

SHIFT OBSERVATORY

# THE AI DISRUPTION INDEX

Saudi Arabia Labor Market Intelligence Report

Q1 2026 — January to March

Based on GOSI, WEF, HRSD, McKinsey, and academic research  
146 occupations · 12,420,050 workers · 20 sectors · 13 regions

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# AT A GLANCE

Key figures shaping Saudi Arabia's AI workforce landscape — Q1 2026



12,420,050

Total GOSI workforce  
(Q4-2024)

146

Occupations scored on AI  
automation risk

118,500

Global tech layoffs in 2025  
(layoffs.fyi)

54,836

AI-cited job cuts in the US  
(Challenger 2025)

34,650

Tech layoffs 2026 YTD  
(48 companies)

100

Professions reserved  
exclusively for Saudis

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

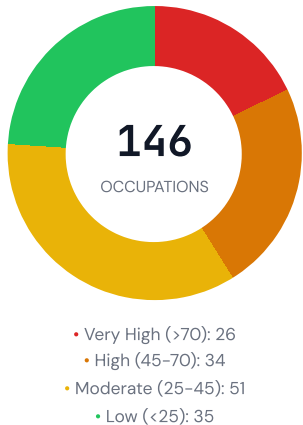
Q1 2026 — Saudi Arabia AI Labor Market Intelligence

Saudi Arabia's labor market sits at the intersection of two powerful and potentially contradictory forces. On one side, Vision 2030 drives aggressive nationalization through Saudization quotas, Nitaqat band enforcement, and an expanding list of 100 reserved professions. On the other, the Kingdom has positioned itself as the #1 country globally in AI adoption (Kiteworks, 2025), with sovereign AI investments exceeding \$100 billion through HUMAIN and PIF.

This creates what we call the **V2030 Paradox**: the same technologies the Kingdom champions will automate significant portions of the jobs it is simultaneously trying to nationalize. Our analysis of 146 occupations reveals that **60 face high or very high automation risk** (composite score >45/100). The pattern is clear: occupations combining administrative functions, repetitive digital tasks, and structured decision-making face the greatest exposure.

Globally, the pace of AI-driven workforce disruption accelerated dramatically in early 2026. Block Inc. became the first S&P 500 company to explicitly halve its workforce citing AI, with CEO Jack Dorsey stating that "intelligence tools have changed what it means to build a company." This follows 118,500 tech layoffs in 2025, of which 54,836 were explicitly AI-cited in the US alone (Challenger, Gray & Christmas).

For professionals in Saudi Arabia — Saudi nationals navigating Saudization requirements and expatriates facing dual pressure from AI and regulatory displacement — the question is no longer whether disruption is coming, but how fast and in which sectors first. This report provides the data to answer that question.



**KEY INSIGHT:** 60 of 146 occupations scored above our high-risk threshold (45/100). The sectors most exposed are Administrative & Support Services (72/100), Financial & Insurance Activities (62/100), and Wholesale & Retail Trade (55/100). These three sectors alone employ 3,354,665 workers.

## HIGHEST AI AUTOMATION RISK

Top 10 occupations by composite risk score — Q1 2026

| RANK | OCCUPATION                |                                                                                   | SCORE | WORKFORCE | CATEGORY                | WEF TREND     |
|------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1    | Data Entry Keyers         |  | 94.9  | 65,000    | Substitution            | Rapid Decline |
| 2    | Technical Writers         |  | 93.2  | 3,800     | Substitution            | Declining     |
| 3    | Tax Preparers             |  | 93.1  | 9,200     | Substitution            | Declining     |
| 4    | Telemarketers             |  | 92.4  | 14,500    | Substitution            | Declining     |
| 5    | Legal Secretaries         |  | 91.5  | 5,800     | Substitution            | Declining     |
| 6    | Proofreaders              |  | 91.4  | 2,400     | Substitution            | Declining     |
| 7    | Accountants & Auditors    |  | 88.2  | 95,000    | Substitution<br>Partial | Declining     |
| 8    | Payroll Clerks            |  | 87.7  | 28,000    | Substitution            | Declining     |
| 9    | Administrative Assistants |  | 85.2  | 145,000   | Substitution            | Rapid Decline |
| 10   | Call Center Agent         |  | 85.0  | 42,000    | Substitution            | Rapid Decline |

The pattern in the highest-risk occupations is unmistakable: they combine **administrative functions, repetitive digital tasks, and structured decision-making** — precisely the capabilities where large language models and RPA tools excel. Data Entry Keyers (94.9/100), representing ~65,000 workers, face near-certain disruption as OCR, AI document processing, and automated data pipelines eliminate the core value proposition of the role.

