



ICIMS 

# Workforce Report

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Our data and insights lead to  
your recruiting success.

April 2026 – Spotlight on AI adoption in talent acquisition

# The big picture

**Leaders are pushing for growth at the exact moment talent markets are getting more complicated.** In the U.S., openings are surging well ahead of both hiring and applications, signaling rising demand but a pipeline and process that cannot quite keep up. Time to fill is falling, which suggests recruiting teams are getting sharper on the roles they do close, but the backlog of open requisitions is building in the background.

In EMEA, the story is the mirror image. **Hiring remains subdued and openings are still below last year**, reflecting slower growth and tighter fiscal conditions in markets like France and the UK. Yet applicants per opening are rising even as total application volumes drifts down, which means fewer roles are creating more competition for each seat.

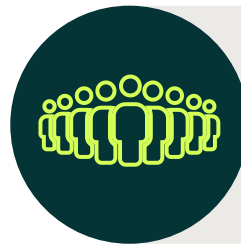
Strategically, this is not a simple “more candidates” or “more requisitions” problem. The move now is to treat hiring as a high-intent pipeline, anchored in intense prioritization of the roles that move the business.

**We encourage leaders to align on which jobs matter most**, then strip delay out of the process with faster decisions, clear SLAs for managers and smarter use of existing candidate relationships. When recruiters are equipped with the right tools and the freedom to focus on warm talent and targeted outreach, they can convert constrained interest into real hiring velocity on the roles that count.

## TOP FINDINGS



**U.S. demand is outrunning supply**, with an increase of 14% in openings year-over-year while applications are 6% below.



