

Lead the AI Talent Race in 2026–2027: A Practical Roadmap to Building Your AI Product Engineering Team in Latin America & Eastern Europe

August 2026 Edition



The AI engineers you need are already **employed**, heavily **targeted by recruiters**, **rarely active** on job boards, or **priced well beyond** what most companies can sustain. Fill these roles too slowly, and you **burn the budget or lose ground to competitors**. Fill them faster, and you **ship sooner**, with an **early market advantage** to show for it.

This guide helps VC- and PE-backed tech companies, unicorns, and public tech product companies map out which LATAM and Eastern European markets offer the **fastest access to top AI talent**, how much you can **save compared with US hiring**, and how to **hire compliantly** while keeping full ownership of your product, your culture, and your delivery timeline – scaling from 0 to 30 AI engineers in 90 days.

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Key Findings

Speed

US domestic hiring for specialized AI roles takes **2-4 months on average**, and up to 6 for the most senior searches (LinkedIn Talent Insights, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). **In Western Europe**, available estimates generally place AI and machine learning hiring timelines at around **1.5-3 months**, with senior, platform, and cross-border searches often taking longer.



Latin America and Eastern Europe cut this to

0.5-1.5 months for senior engineers and **1-2 months** for C-level tech roles – a structural, not incremental, difference.

Talent depth and market selection

Latin America

(**2.3M+** tech specialists across **4** core markets):

Mexico

974,500 tech specialists,

the largest pool in the region, backed by **174,476** STEM/ICT graduates annually and **\$6.3B** in AI/cloud infrastructure investment fueling **356%** year-over-year growth in generative AI course enrollments.

Colombia

202,000 tech specialists,

with **91%** of developers already using AI-assisted coding tools daily and a startup ecosystem ranked **#2** in LATAM (**2,295** active startups, **3** unicorns) where SaaS has overtaken fintech as the leading segment.

Argentina

176,000 tech specialists,

exporting over **\$9.6B** in knowledge-based services annually – its third-largest export category, **#1** in LATAM on English proficiency.

Chile

160,000 tech specialists,

strongest AI capability per engineer (**#1** in LATAM on the Global Innovation Index and the ILIA AI Index), anchored by CENIA, the national AI research center.

Eastern Europe

(**2M+** tech specialists across **4** core markets):

Poland

778,800 tech specialists,

strongest all-round market at scale, **#1** in Europe for Tier 2 AI talent depth, home to Intel's largest EU R&D center focused specifically on AI/ML.

Ukraine

305,000 tech specialists,

second-largest talent pool and the widest cost savings in the region, with a dedicated AI/ML specialist pool that grew **17%** in a single year (AI HOUSE, 2025).

Romania

207,800 tech specialists,

best value-per-engineer, with three cost-tiered hubs (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iași) and selected for the EuroHPC AI Factory with **€500M** in EU public funding.

Bulgaria

126,100 tech specialists,

with the highest ICT-to-GDP share in the EU (**9.6%**) and the most EU-integrated market following euro adoption in January 2026, anchored by INSAIT, an AI research institute founded with ETH Zurich and EPFL.



Cost

According to Alcor's 2026 salary research,

AI/ML talent runs **26–73% below US rates** across all eight markets and every seniority level. Savings widen at mid-level and narrow slightly at lead-level, where technical leadership commands a premium everywhere, but the advantage holds throughout. **Argentina and Ukraine** deliver the deepest savings in their respective regions.



Compliance and contracts

Every market resolves to an **employment agreement or a B2B contract**, each governed by different local labor codes with materially different notice periods, severance formulas, and probation rules. Under a properly classified B2B model, the contractor typically handles their own taxes and social security contributions, so the company isn't obligated to pay employer payroll taxes and contributions.

Effective employer social costs under the employment agreement on a \$5,000 salary range from roughly **2.25%** in Romania to **30%** in Colombia, with Chile (**8%**), Bulgaria (**9.5%**), Ukraine (**17.4%**, or **0.8%** under the Diia.City gig contract), Poland (**20%**), Mexico (**~26.3%**), and Argentina (**27.8%**) in between. LATAM employers may also need to budget for statutory bonuses such as a mandatory 13th-month salary.

Probation and termination rules vary just as widely.

In LATAM

Mexico allows the longest probation (6 months) but no notice period, while Chile recognizes no probation at all and reserves no-cause termination for managerial roles only. Colombia layers a dedicated severance fund on top of standard termination pay, and Argentina extends probation to 8–12 months at smaller companies under collective bargaining agreements.

In Eastern Europe

Poland's notice scales from 2 weeks to 3 months by tenure, Ukraine's FTE severance ranges 1–6 months' salary, Romania has no severance obligation outside medical-unfitness cases, and Bulgaria requires 30 days' to 3 months' notice.



In practice,

In practice, a ten-person AI product engineering team (1 lead, 5 senior, 4 mid-level engineers) costs **\$1,977,000 per year** in base salary in the US, compared with **\$724,800–\$1,071,600 per year** across Latin America and Eastern Europe – a **46%–63% saving**.



Ownership and IP

Full ownership requires locally enforceable IP-assignment clauses signed before product access is granted, covering source code, fine-tuned models, training pipelines, proprietary datasets, and prompt/agent logic. Generic "software IP" language leaves the most valuable parts of an AI product – the model and data layer – **legally unprotected**.

Alcor builds this protection into the engagement from day one:

NDAs and IP-assignment terms are completed before any engineer receives confidential product information, **the client retains full control** of the roadmap, repositories, and day-to-day work throughout, and the team can be insourced later with no buyout or IP-reconstruction cost.



Execution model



Alcor's software R&D center

model launches a fully dedicated, fully IP-owned AI engineering team in about a month with no entity required vs 4–6 months to incorporate independently or shared-IP tradeoffs with traditional IT outsourcing – and **scales to 30+ engineers within 90 days**.

Why US and European Tech Companies Are Hiring AI Engineers Beyond Domestic Markets



Speed: domestic hiring can't keep pace

The first reason is that domestic AI hiring moves too slowly for the pace most product roadmaps demand. Industry data from LinkedIn Talent Insights and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that filling specialized AI and machine learning roles can take several months, particularly when relying on cold sourcing. More specifically, published estimates suggest that **filling an AI engineering role in the US typically takes 2-4 months**, while highly specialized searches can last up to 6 months. In Western Europe, available estimates generally place **AI and machine learning hiring timelines at around 1.5-3 months**, with senior, platform, and cross-border searches often taking longer.



Cost: senior AI talent commands a premium

The cost is another constraint. According to Alcor's 2026 engineer compensation research, **Senior Machine Learning Engineers and Senior AI Engineers in the United States each earn an average base salary of \$222,000 per year**. In major Western European AI hubs, companies pay an average annual base salary, including bonuses, for Senior Machine Learning Engineers at £98,148, or \$131,304, in the UK; €77,004, or \$87,684, in France; and €95,772, or \$109,056, in Germany, according to Glassdoor. For Senior AI Engineers, the annual averages are £90,948, or \$121,656, in the UK; €92,496, or \$105,324, in Germany; and €83,496, or \$95,076, in France.¹



Scarcity: demand for AI talent keeps intensifying

The second reason is that demand for specialized AI talent continues to intensify. Robert Half found that **65% of technology leaders say finding skilled professionals is harder than it was a year ago**, and just 7% believe their teams currently have the people and expertise needed to execute their priorities. The scale of the problem keeps growing too – US job postings for AI, machine learning, and data science roles reached 49,200 in 2025, up 163% from the previous year. At the same time, PwC recorded approximately 483,000 job postings requiring AI skills across the UK, France, and Germany in 2025.