Critically, many of these positions are disproportionately held by expatriate workers. When combined with tightening Saudization quotas, these workers face **dual displacement pressure**: AI automates the task while regulation restricts the visa. Employers will find themselves simultaneously automating roles and meeting quota requirements — a convergence that accelerates rather than slows the transition.

**EMPLOYER SIGNAL:** The top 10 most exposed occupations collectively employ over 410,700 workers. Companies with significant headcount in these roles should begin transition planning now — not when the technology forces their hand.

# LOWEST AI AUTOMATION RISK

Top 10 occupations by composite risk score (ascending) — Q1 2026

| RANK | OCCUPATION                        |                        | SCORE | WORKFORCE | CATEGORY     | WEF TREND    |
|------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| 1    | Imam/Religious Leader             | <div><div></div></div> | 5.0   | 42,000    | Augmentation | Stable       |
| 2    | Social Workers                    | <div><div></div></div> | 11.8  | 26,500    | Augmentation | —            |
| 3    | Personal Trainer (Gym)            | <div><div></div></div> | 12.0  | 22,000    | Augmentation | Rapid Growth |
| 4    | AI Ethics & Governance Specialist | <div><div></div></div> | 12.0  | 450       | Augmentation | Rapid Growth |
| 5    | Renewable Energy Technician       | <div><div></div></div> | 12.0  | 6,500     | Augmentation | Rapid Growth |
| 6    | Dentists                          | <div><div></div></div> | 13.4  | 33,751    | Augmentation | —            |
| 7    | Teachers (Preschool/Primary)      | <div><div></div></div> | 13.5  | 244,652   | Augmentation | —            |
| 8    | Registered Nurses                 | <div><div></div></div> | 13.6  | 243,336   | Augmentation | —            |
| 9    | Cybersecurity Analyst             | <div><div></div></div> | 14.0  | 12,500    | Augmentation | Rapid Growth |
| 10   | Driving Instructor                | <div><div></div></div> | 15.0  | 14,000    | Augmentation | Stable       |

The safest occupations share three defensive characteristics: **physical presence requirements, emotional intelligence, and non-routine judgment**. Religious leaders (5.0/100), social workers, personal trainers, and healthcare professionals operate in domains where human connection, physical dexterity, and contextual judgment create natural moats against automation.

Notably, emerging AI-era roles also appear in this list. AI Ethics Specialists, Cybersecurity Analysts, and Renewable Energy Technicians score below 15/100 — their very existence is a response to the technological forces disrupting other occupations. This creates a clear reskilling pathway: workers in high-risk administrative roles can transition toward technology governance, security, and green energy roles where demand is growing and AI exposure is minimal.

Healthcare deserves special attention. Dentists (13.4), Registered Nurses (13.6), and Teachers consistently score below 15/100. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 healthcare expansion — with new hospitals, medical cities, and primary care centers — makes these roles both AI-safe and high-demand.

## SECTOR AI EXPOSURE MAP

20 ISIC sectors ranked by AI risk score — bar width proportional to exposure



## WORKFORCE COMPOSITION BY RISK LEVEL

• High Risk (>45) • Moderate (25-45) • Low Risk (<25)

Information & Communication (ICT) (23 occupations)



Administrative & Support Services (19 occupations)



Professional, Scientific & Technical (16 occupations)



Financial & Insurance Activities (14 occupations)



Construction (13 occupations)



Transportation & Storage (11 occupations)



Administrative & Support Services leads exposure at 72/100, with 9 of its occupations in the high-risk band. Financial Services (62/100) faces a perfect storm: high automation potential combined with aggressive Saudization in banking (tawteen Phase 2). Banks like Al Rajhi and SABB must simultaneously replace expat workers AND automate — creating a compressed transition timeline. Construction (12/100) and Healthcare (15/100) remain resilient.