**EMEA: fewer roles, tougher competition:** hiring is 10% below last year, but applicants per opening climbed to 48.

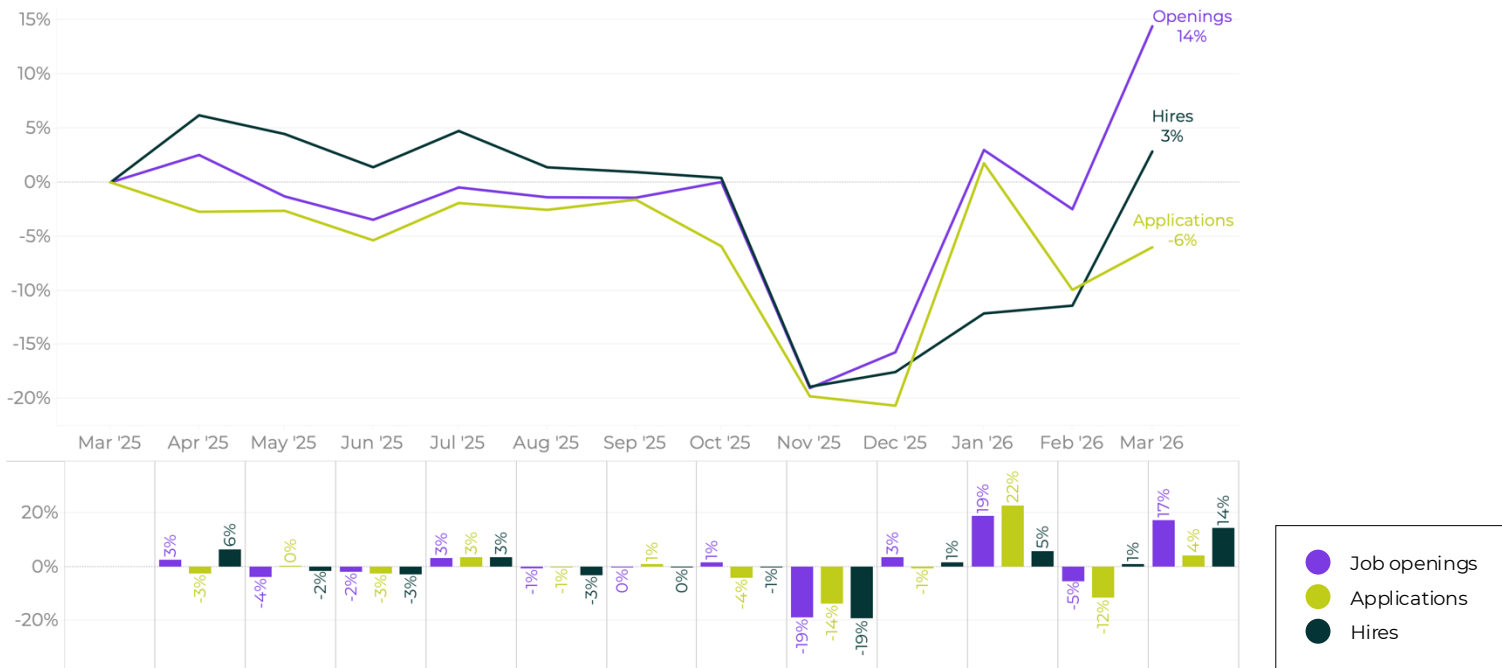


**69% of talent organizations are using AI**, but each stage of the funnel shows a different level of adoption.

**ICIMS Insights Workforce Reports** monitor monthly labor market activity based on hundreds of millions of applicants and millions of users. Organizations can use this data as a measuring stick to anticipate and adapt to ever-changing workforce dynamics.

# Openings increase but hiring cannot keep up

US PLATFORM INDICATORS | Job openings, applications and hires | March 2025–March 2026



**ICIMS INSIGHTS QUICK TAKE:** The gap between hires and openings widens.

## MARKET UPDATE

March data shows a market where demand is heating up faster than the talent supply. Job openings were 14% higher than last March and rose 17% month-over-month, continuing the upward trend that started in December with only a small dip in February.

