Workforce Report

Our data and insights support your recruiting success.

August 2026 – Spotlight on manufacturing

The big picture

Demand is accelerating on both sides of the Atlantic, and the labor market is answering with strain instead of speed.

In the U.S., job openings closed July 17% above the July 2025 baseline while hires ended the month flat at 0% growth. On its own, a healthy climb in job postings signals confidence. The tension is in the gap: openings are accelerating while conversion into hires has stalled, leaving recruiting teams to work through more requisitions without more people landing in seats.

EMEA is showing a related but distinct pattern. Job openings and applications are both climbing, up 12% and 6% year-over-year, yet hires remains the lone metric still below baseline at -1% growth. Unlike the U.S., the problem here is not a thin candidate pool. Rather, it is what happens to candidates once they are in the pipeline.

This month, the spotlight turns to **manufacturing**. As job openings outpace hires across both regions, the sector offers a clear look at where that gap shows up at an industry level.

TOP FINDINGS

U.S. employer demand continues an upward trend, with an increase of 17% in job openings year-over-year while hiring flatlines.

12%

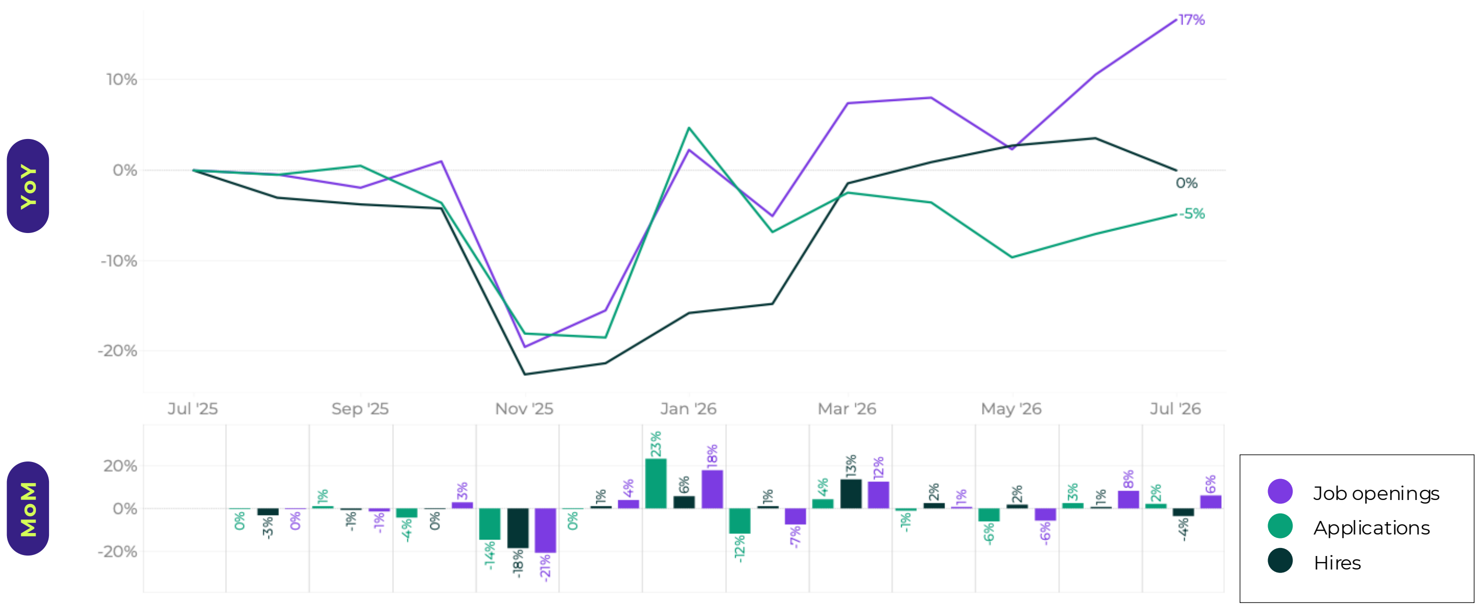
EMEA job openings grow 12% and hiring is cooling off.