# GLOBAL AI-DRIVEN LAYOFFS

Major workforce reductions citing AI — 2024 to Q1 2026

## 2024



## 2025



| COMPANY           | JOBS CUT | AI ROLE   | DATE                |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|---------------------|
| BT Group          | 10,000   | SUSPECTED | May 2023 plan       |
| IBM               | 7,800    | SUSPECTED | May 2023 plan       |
| Indeed/Glassdoor  | 1,300    | AI CITED  | Jul 2025            |
| Google (Ads)      | 1,000    | AI CITED  | Jan 2024            |
| Klarna            | 700      | AI CITED  | Feb 2024            |
| Paycom            | 500      | AI CITED  | Oct 2025            |
| Chegg             | 468      | AI CITED  | Jun 2023 + Oct 2025 |
| Just Eat Takeaway | 450      | AI CITED  | Sep 2025            |
| Stack Overflow    | 150      | AI CITED  | Oct 2023            |
| Google Cloud (UX) | 100      | AI CITED  | Oct 2025            |
| Deepwatch         | 70       | AI CITED  | Nov 2025            |
| Duolingo          | 0        | AI CITED  | Jan 2024            |

# LAYOFF TRENDS & IMPLICATIONS

What the global data tells us about Saudi Arabia's exposure

Q1 2026 marks an inflection point in AI-driven workforce restructuring. For the first time, a major S&P 500 company (Block Inc.) explicitly framed AI not as cost optimization but as **structural workforce redesign**. CEO Dorsey's statement that "intelligence tools have changed what it means to build a company" signals a shift from defensive cuts to offensive restructuring. This is no longer about reducing headcount — it's about fundamentally rethinking which functions require human workers.

The data tells a stark story. Global tech layoffs reached 118,500 in 2025, with 54,836 explicitly AI-cited in the US (Challenger, Gray & Christmas). October 2025 saw the peak: 153,074 total cuts, of which 31,039 (20.3%) cited AI — making artificial intelligence the **#2 cause of job cuts** behind cost-cutting for the first time.

The implications for Saudi Arabia are threefold. First, multinational employers operating in the Kingdom (Accenture, Microsoft, Amazon, Meta) are implementing these same AI-driven restructuring strategies globally — their Saudi operations will not be exempt. Second, the types of roles being eliminated globally (customer service, administrative support, content creation, financial analysis) map directly onto high-risk occupations in the Saudi labor market. Third, Saudi companies are increasingly adopting the same tools: Arab National Bank has deployed 100+ RPA bots, Saudi Post operates 200 sorting robots, and ZATCA has automated 50% of customs operations.

**FORWARD SIGNAL:** The cumulative AI-cited layoff figure from 2023–2026 stands at 79,449 in the US alone. The trend is exponential, not linear. Organizations that treat AI workforce displacement as a 2028–2030 problem are already behind.

## KSA AI DEPLOYMENT TRACKER

| ENTITY                   | TYPE              | IMPACT                                                                           |
|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Arab National Bank (ANB) | RPA/AI            | 35 processes automated, 100+ bots, 40K hours saved, 2M+ requests processed       |
| Saudi Post (SPL)         | Robotics          | 200 sorting robots deployed, largest robotic sorting center in Middle East       |
| BinDawood (Danube)       | Automation        | Fully automated dark stores for e-commerce fulfillment                           |
| Absher Platform          | Digital Gov       | 12M+ operations in H1 2023, 17B SAR annual savings                               |
| ZATCA Customs            | AI Risk Engine    | 50% customs operations automated, clearance time 24h→5h                          |
| KFSHRC Hospital          | AI Diagnostics    | 20+ AI applications, 170K automated interventions, 25% diagnostic accuracy impro |
| NEOM (The Line)          | Smart City Design | Native autonomous transport, predictive maintenance, AI-first urban management   |
| Carrefour City+ Dubai    | Computer Vision   | Fully cashierless store using AI vision and auto-payment                         |

# SAUDIZATION LANDSCAPE — Q1 2026

Tawteen decisions, Nitaqat bands, and regulatory trajectory

## KEY TAWTEEN DECISIONS (2024–2025)

| PROFESSION                     | QUOTA | EFFECTIVE        | PHASE     |
|--------------------------------|-------|------------------|-----------|
| Consulting professions         | 40%   | 25 March 2024    | Phase 2   |
| Project management professions | 40%   | 12 December 2024 | Phase 2   |
| Procurement professions        | 50%   | 2023             | Current   |
| Sales professions              | 15%   | 24 December 2023 | Phase 1   |
| Engineering professions        | 25%   | 21 July 2024     | Phase 1   |
| Dentistry (private sector)     | 35%   | 10 March 2024    | Phase 1   |
| Radiology (private healthcare) | 65%   | 17 April 2025    | Phase 1–2 |
| Medical laboratories           | 70%   | 17 April 2025    | Phase 1–2 |
| Clinical nutrition             | 80%   | 17 April 2025    | Phase 1–2 |
| Physiotherapy                  | 80%   | 17 April 2025    | Phase 1–2 |