Hiring is moving in the right direction but at a slower pace, up 3% year-over-year, while applications are 6% below last year even though they improved from February. Hires increased 14% month-over-month, yet the growth in openings is still out in front, and the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report shows the U.S. added 178,000 jobs in March, well above market expectations.

If this pattern holds, talent teams could find themselves in a difficult spot: more roles to fill, fewer candidates in the pipeline and growing pressure from the business. The risk is a widening execution gap where requisitions pile up, recruiting teams are stretched, and candidates experience slower responses and inconsistent communication.

## STRATEGY

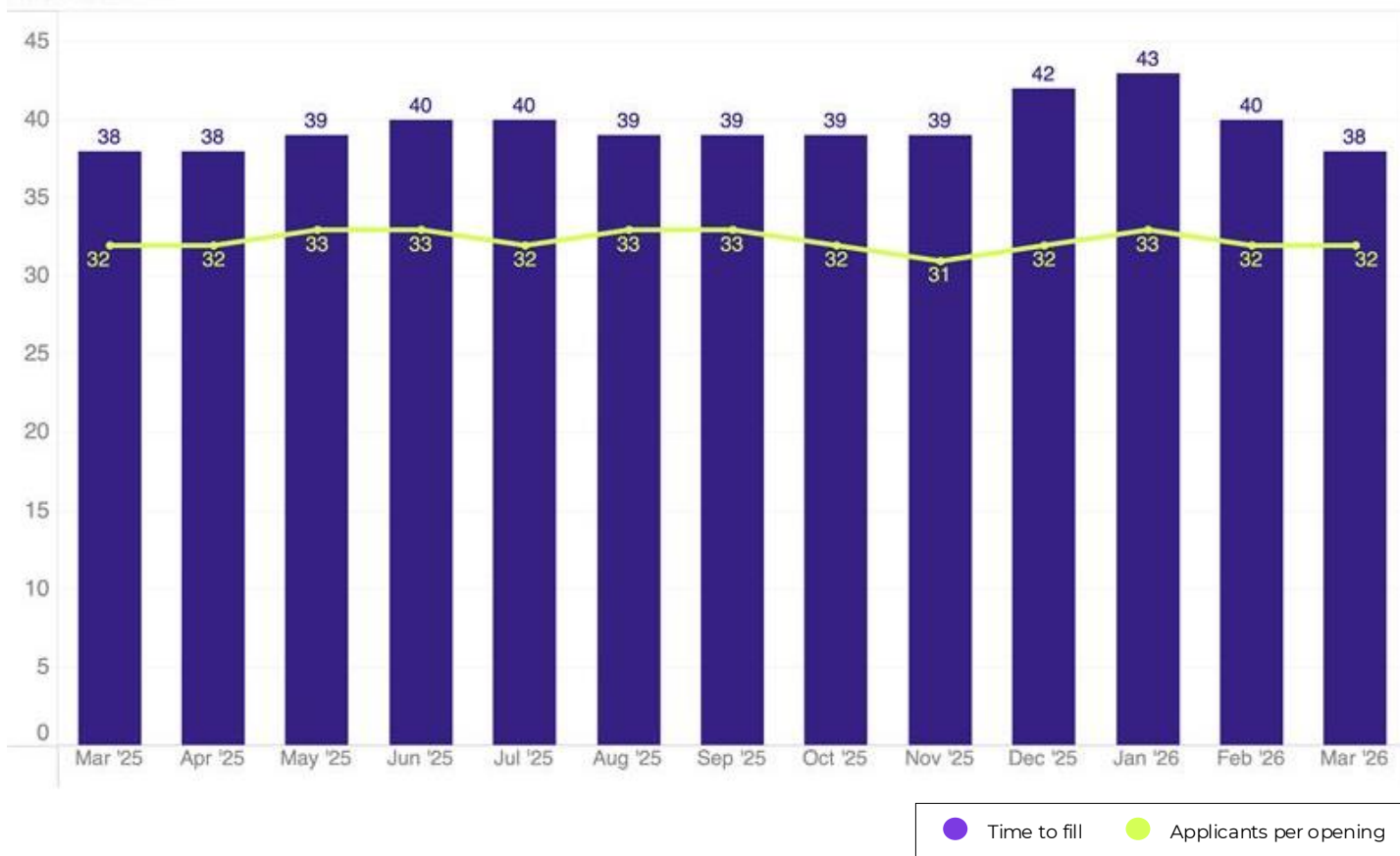
The practical move now is to get ahead of that gap. Teams with a high volume of openings should revisit their candidate pipeline from the last year and use their candidate relationship management (CRM) tool to surface qualified talent for targeted re-engagement, instead of relying only on fresh applicants.