Manufacturing job openings jumped 29% higher over the 12-month rolling period. Concerns continue as both hiring and applications struggle to keep up.

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.

U.S. job openings surge and hires stall as the gap snaps into focus

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



ICIMS INSIGHTS QUICK TAKE: Openings accelerated and hires pulled back sharply month-over-month, the widest split this year between the two.

MARKET UPDATE

July continued a pattern that has been building since spring. Job openings in the U.S. were up 17% over the July 2025 baseline, continuing a climb that started in May, while hires ended flat at 0% growth. On its own, that gap signals a market where demand keeps building faster than organizations can convert it. The tension is not new, but it is not easing either.

The top of the funnel is showing modest signs of a potential come back. While still below the July 2025 baseline, application volume improved to -5% growth, continuing a slight rebound from June. That eases some pressure on sourcing, but it has not been enough to close the gap between job openings and hires, which remains the defining constraint of the summer.

The month-over-month view makes the shift sharper. Job openings increased 6% from June to July while hires fell 4% over the same stretch. This represents a slow, persistent imbalance, one that points to a bottleneck deeper in the hiring process than the applicant pool.

STRATEGY

The hiring drop this month points away from a sourcing problem and toward a conversion one. With applications improving month over month and job openings surging, the constraint is not candidate volume. Rather, it is what happens once a candidate is in the pipeline. Recruiting teams should audit screen-to-interview and interview-to-offer conversion before defaulting to a top-of-funnel fix that this month's data does not support.

Tracking the gap between job openings and hires is useful, but it is a lagging signal. A more actionable metric is requisitions open beyond a set threshold with no interview scheduled. Surfacing that number weekly gives recruiters and hiring managers something to act on before a requisition stalls for a full reporting cycle, not after.

The sharpness of July's divergence also makes this a leadership question. When openings accelerate faster than an organization's interview and decision capacity can absorb, the fix is not more recruiter effort. CHROs should treat approval volume as a lever they help the business manage versus a fixed input recruiting has to work around.

The bottleneck in EMEA is conversion as openings continue to increase

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

ICIMS INSIGHTS QUICK TAKE:
Openings and applications are both climbing while hires remains the lone metric still below baseline.

MARKET UPDATE

Job openings in EMEA extended their climb through July, closing 12% above the July 2025 baseline after turning positive in June. Applications followed a similar path, up 6% year-over-year, though that is a marked cooldown from the growth in applications posted earlier in the year. While still below the July 2025 baseline, hires, meanwhile, improved to -1% growth, its strongest reading since early spring but still the only one of the three metrics not yet back above baseline.

The recovery follows a rockier stretch than the current numbers suggest on their own. All three metrics fell sharply in the back half of 2025, with openings and hires both dropping past -10% around November and December 2025. July's readings mark a real rebound from that trough, not a steady climb from a stable baseline, and the volatility earlier in the year is worth keeping in view when reading the current trend as durable.

Month-over-month, the picture sharpens further. Openings rose 6% from June to July, applications gained 2% and hires moved just 1%. Even at the monthly level, hires are barely moving while the other two metrics accelerate.

STRATEGY

With job openings and applications both moving in the right direction, the fix is what happens after a candidate applies. Recruiting teams should consider an audit of each stage between application and offer, screening turnaround, interview scheduling and decision time to find where candidates are stalling. A pipeline problem responds to different levers than a demand problem, and treating this as the latter will waste effort where it will not move the numbers.

Interview loop speed is the most direct lever available. The data suggests the likely friction point is decision-making, not candidate availability. Tightening the loop, fewer rounds, faster panel turnaround and same-day feedback where possible converts existing pipeline into hires faster.