## NITAQAT BAND PRIVILEGES

| BAND         | NEW VISAS | CHANGE OCC. | RENEW | TRANSFER |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|-------|----------|
| Platinum     | ✓         | ✓           | ✓     | ✓        |
| High Green   | ✓         | ✓           | ✓     | ✓        |
| Medium Green | ✓         | ✓           | ✓     | ✓        |
| Low Green    | ✗         | ✗           | ✓     | ✗        |
| Red          | ✗         | ✗           | ✗     | ✗        |

The Saudization machine operates with systematic precision. Engineering professions reached 25% quota in July 2024; consulting hit 40% in March 2024; marketing communications 100% from March 2025. Each quarter, new professions enter the tawteen pipeline, reducing the share of roles available to expatriate workers. For employers, this creates a dual planning challenge: they must simultaneously meet rising quotas and prepare for AI-driven role elimination.

The interaction between Nitaqat and AI is particularly acute in the Red band. Companies in Red cannot renew work permits, hire expats, or change occupations — effectively forcing a choice between aggressive Saudization or workforce reduction. As AI tools become capable of replacing the very roles that expatriates fill, the economic incentive to automate rather than recruit Saudi replacements grows stronger. This is the regulatory paradox that policymakers must address.

# THE VISION 2030 PARADOX

When AI ambitions meet employment targets

| AI ACCELERATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• KSA #1 in global AI adoption (Kiteworks 2025)</li><li>• HUMAIN: \$100B sovereign AI company (PIF)</li><li>• 1.8 GW computing capacity target</li><li>• SAMAI 2: 1.1M Saudis trained in AI</li><li>• stc: 80%+ queries handled by AI</li><li>• Stanford: #1 women in AI publications</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 100 professions reserved for Saudis</li><li>• 20 tawteen decisions (2024–2025)</li><li>• Nitaqat quotas tightening quarterly</li><li>• HRDF: 8 major reskilling programs</li><li>• 7% unemployment target (met early)</li><li>• 40% by 2030</li></ul> |

## VISION 2030 TARGETS VS. REALITY

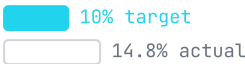
Saudi Unemployment Target met 6 years early



Female Participation Original target exceeded; new: 40%



Youth Unemployment Still above target



This is the central tension of Saudi Arabia's transformation. The Kingdom is simultaneously the most aggressive AI adopter in the Middle East and the most aggressive labor market regulator. V2030 targets ~2,304,400 net new jobs, yet our analysis identifies 4,450,778 positions with meaningful AI exposure. These numbers are not directly comparable — but they define the policy tension Saudi planners must navigate for the next decade.

## RECOMMENDED TRANSITION PATHWAYS

Evidence-based career transitions from high-risk to lower-risk occupations

**Data Entry Keyers** 94.9 → **RPA Developer** 35.0 EASY

Leverage existing data familiarity to transition into process automation. The same workers who manually enter data understand the workflows that RPA tools automate. Pathway: Doroob digital skills + UiPath Academy (3 months) + HRDF Tamheer placement. **Risk reduction: -59.9 points.**

**Accountants & Auditors** 88.2 → **Financial Analyst** 52.0 MODERATE

Move from compliance and bookkeeping (highly automatable) to strategic financial analysis (requires human judgment). Existing finance expertise is directly transferable. Pathway: CFA Level 1 + data analytics certification (6-12 months). **Risk reduction: -36.2 points.**

**Administrative Assistants** 85.2 → **Social Media Manager** 42.0 EASY

Communication and organizational skills transfer directly. Growing demand from Saudi brands, government entities, and entertainment sector. Pathway: Google Digital Marketing certificate + portfolio (3-6 months). **Risk reduction: -43.2 points.**

**HRDF PROGRAMS:** The Human Resources Development Fund offers 8 major programs (Tamheer, Doroob, Cooperative Training, Professional Certificates Support, Employment Support (Taqat), SAMAI (SDAIA), Saudi Digital Academy (SDA), Fuel Initiative) covering on-the-job training, wage subsidies, and certifications. Tamheer alone has placed 70,000+ trainees cumulative (2017-2022) through its on-the-job training track.

The key insight for career transition is that **AI-safe roles are not necessarily high-tech roles**. Physical services (personal training, nursing, construction supervision), creative strategy (marketing, design thinking), and human relationship roles (social work, teaching, counseling) all score below 25/100. Workers do not need to become software engineers — they need to move toward roles where human presence, judgment, and emotional intelligence are the core value proposition.