HR and business leaders should work together to rank and focus the most critical roles so recruiters can spend their time where it matters most. The combination of smarter re-engagement and tighter prioritization will help protect recruiter capacity and the candidate experience, even as demand keeps climbing.

## Same applicant flow, faster hires

As openings climb and time to fill finally starts to ease, the real advantage shifts to organizations that can strip out bottlenecks and move qualified candidates through the process with speed and clarity.

US TIME TO FILL AND APPLICANTS PER OPENING | March 2025 – March 2026



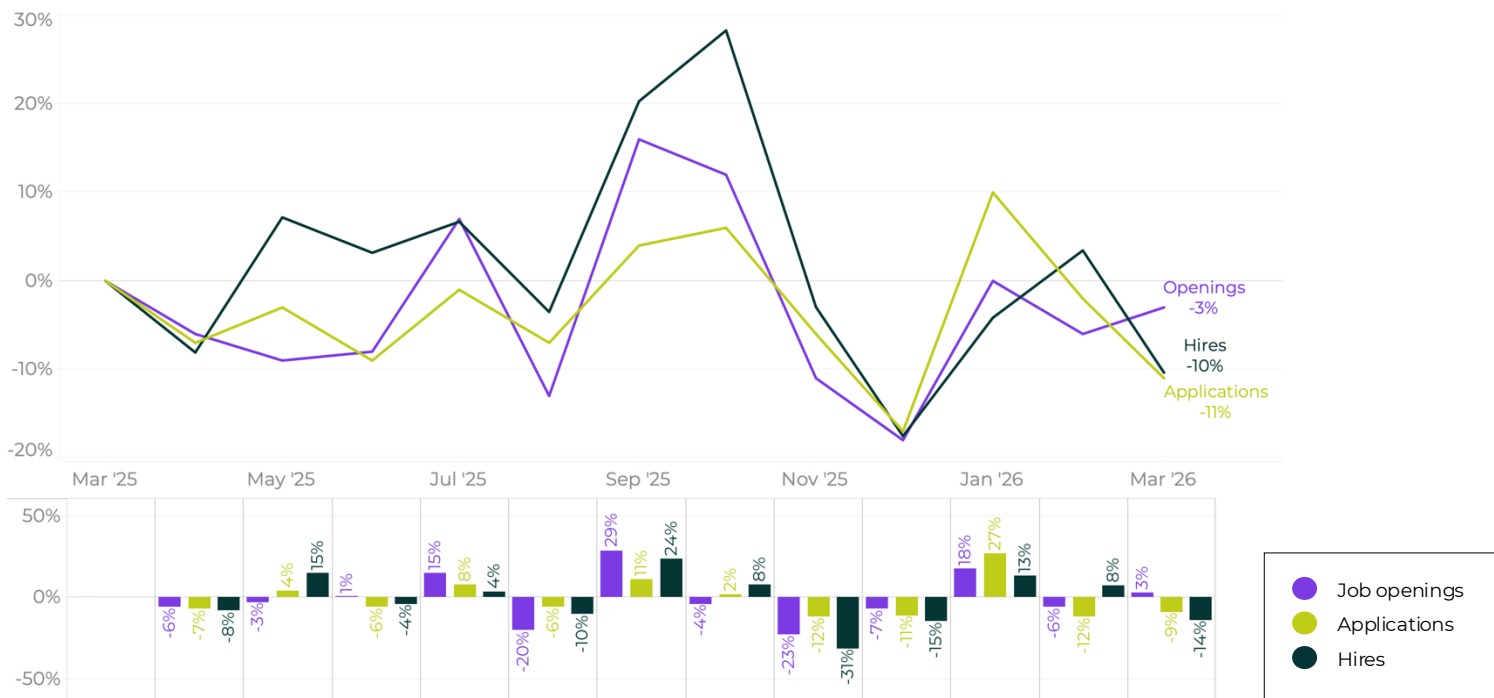
“Even as applicants per opening have held steady, time to fill is only now starting to come down, moving from 43 days in January to 38 days in March. That suggests the real constraint is not the size of the talent pool, but the bottlenecks inside our own hiring process that slow decisions and extend the time it takes to make a hire.”