One caution for leadership: While still above the July 2025 baseline, applications have cooled from strong growth earlier in the year to 6% growth in July. Today's fix assumes a healthy pool to convert. If that slide continues, EMEA may trade a conversion problem for a volume one.

REPORT FOCUS

Manufacturing

Manufacturing has been the standout sector in this year's data. The story is who is filling these roles and how fast openings are converting into hires.

ICIMS platform data shows the gap between manufacturing job openings and hires widening further this month, the sharpest divergence in this report. National projections point to part of why: some of the roles driving manufacturing's growth, like industrial engineers and frontline supervisors, are structurally harder to fill than most production work.

The pipeline of talent entering the sector is also shifting. ICIMS applicant data points to a change in who is applying to manufacturing roles, echoed by national survey and enrollment data on how younger workers are approaching skilled trades.

This month's spotlight covers all three threads: the widening gap between manufacturing openings and hires, what that gap might reveal about the specific roles driving it and the shift already visible in who is applying.

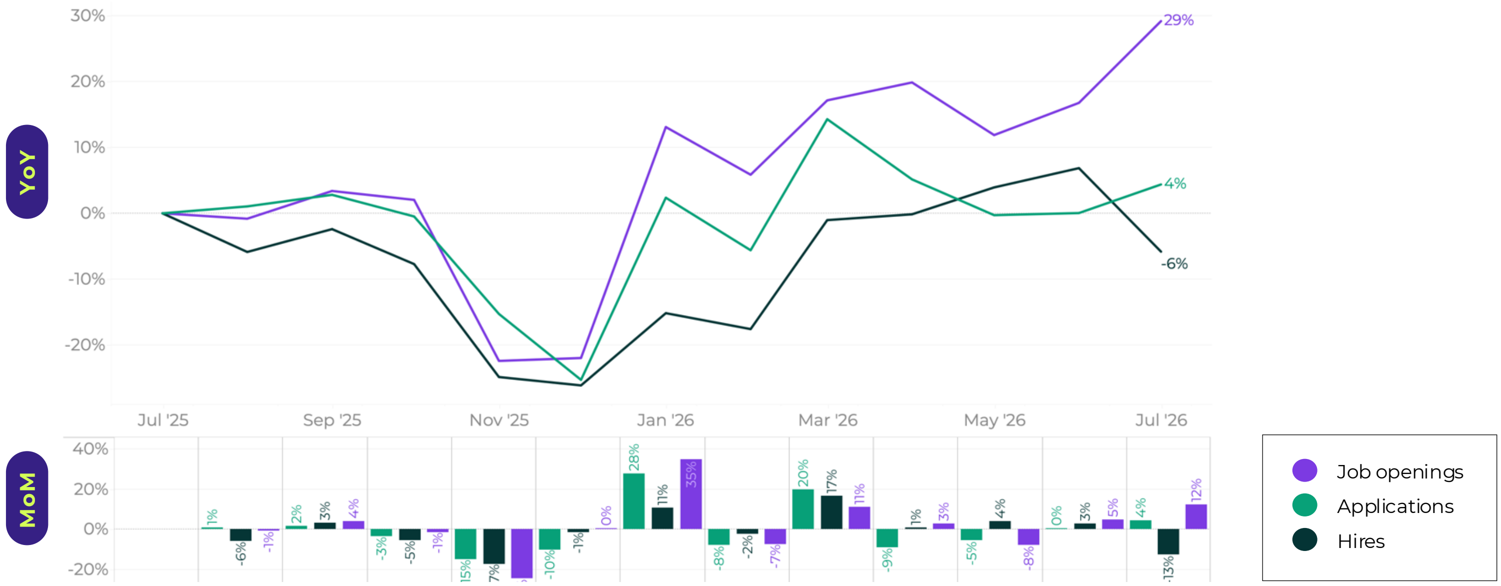
“If there's one sector that keeps defying expectations this year, it is manufacturing. **Every time we think the growth has peaked, the next month proves us wrong.**

But growth alone does not fill a role. Recruiting organizations are being asked to keep pace with demand that is climbing faster than their hiring engines can absorb, and that gap is where the real story is."