The result is a structural bottleneck:

the more central AI product engineering becomes to the roadmap, the harder it is to assemble the required team quickly in a single domestic market.

¹ Germany and France figures for Senior AI Engineer are based on capital-city data (Berlin and Paris respectively), as no reliable national-level figure was available for this specific role.

How Latin America and Eastern Europe Break the AI Hiring Bottleneck

 **Speed:** hiring timelines shrink dramatically



The hiring timeline in Latin America or Eastern Europe can shrink significantly.

With the right local partner, companies **fill an AI engineering role in 0.5–1.5 months** and a C-level tech position in 1–2 months – compared with the 2–6-month US baseline for AI hiring.

 **Scarcity:** a much deeper talent pool to draw from

The talent shortage also becomes more manageable when companies expand their search beyond a single domestic market.

Latin America counts more than 2.3 million IT specialists

across Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, and other countries,

Eastern Europe's ICT workforce exceeds 2 million

across Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and other markets.

Based on Alcor's 2026 compilation.

These are not shallow talent pools. Both regions combine established engineering universities, growing AI and data communities, active startup ecosystems, and a track record of delivering complex product engineering work across fintech, SaaS, AI infrastructure, and enterprise software. That depth gives companies access to the **specialized engineering capacity** that remains scarce in the US market.

 **Traction:** capacity is already converting into hires

This additional capacity is already translating into measurable hiring activity. **US companies grew their software engineer hiring in Latin America by 250% year-over-year**, according to Near's 2026 State of LatAm Hiring Report (based on over 2,000 placements) – a direct response to the hiring bottleneck that domestic markets have been unable to resolve.

Eastern Europe shows a parallel signal from the supply side: per SoftwareMind's 2026 State of Nearshoring report, **63% of Eastern European IT vendors now staff dedicated AI/ML practices**, up from just 29% in 2024. That near-doubling in two years is not a coincidence – it is a supply-side response to the same client demand that US and European companies have been unable to satisfy at home.

 **Cost:** significant savings without sacrificing depth

The cost constraint eases as well. Senior AI Engineers earn an average of \$104,256 per year in base salaries in Latin America and \$118,500 in Eastern Europe, while Senior Machine Learning Engineers average \$79,056 and \$86,100, respectively. Across both roles, the average annual base salary is \$91,656 in Latin America and \$102,300 in Eastern Europe.

This is **59% and 54% below the combined US benchmark of \$222,000**. Compared with the Western European average of \$113,196 across London, Paris, and Berlin, Latin America is 19% more affordable, and Eastern Europe is 10% more affordable. Companies can therefore reduce AI and ML base salary costs while **keeping product development, IP, culture, and delivery oversight in-house**.

The following section provides a quick way to check whether this guide fits your company's current stage and needs.

Is This Guide for You?



This guide is for leaders who have already decided to build an AI product engineering team outside their home market and now need to answer **three practical questions:**

- 1 Where are the **most attractive AI talent markets**?
- 2 What is the **cost of an AI engineering team** in these markets?
- 3 Which **engagement model** gets the team running fastest and compliantly?

It is designed for companies that want faster access to senior AI talent without sacrificing product ownership, engineering culture, IP control, or confidence in compliance.

♦ AI/ML Leader / Head of AI / Director of Engineering

You own the execution of the AI roadmap – turning models and experiments into reliable, production-ready systems. The engineers you need must work simultaneously across model development, data pipelines, cloud infrastructure, MLOps, product integration, and production reliability.

The most common pressure points at this stage:

- **Senior and lead AI engineers who can ship production systems are scarce**, command budget-straining salaries, and are heavily competed for by tech giants – making local recruiting for smaller tech companies unsuccessful
- **Commitments are made before the team exists**, which means every week a critical role stays open is a week of technical debt accumulating against a fixed deadline
- **Previous outsourced engineers executed tasks without fully developing product context**, remained outside your internal culture, and took critical knowledge when the engagement ended

♦ CTO / VP of Engineering / Head of Engineering

You are accountable for scaling the engineering organization and turning the AI and product roadmap into reliable delivery. This includes engineering team design, technical quality, delivery performance, and the right mix of skills and seniority.

The most common pressure points at this stage:

- By the time an AI role closes, the **required skill mix has already shifted**, and every week it stays open, pushes more critical work onto your existing engineering team, and the board is watching every delayed milestone
- Senior AI engineering talent in the US and Western Europe commands **salaries that make a 10+ person team an unsustainable budget line** at most funding stages
- **Previous outsourcing partners just delivered code, but not true product ownership** – no IP control, no codebase continuity, no culture fit

♦ Founder / CEO / COO at a VC- and PE-Backed or Public Product Company

You are accountable for product strategy, revenue growth, operational execution, and investor and board relations – and for making sure the engineering organization can deliver on the AI roadmap the business is built around. With funding secured and a working product in market, the pressure now falls on execution speed – and the board is watching.

The most common pressure points at this stage:

- Every quarter critical AI roles remain open is a quarter of **delayed product delivery, while better-staffed competitors are pulling ahead**
- International hiring comes with entity, classification, payroll, and compliance **obligations that most companies cannot absorb internally without pulling people off the roadmap**
- Even with funding in place, competing for senior AI engineers in the US or Western Europe is rarely won on salary alone – it also requires an **AI-specific recruitment strategy that most companies haven't built in-house yet**



◆ VC Portfolio / Platform / Talent Operator

You are responsible for accelerating portfolio company growth, reducing execution risk, and building operational frameworks that work for multiple companies at different funding stages simultaneously.

The most common pressure points at this stage:

- Portfolio companies are hitting the **same local AI hiring wall at different stages**
- Time founders and engineering leaders spend evaluating regions, employment models, and compliance is **time pulled away from product delivery and growth**
- Evaluating international hiring partners only based on external recommendations is difficult without firsthand experience, and **existing partner networks rarely have the AI-specific depth or regional presence** to cover every portfolio company's needs

◆ Talent / People / HR Leader

You support international hiring logistics, candidate experience, employment model selection, compensation and benefits structuring, onboarding, and compliance coordination.