**TRENT COTTON**  
Head of Talent Insights & Analyst Relations,  
ICIMS

# EMEA Market: Soft demand, hard choices

EMEA PLATFORM INDICATORS | Job openings, applications and hires | March 2025 – March 2026



## ICIMS INSIGHTS QUICK TAKE: EMEA hiring and application volume decline.

### MARKET UPDATE

**Hiring in EMEA remains subdued.** Hiring is 10% below last year and the strong 27% increase in applications in January now looks like an outlier against the weaker trend that began in November, with two consecutive months of negative hiring erasing those gains. Openings also remain below last year's benchmarks, which reinforces the picture of a cautious market.

This pattern is consistent with the broader macro signals. In France, forecasters point to economic and policy uncertainty plus fiscal tightening as a drag on domestic demand and new hiring plans, especially in service-heavy sectors. In the UK, slower growth and higher interest rates are acting as an additional headwind, limiting fiscal room and making leaders more reluctant to commit to expansion hiring.

Application volumes have been volatile and generally below openings for most of the year. In March, applicants per opening were 11% below last March, extending the downward trend that started in February and forcing recruiting teams to accelerate pipeline movement with the challenge of attracting qualified talent in a cautious market.

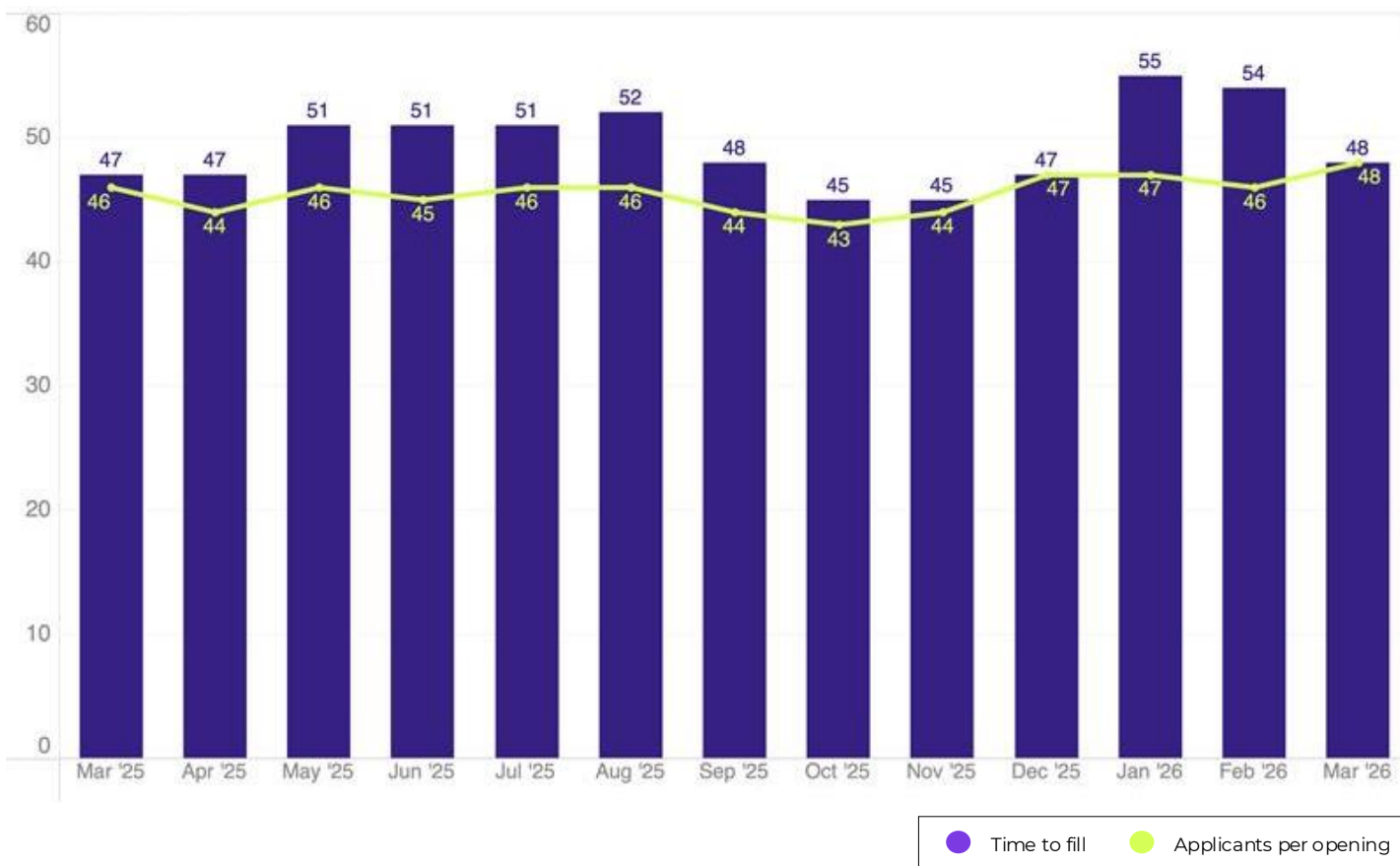
### STRATEGY

**Strategically, leaders should treat this period as a chance to get sharper, not just smaller.** The priority is to focus limited hiring capacity on the roles and capabilities that matter most over the next 12–24 months and to remove friction from the hiring process so that critical positions move quickly even in a low-growth environment.

## Fewer roles, fierce race for talent

With fewer roles in market and more candidates per opening, the advantage shifts to companies that can focus on priority hires and move them through the process without delay.

EMEA TIME TO FILL AND APPLICANTS PER OPENING | March 2025 – March 2026



“With applicants per opening rising to 48 and time to fill easing from its winter peak, EMEA is not short on interest. The real test for leaders is whether their hiring engines can convert that interest into timely, high-quality hires.”



**TRENT COTTON**  
Head of Talent Insights & Analyst Relations,  
ICIMS



## How is AI really being used in Talent Acquisition?

**Artificial intelligence is reshaping how companies hire**, with AI now woven into sourcing, screening, assessments and communication workflows rather than sitting on the sidelines as a future concept. Organizations have spent the last several years layering AI into their recruiting tech stacks, while vendors race to ship new features that promise faster decisions, better matches and less manual work for teams.

Yet most of the noise in the market still centers on broad adoption stats and generic “future of work” narratives, leaving leaders with limited visibility into what AI is operating inside the hiring lifecycle today.

Early data from the ICIMS and Aptitude Research study, **The Definitive Guide: AI Adoption in Talent Acquisition**, suggests AI momentum with caveats: most companies report using AI somewhere in talent acquisition, but most deployments live in isolated use cases rather than in an integrated, end-to-end strategy.

Agentic AI is starting to raise expectations again, with recruiting leaders now asking whether their technology can coordinate workflows, power natural conversations with candidates and support more nuanced decision-making for hiring managers. The practical reality? Recruiters, hiring managers and candidates are feeling the impact unevenly, and the benefits are often constrained by process design and governance gaps.

**For CHROs**, the mandate is to move AI out of the pilot phase and into the heart of the talent strategy: clarifying where AI should augment recruiters, how hiring manager roles and skills need to evolve and which experience and outcome metrics will define success. That includes putting real structure around AI governance in talent acquisition that can stand up to scrutiny from employees, regulators and the C-suite.

**For boards and CXOs**, the questions need to shift from “Do we use AI in hiring?” to “Can we explain how it works, defend the outcomes and connect it to business performance and risk?”

The organizations that succeed will be those that treat AI in hiring as a strategic capability rather than as a collection of disconnected tools.

**69% of companies** report that they are currently using AI in some capacity within talent acquisition

**69%**

**50% shared** that efficiency is the top goal

**50%**

## AI in talent acquisition: mainstream, but not yet transformative

AI has quietly become mainstream in talent acquisition. The data shows 69% of companies say they are using it in some capacity, especially for screening, candidate communication, and assessments.

The concentration in these areas shows that employers are starting with high-volume, rules-based tasks where AI can quickly reduce manual effort and response times.

Operational efficiency is still the main draw. Half of organizations surveyed say it is their top objective for AI in talent acquisition, while only about one in four put better decision-making in that top tier.

Recruiters are under pressure to reduce time-to-hire and manage heavier workloads, so AI is being applied first to speed and scale rather than to redesign selection decisions.