TRENT COTTON
Head of
Talent Insights
ICIMS

The hotter manufacturing gets, the harder hiring becomes

MANUFACTURING PLATFORM INDICATORS | Job openings, applications and hires | July 2025–July 2026



ICIMS INSIGHTS QUICK TAKE:
Manufacturing openings surged to 29% above baseline in July, the sharpest increase in this report.

MARKET UPDATE

Manufacturing has been the standout growth story of the year. Job openings have held above the July 2025 baseline for months and extended that run in July, closing 29% above the baseline.

Unfortunately, hiring has not matched that intensity. Hires briefly moved above baseline in May and June before reversing in July, ending the month -6% below baseline in the same period job openings hit their peak. Applications add a second layer of pressure: volume weakened through the second quarter before recovering slightly to 4% above baseline in July, still well short of what job openings demand.

Month-over-month, July's reversal was not an isolated dip. Manufacturing metrics swung sharply in both directions for most of the year, spiking well above baseline in some months and falling just as fast in others, a pattern the other two metrics have not shown to the same degree. July fits that same volatility: job openings rose 12% from June, applications gained 4% and hires fell 13%.

This volatility makes recruiting resource allocation and forecasting difficult and could point to a reason why hiring has declined in July.

STRATEGY

The gap between job opening growth and hires is about to put real strain on manufacturing recruiting teams. The first move is an audit of the hiring process itself, mapping where candidates fall out and where they get held up at each stage. Drop-off rate and stage duration should function as leading indicators, giving recruiters an early signal of where to focus before a requisition stalls rather than after.

That focus matters more now because the funnel is thin. With fewer candidates entering the process, everyone who does needs to move through quickly, and the stages most likely to hold manufacturing hires back, such as background checks, safety certifications and plant-specific onboarding, deserve the closest look first.

Job opening growth holding steady above baseline for months also makes this a good time to look past job boards as the default source. A stronger employee referral program and closer relationships with trade schools and technical programs could build a more durable, higher-quality pipeline than job boards alone, particularly for roles where specialized skills are the real constraint.

Who's applying to manufacturing jobs is changing

ICIMS applicant data shows manufacturing's pool has changed over the past year. Manufacturing candidates under 45 rose from a 79% share of the industry's applicants in July 2025 to 85% in July 2026, with the largest gains coming from the 25-34 and 35-44 brackets . The 45-54 bracket saw the steepest decline, falling from a 12% to 9% share of the pool.