The most common pressure points at this stage:

- **Inbound pipelines for AI engineering roles are full of noise** – screening time increases while the number of qualified, values-aligned candidates reaching the next stage stays low
- **International employment decisions involve compliance variables your function may not fully own** – contractor versus EOR, entity requirements, statutory benefits, onboarding timelines – and the cost of getting them wrong surfaces late
- **The engineering leader needs the team yesterday, and legal needs three more weeks** – and you are the one managing both timelines simultaneously

Regardless of your role, this guide enables you to:

- ◆ **Determine where senior AI engineers are available and whether the market scales with you** – compare eight markets in Latin America and Eastern Europe by talent depth, AI capabilities, tech ecosystems, English proficiency, and hiring feasibility, including which can sustain a team of 10 to 30+ and where these roles are accessible to scaling and mature tech companies, not just enterprises
- ◆ **Know the cost before making your first hire** – 2026 salary benchmarks for 15 in-demand AI roles at mid, senior, and lead levels across eight markets, with statutory employee benefits, social security contributions, benefits packages, savings versus US rates, and ten-person team cost comparisons
- ◆ **Factor in what compliance and ownership actually require** – compare a legal entity, IT outsourcing, EOR/COR, and Alcor's Software R&D Center – so you know which model lets you hire long-term AI engineers rather than rotating task-executors, and what to look for when evaluating any execution partner – plus country-level rules for contracts, probation, benefits, termination, and contractor classification
- ◆ **Choose the model that gets your AI team running fastest** – see how AI-focused recruitment, EOR/COR, onboarding, compliance, and IP protection come together under one model to launch a fully owned engineering team – without building recruitment infrastructure, opening an entity, or adding an outsourcing layer

Which Markets Can Support AI Team Growth?

Latin America

Choosing where to build a LATAM AI engineering team starts with a country comparison. The table below lines up **Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, and Chile** head-to-head on talent pool, AI capability, and other factors, so you can see where each market wins before reading the full breakdowns.



Metric	Mexico	Colombia	Argentina	Chile
Tech talent pool				
Total national tech talent pool	974,500	202,000	176,000	160,000
AI and engineering capability				
AI adoption & momentum	356% YoY growth in generative AI course enrollments; \$6.3B in AI/cloud infrastructure investment	91% of developers use AI-assisted coding tools daily	Top 5 LATAM country for growth in developers using AI APIs	#1 in LATAM on the Latin American AI Index (ILIA)
TopCoder Programming Competitiveness Index	#4 in LATAM	#6 in LATAM	#3 in LATAM	#2 in LATAM
Global Innovation Index 2025	#3 in LATAM	#5 in LATAM	#7 in LATAM	#1 in LATAM
Time zone & collaboration				
Time-zone overlap with US business hours	GMT-6 (3–4 hrs overlap with both US coasts)	GMT-5 (full overlap with US East Coast)	GMT-3 (1–2 hrs ahead of US Eastern, full overlap with East Coast)	GMT-4/-3 seasonal (full alignment with US Eastern ~5 months/yr; 1–2 hrs ahead the rest)
English proficiency				
EF English Proficiency Index	#20 in LATAM	#17 in LATAM	#1 in LATAM	#9 in LATAM
EF EPI rating – IT professionals	High/Advanced	Moderate (Upper-Int.)	High/Advanced	High/Advanced
Market demand				
% of LATAM-interested companies choosing this market	30%	22%	15%	4%
Most common requested team sizes	83% want 1–5; 17% want 10+	67% want 3–5; 33% want 15–20+	From 1–5 to 20+ – early demand signal	No clear team-size trend yet

Which Markets Can Support AI Team Growth?

Latin America



Metric	Mexico	Colombia	Argentina	Chile
STEM & education				
Annual STEM/ICT graduates	174,476	37,000	25,600	59,750
QS World University Rankings 2026 (# of institutions)	22	13	18	20
Startup ecosystem				
Active startups	1,431, 10 unicorns	2,295, 3 unicorns	1,030, 2 unicorns	875, 2 unicorns
StartupBlink Global Ecosystem ranking	#4 in LATAM	#2 in LATAM	#5 in LATAM	#3 in LATAM
Overall positioning				
One-line verdict	Highest-capacity LATAM market for parallel team building	Growth trajectory strengthening year on year	Strongest for English collaboration + AI-specific depth	Strongest AI capability per engineer

Numbers only set the stage.

The next sections examine each market in depth, helping you identify the best-fit location for your AI engineering team in Latin America.

Which Markets Can Support AI Team Growth?

Latin America



Mexico

Talent Pool and Technical Depth



With **974,500 IT specialists**, Mexico has the hiring capacity to run parallel searches across multiple AI roles simultaneously – without exhausting the candidate base the way a smaller market would.

On AI and data capability specifically, Mexico ranks:

#3 in LATAM , **#58** globally
(Global Innovation Index 2025)

#4 in LATAM , **#47** globally
(TopCoder programming competitiveness index)

#7 in LATAM
for business environment conditions
(StartupBlink IBEI 2026)

#12 in LATAM
for data science skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#14 in LATAM
for tech skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Mexico

Google

IBM

intel

Microsoft

amazon

Mexico's AI research base has real depth:

the National Polytechnic Institute ranks #3 in Latin America for AI research output (EduRank), and upskilling is accelerating fast – **generative AI course enrollments grew 356%** year-over-year in 2025, the highest rate in LATAM and nearly double the global average (Coursera).

Amazon, Microsoft, and Google have committed **\$6.3 billion in AI and cloud infrastructure** investment, signaling structural market deepening that will continue expanding the senior talent pipeline. The combined effect of accelerating enrollment, growing research output, and large-scale infrastructure investment means the pool of production-ready AI engineers in Mexico is expanding.



Demand is already shifting toward Mexico:

30%

of all LATAM-interested companies we spoke with name Mexico for building their engineering teams. **Almost all of them are US-based**, reinforcing the time-zone and travel-proximity case for nearshoring.

83%

need to hire 1-5 engineers, while

17%

are already asking for builds of 10+ – meaning Mexico works equally well as a first foothold or as a market to scale into over a 12-24 month horizon.

That demand is already converting into hires:

Alcor has seen a **21% increase in software engineering hires** among clients in Mexico since the start of 2026.



Mexico

Tech Hubs



Guadalajara

the Silicon Valley of Mexico

#2

Guadalajara is where hardware meets software at scale, producing engineers with deep systems-level expertise directly relevant to MLOps, AI infrastructure, and AI platform roles.

Tech talent pool:	150,000 IT specialists
Tech ecosystem:	1,000+ tech companies – around 40% of Mexico's entire IT sector
Leading industries:	FinTech, AI
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #3 in Mexico and #3 in Central America; 130 startups
Top universities:	ITESO, Universidad de Guadalajara, and Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara



Monterrey

the US-aligned hub

#3

Mexico's most US business-culture-aligned city and top-ranked hub for English proficiency – where collaboration with a US product team feels most natural from day one.

English proficiency:	ranked #1 among Mexican cities
Tech ecosystem growth:	tech company count has increased 188% over 20 years
Venture activity:	part of LATAM's emerging tech hubs that together account for 25.5% of new VC-backed startups
Leading industries:	FoodTech, EdTech, and AI
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Mexico and #2 in Central America; 155 startups
Top universities:	Tec de Monterrey, Universidad de Monterrey, and Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León



Mexico City

LATAM's largest tech workforce, built for scale

#1

The only LATAM hub where a company can run high-volume parallel hiring across multiple senior AI roles without quickly hitting the ceiling of what the local market can supply.

Tech talent pool:	320,000 IT specialists
Hiring capacity:	Mexico's primary hub for hiring multiple AI and engineering roles
FinTech strength:	home to the second-largest fintech ecosystem in Latin America
Unicorn presence:	hosts 5 of Mexico's 10 unicorns
Leading industries:	FinTech, AI
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Mexico and #1 in Central America; 648 startups
Top universities:	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Instituto Politécnico Nacional (ranked #3 in Latin America for AI research)

Mexico



Startup Ecosystem

1,431 active startups, **10** unicorns (Tracxn), **\$1.8** billion raised in 2025 – second in Latin America.