### ICIMS advice

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**Treat these numbers as a wake-up call, not a finish line.** If you are already using AI in talent acquisition, start by mapping where it lives in your workflows and what problem each use case is meant to solve.

Then, pressure-test whether those deployments are doing anything more than saving time. If efficiency is the only clear outcome, you are likely leaving value on the table.

# Top findings

## 1 AI adoption in talent acquisition is widespread but still immature.

Most organizations report using AI in some part of the hiring process. However, adoption is typically limited to specific use cases rather than a coordinated strategy across the hiring lifecycle.

## 2 AI is most commonly used in screening, communication, and sourcing.

These stages of the hiring process involve large volumes of candidate data and repetitive tasks, making them natural starting points for AI adoption.

## 3 Efficiency remains the primary driver of AI investment.

Organizations continue to adopt AI primarily to reduce manual work, accelerate hiring timelines, and improve recruiter productivity.

## 4 Generative AI is expanding how recruiters communicate and evaluate candidates.

Generative AI tools are helping recruiters draft outreach messages, summarize candidate information, and generate interview insights, significantly reducing administrative workload.

## 5 AI is beginning to influence hiring decisions, not just processes.

While early AI adoption focused on automation, newer tools are providing decision-support insights that help recruiters and hiring managers evaluate candidate qualifications and potential.

## 6 Recruiter roles are shifting toward more strategic activities.

As AI automates administrative tasks such as scheduling, resume review, and messaging, recruiters are spending more time on candidate engagement, talent advisory, and workforce planning.

## 7 Hiring managers are becoming direct users of AI-driven hiring tools.

AI-generated candidate summaries, interview insights, and structured interview guidance are helping hiring managers make faster, more consistent hiring decisions.

## 8 Candidate expectations are evolving as AI becomes more visible in hiring.

AI-powered communication and chatbots can improve response times and engagement, but organizations must balance automation with personalization to maintain trust.

## 9 Governance and transparency remain major challenges.

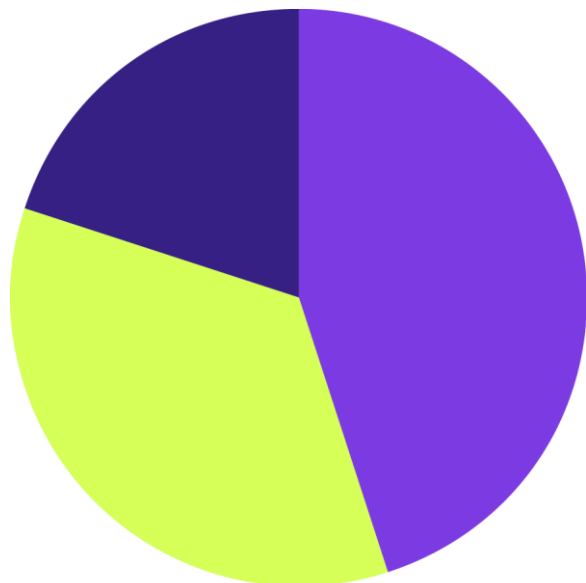
Many organizations lack clear policies for monitoring bias, ensuring transparency in AI recommendations, and maintaining human oversight in hiring decisions.

## 10 The next phase of AI adoption will focus on orchestration of agents.

Rather than individual AI tools supporting isolated tasks, the future of talent acquisition will likely involve networks of AI agents that coordinate sourcing, communication, screening, and scheduling across the hiring process.

# The biggest concern in AI: Governance

## AI GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK STATUS



**45%**  
**No framework**  
No AI policies or oversight structure.

**35%**  
**In development**  
Building policies, not yet operational.

**20%**  
**Fully established**  
Clear governance and human oversight.

**ICIMS INSIGHTS QUICK TAKE:** AI adoption is high, but governance is not keeping up.

AI adoption is accelerating but AI governance has not kept pace. Boards and regulators have turned up the “scrutiny” dial, yet many organizations are still running critical hiring decisions on models without clear policies, documentation or human oversight.

That gap shows up in practical ways:

- Recruiters unsure what tools they can use,
- Legal teams worrying about disparate impact, and
- Candidates asking tough questions about how their data is being evaluated.

The net effect: your AI roadmap might look ambitious, but every new deployment is harder to defend.

### STRATEGY

**You cannot assume that buying another AI point solution** or flipping on a new feature will generate value if you do not have standards for fairness, explainability and accountability.

Instead, the advantage will go to organizations that treat AI governance like a core operating discipline: clear policies, cross-functional review, documented risk assessments and ongoing monitoring of outcomes.