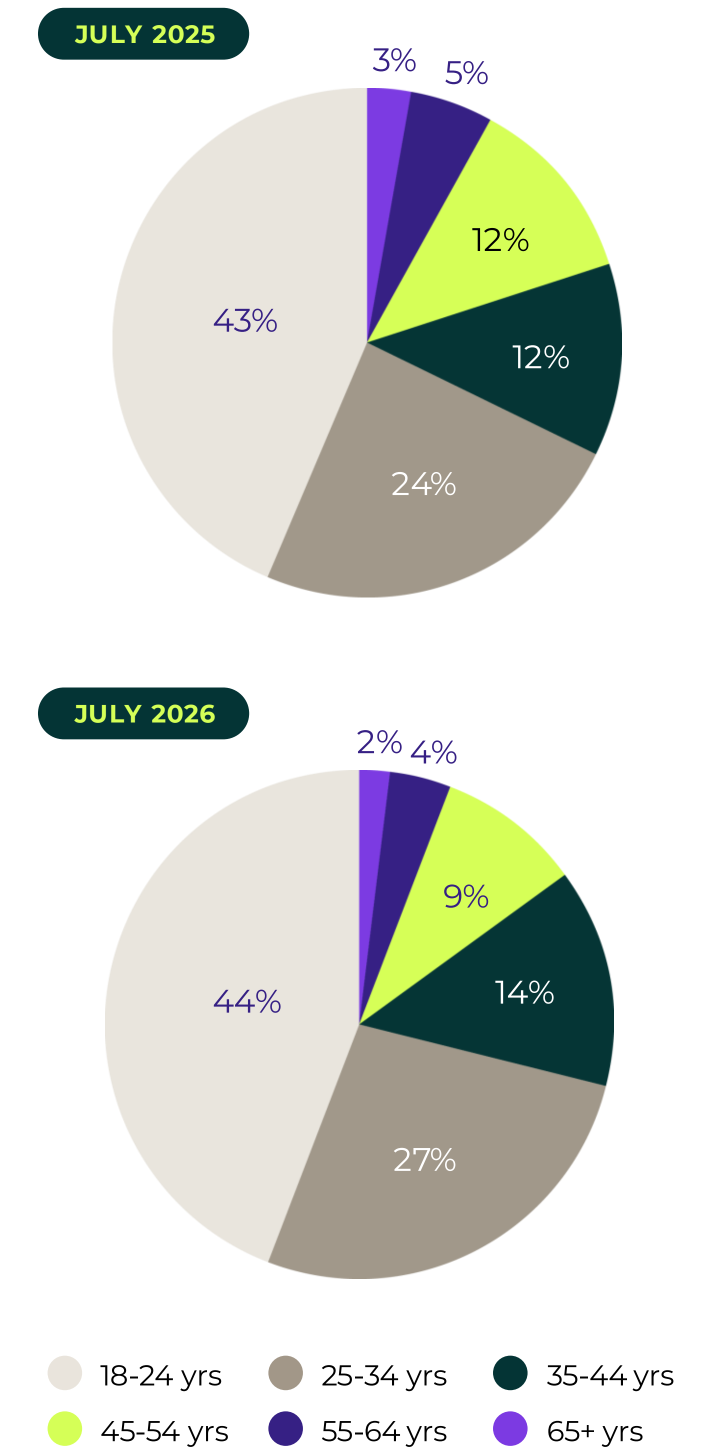
That shift stands apart from who is currently employed in the sector. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows the 2025 annual average, an 11-month figure BLS notes is not strictly comparable to prior years, shows workers 45+ make up close to 47% of manufacturing's workforce, compared with just 15% of ICIMS applicants in that range this year. Even with that caveat, the applicant pool and the current workforce show a different age composition.

STRATEGY

Recruiting shaped by years of established hiring patterns may be worth revisiting. Sourcing channels, trade school and technical program partnerships as well as job messaging deserve testing against how the applicant pool is shifting. The goal is to confirm marketing efforts are reaching and engaging the full range of qualified candidates rather than only where past hiring has concentrated.

This shift is an opportunity to attract and engage a new pool of top talent. National data backs the trend: 60% of Gen Z say they plan to pursue skilled trade work this year, per a February 2026 ResumeTemplates survey. Undergraduate certificate program enrollment grew 10.2% this spring, the fastest-growing credential type nationally, according to the National Student Clearinghouse.

The organizations that adapt their sourcing and messaging fastest stand to build a stronger, deeper pipeline than those still recruiting the way they did five years ago.



Why the manufacturing hires gap might not be a process problem

Quick take: Data from the July Workforce Report's *Hot Jobs* data pointed to a surge in supervisors and industrial engineers, both structurally slower to fill than most production roles. If those same roles drove July's 29% year-over-year growth surge in manufacturing job openings, that could explain part of the hires gap without anything in the process being broken.

A unique concentration

The ICIMS Insights July Workforce Report's spotlight found supervisor openings up 59% year-over-year in June, with industrial engineers up 39%, both outpacing other production categories. This month, manufacturing job openings closed 29% above baseline, the sharpest increase in this report, while hires fell -6% below baseline.

The open question: did supervisors and engineers keep driving that surge into July, or has it broadened into roles that fill faster?