Mexico ranks

#4 in LATAM/#43 globally

(StartupBlink 2025). The significance for AI hiring is direct: engineers who have built production AI systems inside venture-backed startups are the candidates most relevant to Series A and B product companies.



STEM and University Indicators

174,476

STEM and ICT graduates annually (IVEMSA)



49%

of first degrees in STEM fields – above the OECD average of 28% (BBVA Research 2024)

22

institutions in QS World University Rankings 2026



English Proficiency

#20 in LATAM/#103 globally

overall (EF EPI), but rated **High/Advanced** for IT professionals specifically. The national ranking understates what matters: engineers working in AI product roles at startups, multinationals, and nearshore operations in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey operate in English daily.



Sector Strengths



Mexico's engineers are well-prepared

for the collaboration patterns, communication norms, and delivery expectations of US product teams. That nearshore relationship experience reduces onboarding friction in a way that raw talent pool numbers don't capture.

Mexico ranks **6th in the region in the number of researchers working specifically in AI,**

and accelerating data center investment in the Bajío region signals structural deepening of AI infrastructure capacity that will continue expanding the senior talent pipeline.



Mexico: Verdict



Can Mexico support AI team growth – from an initial team of 10+ engineers to 30 and beyond?

Yes,

Mexico is the highest-capacity LATAM market for parallel team building, with a specialist pipeline that is expanding faster than anywhere else in the region.



Time zone advantage

no other market in this guide can match – GMT-6 covers the full US central business day and delivers **3–4 hours of real-time overlap with both coasts** simultaneously. **No schedule compromise, no overnight handoffs, no asynchronous lag.** For US product teams where real-time collaboration is non-negotiable, Mexico is the only market here that fully delivers it.



Hiring capacity at scale

974,500+ IT professionals means parallel sourcing across multiple AI roles simultaneously is viable, and the candidate base doesn't run out after the first 10 hires.



AI pipeline momentum

356% generative AI enrollment growth, \$6.3 billion in cloud infrastructure investment, and 62 AI-research universities signal a market closing its specialist gap faster than any other in LATAM.

Primary constraint:

Senior specialists in production LLM, MLOps, and AI infrastructure require active sourcing

– they are available but not abundant. Mexico rewards companies that combine senior hires with strong mid-level talent and take a phased approach to building out the full team. It is the right market for companies building at scale and for those that need five senior AI specialists delivered in 30 days.

Latin America

Colombia



Talent Pool and Technical Depth



Colombia's tech talent pool stands at

202,000 professionals.

While smaller than Mexico's, it is one of the fastest-growing tech markets in the region: Colombia drew **\$513 million across 104 formal deals** in 2025, roughly 12% of all Latin American investment, ranking third behind Brazil and Mexico.

91% of Colombian software developers report daily use of AI-assisted coding tools,

and 79% anticipate AI will significantly redefine their roles (Colombia One, 2026). That adoption rate is not a vanity metric – it signals a workforce that is already operating in AI-augmented environments and actively building the applied AI intuition that production AI product teams require.

On AI and data capability specifically, Colombia ranks:

#4 in LATAM
for business environment conditions
(StartupBlink IBEI 2026)

#5 in LATAM, **#71** globally
(on the Global Innovation Index 2025)

#6 in LATAM, **#62** globally
(on the TopCoder programming competitiveness index)

#9 in South America
for tech skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#10 in South America
for data science skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)



Colombia's national AI policy

sets out 106 specific actions to be executed over five years, spanning regulatory updates, infrastructure investment, and international cooperation across multiple government ministries – the most structured government AI commitment of the four LATAM markets in this guide.



Demand is also building for Colombia:

22%

of all LATAM-interested companies we spoke with name Colombia for building their engineering teams. Interest here comes from a broader mix of HQs – including the **US, Canada, and India** – rather than being concentrated in one region.

67%

need to hire 3-5 engineers,
and

33%

are asking for larger builds of 15-20+ –
positioning **Colombia as a market suited to sizeable teams from the outset.**

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Colombia

IBM

Microsoft

amazon

Google

Meta

Colombia

Tech Hubs



Medellín

the fastest-growing startup ecosystem in South America

#2

Medellín is the only Latin American city where startup creation per capita outpaces São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Bogotá simultaneously.

Tech talent pool:	100,000+ IT specialists
Startup creation:	leads Latin America at 21 startups per 100,000 inhabitants
Leading industries:	FinTech, EdTech
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Colombia; 762 startups, up 32.1% from 2025
Venture activity:	attracted ~ \$157 million in 2025 – a 400% year-on-year increase
Top universities:	University of Antioquia, Pontifical Bolivarian University, EAFIT University, and CES University



Bogotá

the region's third-largest startup hub by capital raised

#1

The third-largest Spanish-speaking startup hub by capital raised globally, attracting approximately \$692 million – 80% of Colombia's total startup investment and more than Santiago and Buenos Aires combined.

Tech talent pool:	110,600+ IT specialists, Colombia's largest tech talent hub (CBRE, Scoring Tech Talent 2025)
Tech ecosystem:	home to approximately 41% of Colombia's tech companies
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Colombia and #3 in Latin America; 889 startups
Startup concentration:	accounts for approximately 41% of Colombia's startups
Top universities:	National University of Colombia, University of the Andes, and Pontifical Javeriana University



Cali

the cost-efficient hub

#3

A growing base for engineering support and regional technology operations, with lower hiring competition than Bogotá and Medellín and a maturing startup scene.

Leading industries:	EdTech, software and data engineering
Tech ecosystem growth:	ranked as Colombia's third-leading technology city
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #3 in Colombia; 219 startups – 10% of the national total
Top universities:	ICESI University, University of Valle, and Pontifical Javeriana University Cali

Colombia



Startup Ecosystem

KPMG's Colombia Tech Report 2026 counted **2,295** active startups, up **9.3%** year-on-year, with SaaS overtaking fintech as the leading segment at 27%.



Colombia ranks

#2 in LATAM/#35 globally

(StartupBlink 2026) with **3** unicorns. **98%** of Colombian startups use AI in some capacity and **38%** have it as their core product – a signal of genuine production AI demand and exposure within the ecosystem.



STEM and University Indicators

37,000

STEM and ICT graduates annually (ProColombia)



13

higher education institutions in QS World University Rankings 2026



207

total higher education institutions (UniRank)



Graduate output is lower than Mexico's but growing,

with universities in Bogotá and Medellín – including Universidad Nacional, EAFIT, and Universidad de los Andes – actively partnering with the technology industry to align curricula with engineering market demand.



English Proficiency

#17 in LATAM/#76 globally

on the EF English Proficiency Index, with IT professionals rated **Moderate (Upper-Intermediate)**. For roles requiring intensive written or verbal collaboration in English, English fluency should be a defined part of the screening process rather than assumed. In practice, engineers in Bogotá and Medellín's international startup and nearshore environments operate in English regularly, but the proficiency baseline requires more careful validation at the senior level than in Argentina or Chile.