# SAUDI ARABIA AI ECOSYSTEM

Sovereign investments, infrastructure, and workforce signals

**\$100B**

HUMAIN sovereign AI investment (PIF)

**1.8 GW**

Computing capacity target

**#1**

Global AI adoption (Kiteworks 2025)

**389,000**

Digital workforce (35% women)

Saudi Arabia's AI infrastructure buildout is among the most ambitious globally. HUMAIN, the PIF-backed sovereign AI company, has committed \$100 billion with a target of 1.8 GW computing capacity. The data center market is projected to grow from \$1.61B in 2025 to \$8.11B by 2031 (31% CAGR), creating an estimated 6,875 direct jobs and 26,000 indirect government digital jobs by 2030.

On the talent side, SDAIA has trained over 45,000 AI professionals with a +54%/year growth rate. Key programs include ALLaM (an Arabic LLM trained on 500B tokens), Tawakkalna (8.5M users), and Nafath (national SSO). The Stanford AI Index 2025 places Saudi Arabia #1 globally for women-to-men ratio in AI publications, #3 for AI job growth, and #3-4 for advanced AI model development.

However, this acceleration creates workforce tension. When stc reports 80%+ customer queries handled by AI, when ZATCA automates 50% of customs operations, and when Arab National Bank deploys 100+ RPA bots — these are not abstract threats. They are operational realities already reshaping the Saudi labor market. The 20,000 AI specialist target for 2030 and the goal of training 40% of the workforce in AI skills reflect the government's awareness that the transition must be managed, not merely observed.

**INFRASTRUCTURE SIGNAL:** 222 MW of current data center capacity with 760 MW planned and HUMAIN targeting 1800 MW. This is not incremental investment — it's a sovereign bet on AI as the Kingdom's post-oil economic engine.

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Full bibliography and data provenance

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*All data in this report was accessed and verified as of March 2026. Employment figures are based on GOSI Q4–2024 data, the most recent available at time of publication. Global layoff data is sourced from layoffs.fyi and Challenger, Gray & Christmas monthly reports.*

# METHODOLOGY

Scoring framework and limitations

## COMPOSITE SCORE FORMULA

Score = Automation Probability (40%) + Salary Impact (20%) + Regulatory Pressure (20%) + Demand Signal (20%)

The **Automation Probability** component combines three academic models: Frey & Osborne (2017) computerisation probability, Eloundou et al. (2023) GPT exposure scores, and Felten et al. AI occupational exposure index. These are weighted and normalized to a 0-100 scale.

**Salary Impact** captures the economic incentive to automate: higher-salary roles face stronger employer motivation to deploy AI substitutes. **Regulatory Pressure** incorporates Nitaqat band status, reserved profession lists, and tawteen decision timelines. **Demand Signal** uses WEF Future of Jobs 2025 trend classifications (growing/declining/stable) as a forward-looking adjustment.

## DATA SOURCES

| SOURCE          | DATA                                                   | PERIOD       |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| GOSI / GASTAT   | Employment statistics, 13 regions, 20 sectors          | Q4 2024      |
| WEF             | Future of Jobs 2025, occupation trends                 | 2025         |
| HRSD            | Nitaqat rules, tawteen decisions, reserved professions | Current      |
| McKinsey        | AI adoption surveys, automation potential              | 2023-2025    |
| Frey & Osborne  | Automation probabilities (Oxford)                      | Updated 2024 |
| Eloundou et al. | GPT exposure scores (OpenAI)                           | 2023         |
| layoffs.fyi     | Global tech layoff tracker                             | Real-time    |
| Challenger      | AI-cited job cuts (US)                                 | Monthly      |
| Kiteworks       | Global AI Adoption Index                               | 2025         |
| Stanford HAI    | AI Index Report                                        | 2025         |

## LIMITATIONS

This report provides risk indicators, not predictions. Composite scores combine multiple academic models with local regulatory data. Actual job displacement depends on employer adoption speed, government intervention, global AI capability trajectories, and individual worker adaptability. Employment estimates are approximations derived from GOSI sectoral data and occupation-level surveys. Saudi Arabia-specific automation data remains limited; global models are adapted with local weighting. This report should be used as a strategic planning input, not a definitive forecast.

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# SHIFT OBSERVATORY

AI Labor Market Intelligence for Saudi Arabia

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