Some roles just take longer

Government data makes the first read plausible. BLS projects industrial engineer employment to grow 11% through 2034, versus 3.1% for the U.S. economy overall. It is a structurally scarce occupation nationally, not just a trend showing up in ICIMS Insights data.

Supervisors carry a related constraint. BLS's manufacturing career outlook calls out first-line supervisors as the one production occupation that typically requires more than a high school diploma and a significant number of years' experience. Roles with that kind of bar rarely follow the same timeline as entry-level production work, no matter how efficient the process is.

The takeaway

If July's surge is still concentrated in these roles, part of the hires gap is compositional. Manufacturers may simply be posting more of the roles that were always going to take longer, not converting candidates more slowly than before. That does not make the conversion audit in this month's Strategy unnecessary. A slow process still costs time on top of a structurally long fill. It means some of the gap may not close no matter how fast that process gets.

HIGH-GROWTH LEADERSHIP & ENGINEERING
June 2025 - June 2026

59% ⬆ Surge for first-line supervisors
Job openings for production and operating worker supervisors lead the sector's growth.

39% ⬆ Increase for industrial engineers
Technical roles continue to see high demand as manufacturing processes evolve.

PRODUCTION & MAINTENANCE ESSENTIALS
June 2025 - June 2026

30% ⬆ Growth in maintenance and repair
General maintenance workers remain vital for sustaining consistent operational uptime.

29% ⬆ Rise for production workers
All other production worker categories show steady and significant year-over-year opening increases.

"**The bar for supervisor and engineering talent has risen, while internal development pipelines have struggled to keep pace**, pushing more companies to hire externally and extending time to fill. Pair that with a workforce that is more selective about taking on traditional leadership roles, and you create a real shortage of qualified talent."

DANNY ROJAS
Senior Principal, Product & Market Insights, ICIMS

CUSTOMER STORY

Manufacturing

One of the largest infrastructure companies in North America, with over 30,000 employees, needed to support high-volume, distributed hiring across field-based and corporate roles. They turned to ICIMS, a platform built to improve hiring speed, strengthen candidate experience and increase visibility into performance.

THE RESULTS

Increased recruiter productivity, quicker offer-to-hire conversions and a time to fill 33% faster than ICIMS' manufacturing benchmark.

33 vs 49
Time to fill (in days)

88%
Offer-to-hire conversion versus the 85% industry average based on ICIMS platform data across manufacturing customers

17%
Increase in recruiter productivity (113 hires in 2025 vs 96 in 2026)

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

Use the funnel, not the top of it, as your diagnostic. Across every region this month, openings and applications climbed while hires lagged, meaning the fix is rarely more candidates. It is what happens to the ones already in the pipeline.

Now is the time to diagnose and treat bottlenecks before the pressure becomes too much for your recruiting teams.

FOR THE CHROs

Treat this month's data as a leadership signal, not a recruiting one. Openings outpacing hires in every region this month means demand is being approved faster than teams can convert it.

Also worth a look: who is applying is changing. Manufacturing's pipeline looks different than it did a year ago. That is a planning input for where to invest in sourcing and partnerships now, not later.

FOR THE CXOs

The gap between openings and hires is now a recurring pattern, not a one-month anomaly. Treat it as a real constraint on how fast growth plans can execute, not a staffing footnote.

Ask where the hardest-to-fill roles sit in your growth plan, and whether hiring timelines account for that. A role that structurally takes longer to fill needs to be planned for, not just chased faster.

Want more great insights?

ICIMS State of Frontline Hiring Report

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**.

The Definitive Guide to AI Adoption in Talent Acquisition

69% of companies are using AI to hire. Only 18% use it throughout the recruiting process. Find out where your team stands. Get the full **Definitive Guide to AI Adoption in Talent Acquisition.**

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

Visit icims.com to learn more.

Data Breakthrough Awards:
2026 Overall Data Science Solution of the Year