Sector Strengths



Colombia's strongest sectors – fintech, SaaS, e-commerce, and logistics technology –

have produced a senior engineering population with solid experience in cloud architecture, API integration, and product delivery.

The country's coordinated national AI policy, combined with

91% developer AI tool adoption, signals a market where AI is being integrated into engineering practice at the workforce level, not just discussed at the policy level.

Colombia: Verdict



**Can Colombia support AI team growth
– from an initial team of 10+ engineers
to 30 and beyond?**

Yes,

**Colombia has a growth trajectory that strengthens
the case year on year.**



Ecosystem momentum

the **fastest-growing major startup ecosystem** in South America, **400% investment growth in Medellín** in 2025 and **98% of startups using AI** signal engineers with genuine production AI exposure



AI workforce readiness

91% daily AI tool adoption among Colombian developers means the talent pool is already operating in the AI-augmented working patterns that product AI teams require



Time zone

GMT-5, **aligning fully with US East Coast** hours and partially with Central time, enabling real-time collaboration throughout the US business day



Dual-hub depth

Bogotá and Medellín together provide enough **candidate depth to build and scale a team of 10–30 senior AI engineers** without depending on a single city's talent pool

Primary constraint:



English proficiency is slightly lower than in three other LATAM markets

described in the guide at the population level. For AI product engineering roles requiring frequent English-language collaboration, screening for English fluency should be a defined part of the hiring process rather than assumed.

Which Markets Can Support AI Team Growth?

Latin America

Argentina



Talent Pool and Technical Depth



Argentina's tech talent pool stands at **176,000 professionals.**

The country's standout characteristic is not volume but quality: Argentina leads all four LATAM markets in English proficiency, has the highest concentration of senior engineers with product ownership experience, and **exports over \$9.6 billion** in knowledge-based services annually – its third-largest export category (Argencon and CESSI, 2025).

On AI and data capability specifically, Argentina ranks:

#3 in LATAM , **#45** globally
(TopCoder programming competitiveness index)

#6 in South America
for tech skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#6 in South America
for data science skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#7 in LATAM , **#77** globally
(on the Global Innovation Index 2025)

#10 in LATAM
for business environment conditions
(StartupBlink IBEI 2026)



Argentina's AI research infrastructure

is among the most developed in the region. The University of Buenos Aires hosts one of the country's main data science research centers and produces **graduates actively recruited by AI safety centers and research labs** in the US and Europe, per Rest of World's independent reporting. Argentina also ranks among the **top five LATAM countries for growth in developers actively using AI APIs** (OpenAI, 2025) – a practical signal that AI adoption is embedded at the engineering level, not just the research level.



Argentina is also drawing steady interest

15%

of all LATAM-interested companies we talked to name Argentina for building their engineering teams. Interest here is **entirely US-based**, making it the most concentrated nearshoring signal of the three markets. Requested team sizes range from **single-digit hires to builds of 20+**, suggesting real appetite across the spectrum – though with fewer respondents specifying a size, this is more of an early signal than a settled pattern yet.

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Argentina

Google

IBM

Microsoft

salesforce

amazon



Argentina

Tech Hubs

#2

Córdoba

Argentina's preferred secondary hiring market

Known as "La Docta" for its strong academic tradition - Argentina's preferred secondary engineering market, responsible for 30-40% of the country's software exports and offering meaningfully lower operating costs than Buenos Aires.

Industry impact	responsible for 30-40% of Argentina's software exports
Tech ecosystem:	home to approximately 400 tech companies
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Argentina; 200 startups
Business traction:	45.3% of local startups grew revenue by more than 20% year-on-year in 2025 (Córdoba Startup Monitor)
Top universities:	National University of Córdoba, Catholic University of Córdoba, and Blas Pascal University

#3

Rosario

Argentina's agritech and data innovation hub

Recognized as a natural hub for agricultural biotechnology innovation, with a growing software development and data engineering community.

Core industry strengths:	agritech, logistics, software development, and data-driven agricultural innovation
Leading industry:	HealthTech
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #3 in Argentina; 29 startups
Top universities:	National University of Rosario, University of the Latin American Educational Center, and University of Gran Rosario

#1

Buenos Aires

the primary hiring hub and deepest pool of senior AI talent

Home to more than half of Argentina's startups and the highest investor density in the country, Buenos Aires is where Argentina's most internationally experienced senior engineers are concentrated.

Tech talent pool:	115,000+ IT specialists
Hiring capacity:	the country's primary hub for volume AI hiring
Leading industry:	e-commerce
Tech ecosystem:	home to more than 1,200 tech companies
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Argentina and #5 in Latin America; 594 startups
Startup concentration:	hosts approximately 57% of Argentina's startups
Investor ecosystem:	highest investor density in the country, supported by Endeavor Argentina's prominent entrepreneur network
Top universities:	University of Buenos Aires, National Technological University, and Buenos Aires Institute of Technology

Argentina



Startup Ecosystem

1,030 active startups, 2 unicorns (Tracxn),



Argentina ranks
#5 in LATAM/#46 globally

(StartupBlink 2025). Argentina raised **\$418 million** in 2024 – one of only three LATAM countries where VC investment increased that year.



STEM and University Indicators

25,600

STEM and ICT graduates annually (OECD Education GPS)



18

higher education institutions in QS World University Rankings 2026



126

total higher education institutions (UniRank)



UBA

ranked among Latin America's leading sources of AI talent, with graduates actively recruited by AI safety centers and research labs in the US and Europe (Rest of World, 2025)



English Proficiency

#1 in LATAM/#26 globally

on the EF English Proficiency Index, with IT professionals rated **High/Advanced** – the strongest English proficiency of any Alcor LATAM market. For teams where developers need to participate directly in product planning, sprint reviews, architecture decisions, and stakeholder communication in English without a language gap, Argentina is the default choice in the region.



Sector Strengths



Argentina's strongest tech sectors – fintech, e-commerce, SaaS, and agritech

have produced a senior engineering population with extensive experience in product ownership, API architecture, and full-stack delivery.

Argentina's tech stack is among the most directly AI-relevant of the four LATAM markets,

with TensorFlow and NLP experience signaling genuine ML and LLM engineering capability rather than general software development relabelled as AI. \$9.6 billion in annual knowledge-based service exports confirms that this is a market built on delivering for international product teams, not just supporting them.

Argentina: Verdict



**Can Argentina support AI team growth
– from an initial team of 10+ engineers
to 30 and beyond?**

Yes,

Argentina is the strongest market in LATAM for English-language collaboration and AI-specific technical depth.



English proficiency

#1 in LATAM makes Argentina the default choice for teams where engineers need to own problems end-to-end in English, from architecture decisions to daily standups, without the screening overhead required in other markets



AI-native tech stack

Python, TensorFlow, NLP, and Cloud APIs are among the **most directly relevant skill profiles** for ML, LLM, and AI product engineering roles in the region



Product ownership culture

\$9.6 billion in annual knowledge-based service exports and a long history of international engineering collaboration produce engineers accustomed to product ownership, not just task execution

Primary constraint:

STEM graduate output is lower than in three other LATAM markets presented in the guide
– 25,600 annually

– and the talent pool at 176,000 is smaller than Mexico's. For companies needing 20+ engineers across multiple rare AI specializations simultaneously, Argentina works best as part of a multi-country strategy or with extended hiring timelines built into the plan.