This is the approach ICIMS has taken with its **Responsible AI** program and governance committees, building an AI model that can stand up to regulators, candidates and customer expectations.



## REPORT FOCUS

# There is more data

In a few charts and call-outs, you are seeing a small slice of what ICIMS and Aptitude Research have analyzed in **The Definitive Guide: AI in Talent Acquisition**.

Our guide drills much deeper into how AI is being used at every stage of the recruiting funnel. It breaks adoption out across sourcing, screening, assessment, interviewing and candidate communication, giving leaders a line of sight into which parts of the funnel are AI-enabled, which are still manual and where the biggest gaps and opportunities sit.

The ICIMS Insights April Workforce Report is just a preview of what is available in the full report, which goes much deeper with funnel-by-funnel data, benchmarks and insights.

**The Definitive Guide: AI Adoption in Talent Acquisition will be released on April 30, 2026.**



Most reports dwell on why AI is being adopted or quote broad usage stats, but I find very few show how it plays out across the hiring lifecycle. **This new data reveals where AI is changing sourcing, screening, interviewing and communication.**

The report also provides research on what that means for recruiters, hiring managers, and candidates.

I am excited to bring these insights into the market.



**TRENT COTTON**  
Head of Talent  
Insights & Analyst  
Relations,  
ICIMS

## FROM INSIGHTS TO IMPACT

# Tailored takeaways

Whether you lead people, run operations or shape strategy, you can use these insights to align teams, reduce friction and move faster on your goals.

## FOR THE Talent Leaders

- **Shift from intake order-taking to portfolio management.** Push low-impact or chronically stalled roles into “on hold” status so your team is not spread across work that will never close.
- **Attack time to fill in the places you control.** Map your funnel by role family and surface where days are being lost. Then set simple, visible SLAs and automate the low-value touches so recruiters can spend time on decisions and candidate conversations.

## FOR THE CHROs

- **Differentiate by region.** U.S.: focus on engagement and conversion. Eurozone: quality and internal mobility. UK: retention plus selective, high-priority hires.
- **Set clear AI guardrails in hiring.** Decide where automation is allowed and where humans must own the call and communicate that to candidates and leaders.

## FOR THE CXOs

- **Be explicit on what gets filled.** Name the roles that are non-negotiable and which can be paused so TA is not guessing where to spend capacity.
- **Invest in speed and signal.** Back process changes and tech that reduce interviews, clarify decision rights, and cut days from TTF for critical roles.

# Want more great insights?

## ICIMS State of Frontline Hiring

Frontline roles are the backbone of our workforce, but hiring for them continues to be challenging. Based on fresh data from over 2,000 frontline workers and hiring managers across healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing and retail, our [State of Frontline Hiring Report](#) uncovers why companies are struggling to fill roles.

## ICIMS State of the CHRO Report

The role of HR has never been more strategic. Learn how 1,000 CHROs and chief people officers are navigating the shift and how 500 CIOs see HR navigating TA tech in the [ICIMS State of the CHRO Report](#).

## ICIMS Talent Experience Report

Explore what candidates want right now and how talent acquisition pros are delivering those experiences in our second annual [Talent Experience Report](#).

# About ICIMS

ICIMS is the talent acquisition platform that unites the strengths of enterprise software with the transformative power of AI.

Workforce data is vital to driving business forward.

## ICIMS Insights provides data that is:

- Current
- Cross-industry
- Dual-focused on employer and job seeker intentions and activity

