you need them.
- Build operational resilience by distributing key roles across regions.

To make that work in practice, you need a legally sound way to employ people in each country. There are three main routes.

3 Ways To Hire Abroad

- 1 Partner with an Employer of Record:** You hire the person. The EOR employs them on your behalf locally, handling payroll, benefits, and compliance in that country. You get speed and full coverage without setting up a legal presence.
- 2 Establish Your Own Legal Entity:** You maintain full control, but it comes with significant setup costs, ongoing admin, and the obligation to stay on top of every local regulation yourself.
- 3 Engage Contract Workers:** You hire independent contractors for project-based work. It's flexible, but the role needs to genuinely meet local criteria for independent work.

Your Gateway to the World's Talent

The markets worth watching in 2026 aren't always the ones on everyone's shortlist.

Some of the most compelling combinations of talent, cost, and compliance clarity are in places that wouldn't have made this conversation five years ago.

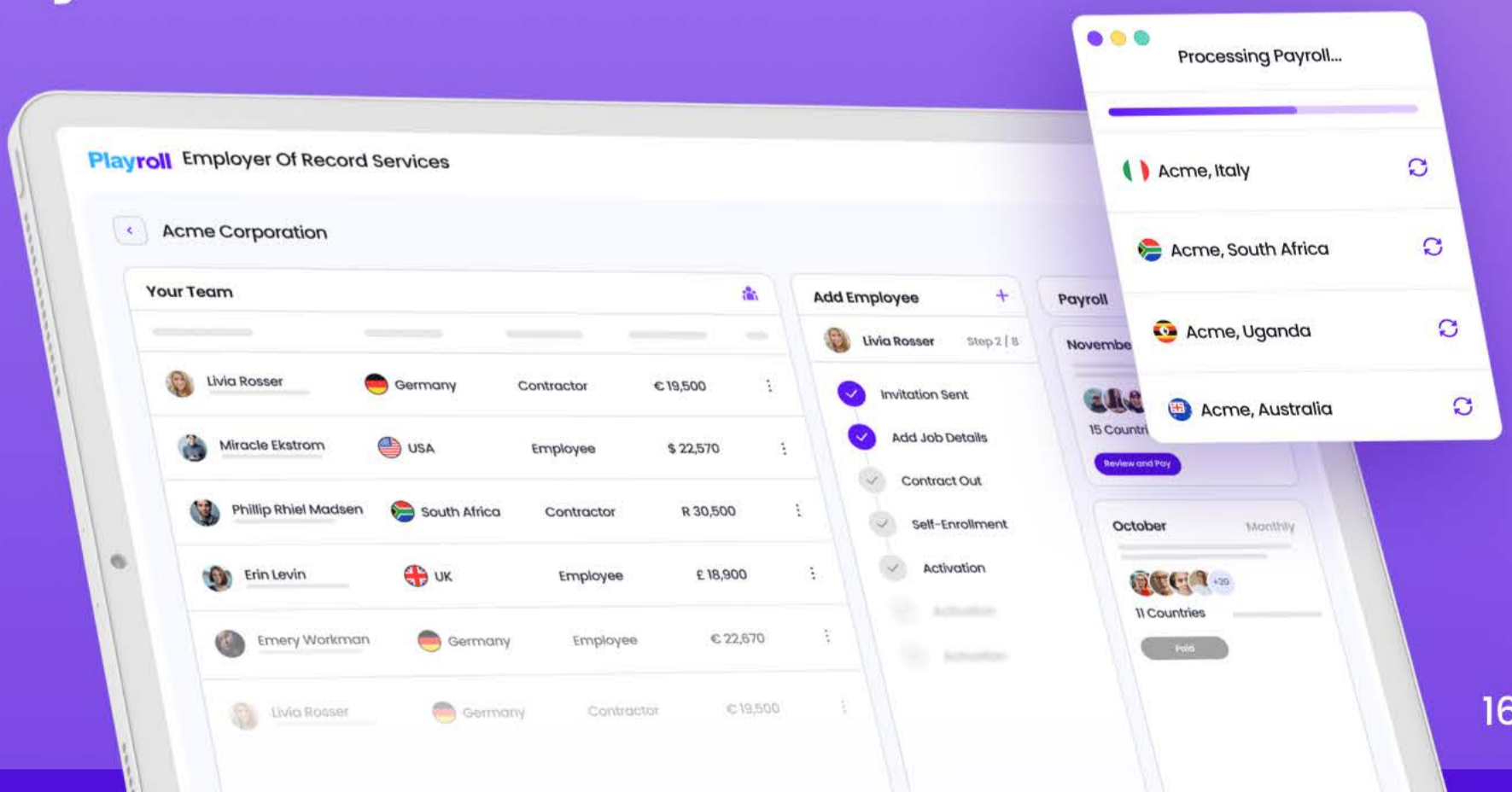
Wherever the data points you, Playroll makes the move straightforward.

Hire through our Employer of Record in 180+ countries to expand quickly in new markets, we'll help you set up a permanent entity when you're ready to plant a flag, or manage contractors compliantly across borders. All through one platform, with a team that knows the local detail and supports you every step of the way.

The talent is out there. Let's go find it.

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How Did We Crunch the Numbers?

Our Global Hiring Index scores 170 countries across five factors that shape the true cost and feasibility of hiring internationally: from labor affordability to regulatory complexity.

All indicators were sourced from publicly available government and institutional databases, including the ILO, World Bank, and ITU, and were pulled in March 2026.

Raw indicators were normalized to 0–100 scales using min–max scaling across the full country set, with scores oriented so that higher always means more favorable for hiring.

Where a factor drew on multiple indicators, these were equally weighted to produce a single composite score.

Key Factors That Shaped the Index



Affordability Of Talent

Captures the all-in cost of hiring in each country relative to the talent pool. Indicators include estimated total employment cost, employer tax and social contribution rates, cost-of-living indices, and productivity-adjusted wage levels. Raw cost indicators were inverted so that a higher score reflects a more affordable hiring environment.

Sources: ILOSTAT, World Bank, Playroll data, Numbeo



Availability Of Talent

Measures the depth and accessibility of a country's employable workforce for cross-border hiring. Indicators include labor force participation rate, employment within services as a share of total employment, and mean years of schooling – combined to reflect both the size and skill-readiness of the available talent pool.

Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, ILOSTAT, WDI



Innovation

Signals a country's orientation toward future work models and technological advancement. Indicators include R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP, Government AI Readiness Index scores, and the presence of digital nomad visas or equivalent remote work frameworks.

Sources: WDI, AI Readiness Index



Digital Infrastructure

Assesses whether a country has the connectivity and digital ecosystem to support remote work at scale. Indicators include the ICT Development Index and the UN E-Government Development Index, combined into a single composite score per country.

Sources: ICT Development Index, E-Government Index



Compliance Ease

Reflects how straightforward it is to hire and manage workers within a country's regulatory framework. Indicators include regulatory quality indices, labor market flexibility measures, and ease of starting a business scores – capturing both the legal overhead and practical friction of compliant hiring.

Sources: WGI Index, World Bank