Latin America

Chile



Talent Pool and Technical Depth



Chile's tech talent pool comprises

160,000 professionals

- smaller in absolute headcount compared to three other LATAM markets presented in the guide but the strongest in AI capability per engineer.

Chile leads the entire region in AI development

for the second consecutive year, scoring 70.5 points on the Latin American Artificial Intelligence Index (ILIA) 2025, ahead of Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico.

On AI and data capability specifically, Chile ranks:

#1 in LATAM , **#51** globally
(on the Global Innovation Index 2025)

#2 in LATAM , **#39** globally
(on the TopCoder programming competitiveness index)

#3 in LATAM
for data science skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#4 in LATAM
for tech skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#6 in LATAM
for business environment conditions
(StartupBlink IBEI 2026)



The institutional proof behind Chile's AI rankings is CENIA - the National Center for Artificial Intelligence,

founded to position

Chile as the AI development pillar for Latin America and the Caribbean.

CENIA's technical staff hold degrees specifically in AI-adjacent engineering fields from Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and Universidad Austral de Chile, with specializations in MLOps, computer vision, and language models - homegrown Chilean AI engineers at the research frontier.

In early 2026, UNESCO's Regional Office in Santiago signed a formal cooperation agreement with CENIA to jointly advance AI literacy and ethical AI development across Chile and the wider Latin American region, establishing Chile as a hub for UN-level AI education policy, not just domestic AI strategy.



What this means for hiring:

Chile's AI engineering strength is concentrated at the **senior and specialist level** - engineers with deep technical foundations in AI-adjacent disciplines, strong English proficiency, and direct exposure to international product teams through the **Start-Up Chile program**.

The constraint is volume, not quality.

Companies looking for a small, high-caliber AI engineering team will find Chile one of the strongest markets in LATAM, already accounting for **4%** of all companies expressing LATAM hiring interest to us.

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Chile



Microsoft



amazon

ORACLE

Google



Chile

Tech Hubs



Valparaíso

Chile's generative AI and deep tech investment hub

#2

Recipient of an \$18 million startup lab investment in 2025–2026 specifically targeting generative AI, robotics, and biotechnology – a secondary hub with a focused emerging technology mandate.

Core engineering strengths:	logistics and maritime technology, with growing capacity in generative AI and robotics
Innovation investment:	\$18 million startup lab investment for 2025–2026, focused on generative AI, robotics, and biotechnology
Leading industries:	generative AI, robotics, biotechnology, maritime technology
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Chile; 30 startups
Top universities:	University of Valparaíso, Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso, and Federico Santa María Technical University



Concepción

Chile's secondary engineering pipeline

#3

Chile's third-largest city and a growing source of engineering talent for companies expanding beyond Santiago's senior market, with lower hiring competition and a strong university base.

Leading industry:	software and data engineering
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #3 in Chile; 12 startups
Top universities:	University of Concepción, University of Bío-Bío, and San Sebastián University



Santiago

Chile's startup powerhouse and cloud infrastructure capital

#1

Home to 85% of Chile's startups and the site of \$7.3 billion in combined AWS and Microsoft cloud infrastructure investment – the largest concentration of AI and cloud engineering capacity in the country.

Tech talent pool:	135,000 IT specialists,
Hiring demand:	demand for data scientists is growing at approximately 35% annually
Cloud and data infrastructure:	AWS committed \$4 billion to launch a South American cloud region in Santiago by the end of 2026
Leading industry:	FinTech
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Chile and #4 in Latin America; 751 startups
Startup concentration:	hosts approximately 85% of Chile's startups (StartupBlink)
Deep tech ecosystem:	home to Chile's first Deep Tech hub, Startuplab.01, launched in 2025 by Fundación Chile and Corfo
Top universities:	University of Chile, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, and University of Santiago de Chile

Chile



Startup Ecosystem

875 active startups, 2 unicorns (StartupBlink),



Chile ranks

#3 in LATAM/#37 globally

(StartupBlink 2025). Since 2010, the government-backed Start-Up Chile program has brought **1,600+** startups and **4,500+** entrepreneurs from 85 countries through Santiago – directly exposing Chilean engineers to international product teams, agile practices, and English-language working environments.



STEM and University Indicators

59,750



STEM and ICT graduates annually (SIES Chile 2025) – the highest graduate-to-talent-pool ratio of the four LATAM markets

20



higher education institutions in QS World University Rankings 2026

55



total higher education institutions (UniRank)

CENIA

the National Center for Artificial Intelligence, staffed by homegrown Chilean AI engineers with specializations in MLOps, computer vision, and language models, in formal cooperation with UNESCO as of 2026



English Proficiency

#9 in LATAM/#54 globally

on the EF English Proficiency Index, rated **High/Advanced** for IT professionals – the second strongest of the four LATAM markets after Argentina. The Start-Up Chile program's decade-long exposure to international teams has further raised English capability among senior engineers, making English-language collaboration reliable at senior and lead level without the additional screening pressure required in Colombia.



Sector Strengths



Chile leads LATAM in AI maturity, fintech, and cloud infrastructure.

AWS's cloud infrastructure investment in Santiago signals a structural deepening of cloud-native engineering capacity that will continue expanding the senior AI talent pipeline. CENIA's active research program in MLOps, computer vision, and language models means Chile's most senior AI engineers are working at the frontier of applied AI, not just adjacent to it.



Chile: Verdict



Can Chile support AI team growth –
from an initial team of 10+ engineers
to 30 and beyond?

Yes,

Chile is the strongest market in LATAM for AI capability per engineer, with a realistic constraint on absolute scale.



AI maturity

#1 in LATAM on the Global Innovation Index, **#1 on the ILIA AI Index**, #2 in LATAM on TopCoder, and a UNESCO-backed national AI research center staffed by homegrown MLOps, computer vision, and LLM specialists make Chile the most AI-capable market per engineer in the region



English proficiency

High/Advanced for IT professionals is the second strongest rating in LATAM, making English-language collaboration reliable at senior and lead level without additional screening pressure



Infrastructure depth

\$7.3 billion in combined cloud infrastructure investment and the region's fastest broadband speeds signal a market building sustained AI engineering capacity, not just responding to short-term demand

Primary constraint:

At 160,000 professionals, Chile's talent pool is the smallest of the four LATAM markets.

It is well-suited for building a focused team of 5–15 senior AI engineers but requires realistic expectations about hiring timelines for rare specializations at scale. Companies needing 20+ engineers across multiple AI roles simultaneously should plan for a longer build timeline or consider Chile as part of a multi-country strategy.

Which Markets Can Support AI Team Growth?

Eastern Europe

Choosing where to build an Eastern Europe AI engineering team starts with a country comparison. The table below lines up **Poland, Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria** head-to-head on talent pool, AI capability, and other factors, so you can see where each market wins before reading the full breakdowns.