## Data derived from:



**3.1M+**  
global platform users



**691M+**  
candidate profiles



**~243M**  
applications



**5M+**  
hires



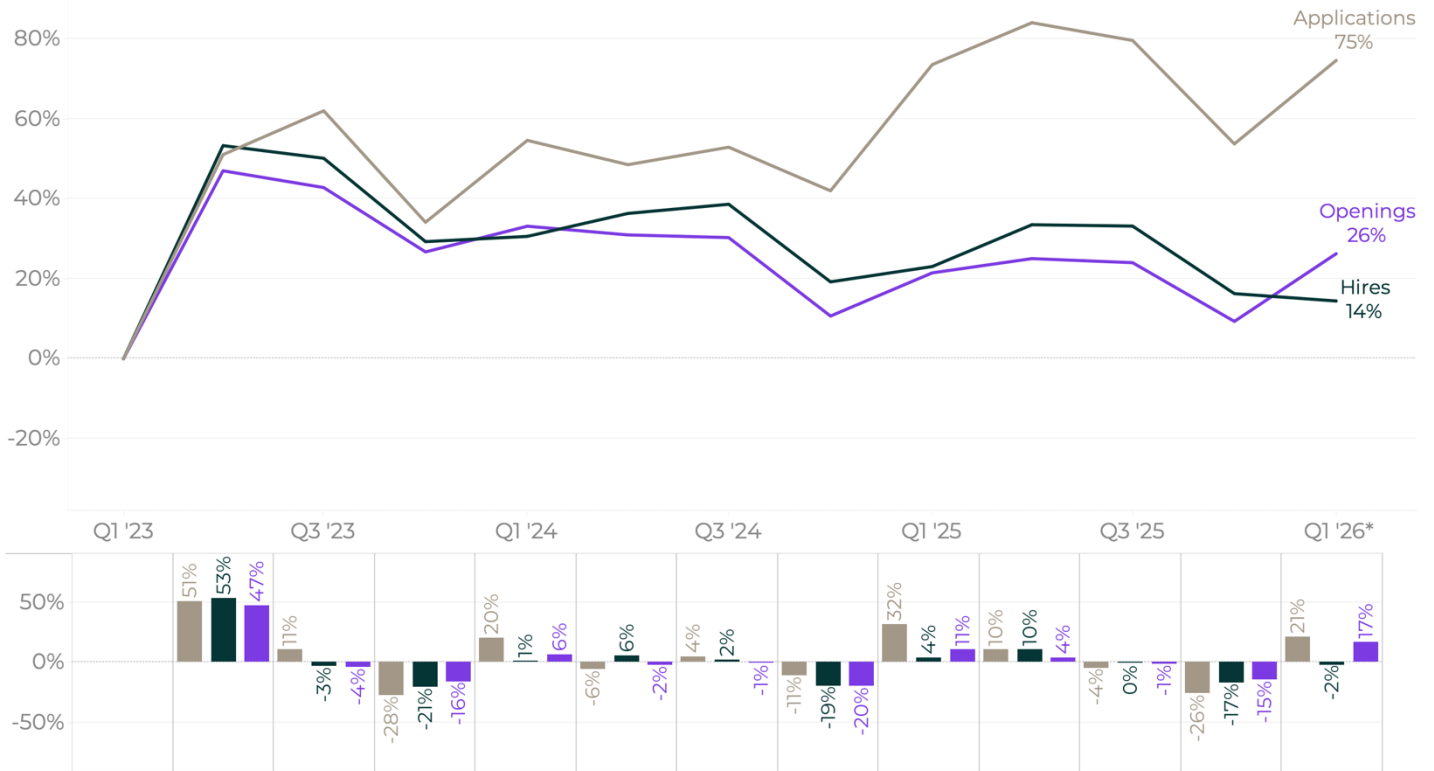
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# Frontline applications stay strong

What used to be a race for applicants is now a race to see who can move the qualified ones through the fastest. As openings increase, organizations should prioritize streamlining processes to remove bottlenecks.

Frontline job activity: Q1 2023 – Q1 2026\*



\*Data for Q1 26 is based on projections leveraging the first two months of data.

“Applications continue to outpace hires, showing that the challenge is not finding candidates, it is turning them into employees fast enough. If openings continue to increase, this could cause a serious strain on recruiting organizations fighting for top talent.”



**TRENT COTTON**

Head of Talent Acquisition Insights & Analyst Relations, ICIMS

## Each sector tells a different story

Frontline hiring sits at the center of the labor market, touching almost every major sector. In this month’s report, the data shows that each sector’s hiring story looks very different.

### Frontline job activity: February 2025 vs. February 2026



In **manufacturing**, employers are still leaning into growth, with openings up about 10% even as applications fall roughly 10%. That gap is starting to bite: hires are inching forward, but at only about a 3% gain, suggesting plants are struggling to convert a shrinking pool of candidates.

**Retail** tells a different story: demand has barely ticked up, with openings hovering just above flat and applications down close to 8%. Hires have slipped into negative territory, signaling that many retailers are quietly pulling back on staffing plans or finding it harder to persuade workers to take front-of-house roles.

**Healthcare** looks like the steadiest of the four — openings and applications are both slightly positive, and hires are up about 1% — but even here, the modest gains hint at a market that’s more constrained than the headlines suggest.

**Leisure and hospitality** remain the most fragile part of the frontline economy. Openings are up about 7%, but applications are down roughly 10% and hires are down about 3%. After years of churn and burnout, many workers are reluctant to return, leaving hotels, restaurants and venues with more shifts than people to cover them.

These trends suggest that the **frontline recovery is less a surge than a fragile balancing act between need and willingness to work.**