Metric	Poland	Ukraine	Romania	Bulgaria
Tech talent pool				
Total national tech talent pool	778,800	305,000	207,800	126,100
AI and engineering capability				
AI adoption & momentum	#1 in Europe for Tier 2 AI talent; €235M national AI Fund	#4 in EE on the Oxford Government AI Readiness Index	Bucharest is 1 of 6 EU EuroHPC AI Factory sites (€500M funding)	INSAIT anchors Bulgaria's AI research
Programming competitiveness/ expertise rank	#1 in EE	#2 in EE	#3 in EE	#5 in EE
Global Innovation Index 2025	#4 in EE	#7 in EE	#6 in EE	#3 in EE
English proficiency				
EF English Proficiency Index	#3 in EE	#8 in EE	#2 in EE	#4 in EE
EF EPI rating – IT professionals	High/Advanced	Moderate/High	Not specified	Not specified
Market demand				
% of EE-interested companies choosing this market	24%	11%	22%	11%
Most common requested team sizes	71% want 1–5; 29% want 10+	From 1–5 to 20+	63% want 1–5; 25% want 10+	75% want 1–5; 25% want 10+

Which Markets Can Support AI Team Growth?

Eastern Europe



Metric	Poland	Ukraine	Romania	Bulgaria
STEM & education				
Annual STEM/ICT graduates	74,000	40,000	35,600	6,000
QS World University Rankings 2026 (# of institutions)	20	9	10	2
Startup ecosystem				
Active startups	1,777, 13 unicorns	874, 11 unicorns	743, 3 unicorns	547, 1 unicorn
StartupBlink Global Ecosystem ranking	#4 in EE	#8 in EE	#9 in EE	#6 in EE
Overall positioning				
One-line verdict	Strongest all-round market for AI engineering at scale	Deepest AI-specific talent depth and highest cost efficiency	Best value-per-engineer market with fast-growing AI infrastructure	Most EU-integrated market, best suited for focused teams

Numbers just set the stage.

In the next sections, you will dive deep into each market and decide which one is the perfect location for your next AI engineering team in Eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe

Poland



Talent Pool and Technical Depth



Poland's tech talent pool stands at

778,800 professionals

the largest in Eastern Europe and among

all eight Alcor markets. Poland also ranks **#1 in Eastern Europe and #24 globally** on the Oxford Government AI Readiness Index.

On AI and data capability specifically, Poland ranks:

#1 in EE, **#17** globally
(on the TopCoder programming competitiveness index)

#3 in EE, **#36** globally
for AI maturity
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#3 in EE
for data science skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#4 in EE,
for tech skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#4 in EE, **#39** globally
(on the Global Innovation Index 2025)



Poland ranks #1 in Europe and #4 globally for the concentration of Tier 2 AI talent

– advanced AI researchers and engineers building deep learning models, neural architectures, and cutting-edge AI systems, as distinct from general software or data professionals (Interface EU, 2026).

TCL selected Poland for its European AI research headquarters specifically because of Polish researchers'

"**unique combination of great algorithmic and mathematical skills.**" Ringier Axel Springer built one of its key global AI and data science centers in Poland for the same reason.

Intel's Gdańsk R&D center – its largest in the EU at approximately 4,000 staff – is explicitly focused on AI, machine learning, and autonomous vehicle development, with a dedicated **€72-73 million expansion announced to grow AI/ML work** at the site.

The Polish government is backing this with capital. A dedicated **national AI Fund of approximately €235 million** was created in November 2024 to co-finance private-sector AI innovation. Startups and SMEs receive free access to national AI computer infrastructure through the PIAST-AI and Gaia programs, including GPU-powered model training – directly lowering the cost of building AI-heavy products in Poland.



Poland remains a top pick for Eastern Europe hiring:

24%

of all Eastern-Europe-interested companies we spoke with name Poland for building their engineering teams. Interest spans a genuinely **global mix of HQs** – including the **US, Switzerland, the UK, and Germany** – and already reaches multiple hubs beyond **Warsaw**, including **Wrocław, Kraków, and Gdańsk**.

Of those specifying team size,

71%

need single-digit teams

29%

are already building **double-digit teams of 10 or more**.

That demand is already converting into hires:

Alcor has seen a **12.5% increase in software engineering hires** among clients in Poland since the start of 2026.





Poland

Tech Hubs

Warsaw

#1

Poland's largest tech workforce and the country's primary AI hiring hub

Home to 24% of Poland's national tech workforce and the site of Poland's most significant AI infrastructure investment, Warsaw is where parallel hiring across multiple senior AI roles is most viable.

Tech talent pool:	156,000 IT specialists
AI research:	11 universities actively publishing AI research
Leading industries:	robotics and gaming
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Poland, #7 in Eastern Europe; 686 startups and 14.4% YoY ecosystem growth
Venture activity:	attracted PLN 3.4 billion (approximately €800 million) across 180 transactions in 2025, with an 84% year-on-year increase in early 2026
Top universities:	University of Warsaw, Warsaw University of Technology, and Warsaw University of Life Sciences

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Poland



Kraków

#2

Poland's emerging DeepTech capital

Home to Poland's largest concentration of IT companies and the GAIA AI Factory – a dedicated AI research and engineering facility anchoring Kraków's position as Poland's primary hub for deep technical AI work.

Tech talent pool:	100,000 ICT specialists
Core engineering strengths:	enterprise software, DeepTech, AI research, and advanced engineering
Leading industry:	gaming
AI infrastructure:	home to the GAIA AI Factory
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #3 in Poland and #12 in Eastern Europe; 253 startups
Top universities:	Jagiellonian University, AGH University of Kraków, and Kraków University of Technology

Wrocław

#3

the Polish Silicon Valley

Wrocław is often referred to as the Polish Silicon Valley – home to IBM, Google, and Microsoft R&D centers.

Core engineering strengths:	health AI, enterprise R&D, commerce infrastructure
Leading industry:	MedTech
R&D ecosystem:	home to Google and Microsoft R&D centers
Innovation infrastructure:	a Taiwanese-backed technology park is currently under development in the Wrocław area
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Poland and #11 in Eastern Europe; 240 startups
Top universities:	University of Wrocław and Wrocław University of Science and Technology

Poland



Startup Ecosystem

1,777 active startups, 13 unicorns (Dealroom 2026),

Poland ranks

#4 in EE/#33 globally



(StartupBlink 2026). Free GPU compute access through the PIAST-AI and Gaia programs lowers the cost of building AI-heavy products locally, making Poland one of the most structurally supportive environments in Europe for AI startups and the product engineering teams they require.



English Proficiency

#3 in EE/#15 globally

on the EF English Proficiency Index, with an overall EF score of 600 (B2-C1) and 621 (C1) in the IT sector – the highest IT-sector English rating among the four Eastern European markets. C1 enables full participation in technical documentation, code review, stakeholder presentations, and real-time product discussions in English without meaningful language gaps.



STEM and University Indicators

74,000

STEM and ICT graduates annually (Statista)



20

higher education institutions in QS World University Rankings 2026



68

universities with STEM majors (EduRank)



500

total higher education institutions



6+

English-taught Bachelor's degrees specifically titled Artificial Intelligence



Sector Strengths



Poland's tech stack is among the most AI-relevant in Eastern Europe,

with **Python, TensorFlow, NLP, and Kubernetes** directly applicable to ML, LLM, MLOps, and AI infrastructure roles. EU membership provides built-in GDPR compliance and IP protections.

The combination of the EU-backed Piast AI Factory in Poznań, the European Commission's \$143 million commitment to AI research infrastructure, Intel's dedicated AI/ML expansion in Gdańsk, and the €235 million national AI Fund represents **the most concentrated public and private AI investment** of any Eastern European market in this guide.

Poland: Verdict



Can Poland support AI team growth – from an initial team of 10+ engineers to 30 and beyond?

Yes,

Poland is the strongest all-round market in Eastern Europe for AI product engineering at scale.



Tier 2 AI talent depth

#1 in Europe and #4 globally for the concentration of advanced AI researchers and engineers building deep learning models, neural architectures, and production AI systems (Interface EU, 2026) – the only Eastern European market where the **most technically demanding AI roles** are genuinely fillable at volume



AI readiness

#1 in EE on the Oxford AI Readiness Index, #1 in EE on TopCoder, and named by TCL, Ringier Axel Springer, and Intel as their chosen location for European AI R&D specifically because of Polish mathematical and algorithmic talent



Infrastructure investment

Microsoft's **\$704 million Azure expansion**, the **€235 million national AI Fund**, free GPU compute through PIAST-AI and Gaia, and Intel's Gdańsk AI/ML center represent the most concentrated AI infrastructure investment of any market in this guide

Primary constraint:

Poland's talent pool is the most competed-for in Eastern Europe.

Senior AI engineers receive frequent outreach from Western European and US remote employers offering significant salary premiums. Competitive offers and strong employer branding are more important here than in any other Eastern European market – and more important here than in most LATAM markets as well.

Eastern Europe

Ukraine



Talent Pool and Technical Depth



Ukraine's tech talent pool stands at

305,000 professionals

– the second-largest in Eastern Europe. The IT workforce grew 11% year-on-year from 2022 to 2025, and **IT exports reached \$6.66 billion** in 2025, making IT the country's largest services exporter and second-largest export category overall (National Bank of Ukraine/Lviv IT Cluster).

That **pool grew 17%** over 2024–2025, and DOU's 2026 IT market analysis confirms the direction of travel: defense tech, hardware, and AI are actively displacing classic web and mobile development roles in the Ukrainian market, meaning Ukraine's engineering talent is reallocating toward higher-value AI specializations rather than away from them. **44% of Ukrainian AI specialists have 1–3 years of AI-specific experience**, with most of the market operating at middle-to-lead level.



More than 200 Ukrainian companies are currently producing AI-enabled drones,

with 300+ AI-related developments registered on the government's Brave1 defense tech platform and 70+ AI and computer vision systems already actively deployed – real production systems, not research prototypes. Ukraine launched Diia.AI in late 2025, described as the world's first national AI agent delivering government services through chat, built and operated by Ukrainian engineers. Kyiv's 13 universities actively publish AI research.

On AI and data capability specifically, Ukraine ranks:

#2 in EE, **#18** globally
(on the TopCoder programming competitiveness index)

#4 in EE, **#41** globally
up from #54 in a single year
(on the Oxford Government AI Readiness Index)

#7 in EE,
for tech skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#7 in EE
for data science skills
(Coursera Global Skills Report 2025)

#7 in EE, **#66** globally
(on the Global Innovation Index 2025)

According to AI HOUSE's 2025 market research, Ukraine has approximately 6,100 dedicated AI/ML specialists

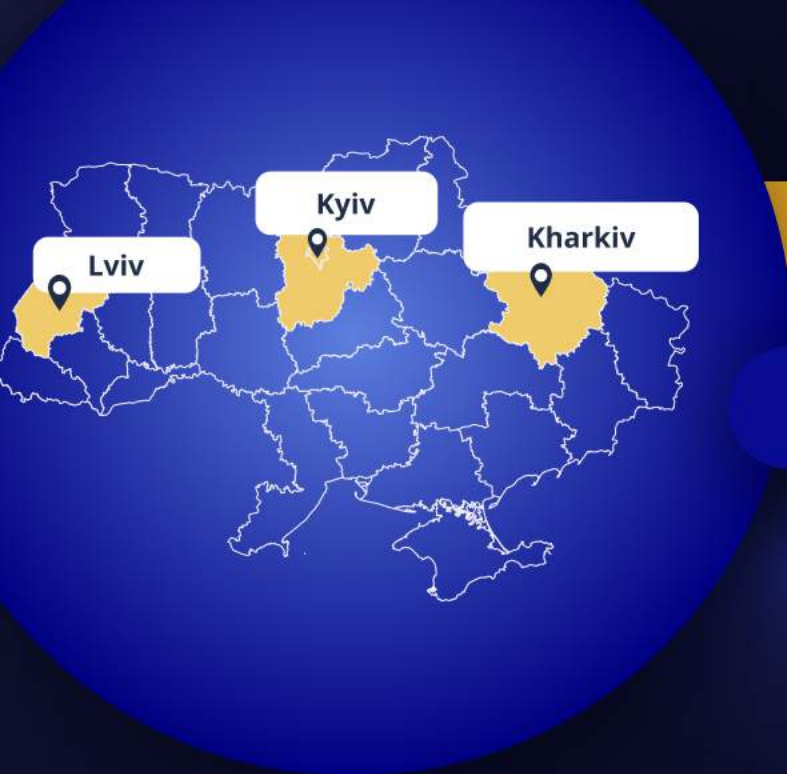
– engineers working specifically in machine learning, deep learning, computer vision, NLP, and AI infrastructure, as distinct from general software developers.



Interest in Ukraine remains resilient:

11%

of all Eastern-Europe-interested companies we spoke with name Ukraine specifically, with external demand coming from **Australia, Singapore, the UK, and the US**. Requested team sizes **range from single-digit hires to builds of 20+**, pointing to appetite across the spectrum rather than one dominant use case – though with a small number of leads specifying a size, this is a directional signal rather than a firm pattern yet.



Ukraine

Tech Hubs

Lviv

#2

Ukraine's primary western engineering hub

Ukraine's most operationally resilient tech city outside Kyiv, with strong energy-independence infrastructure and a deep pool of senior engineers.

Tech talent pool:	51,000–62,000 IT specialists, 41% of whom are senior-level
Leading industries:	software and data engineering
Tech ecosystem:	home to approximately 599 technology companies
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Ukraine; 87 startups
Operational resilience:	strong energy-resilience infrastructure supporting continuous technology operations
Cost environment:	the cost of living, including rent, is approximately 6.7% lower than in Kyiv (Numbeo, July 2026)
Top universities:	Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Lviv Polytechnic National University, and Ukrainian Catholic University

Kharkiv

#3

Ukraine's defense tech and systems engineering hub

Home to an IT cluster that grew from 6 to 650+ members over 10 years, with deep specialization in defense tech, systems engineering, and AI.

Tech talent pool:	20,000–25,000 IT specialists (DOU/ Kharkiv IT Cluster, 2026)
Core engineering strengths:	DefenceTech, software, systems engineering, and AI
Tech ecosystem:	IT cluster with 650+ members, including growth sustained through wartime conditions
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #3 in Ukraine; 29 startups
Top universities:	V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute," and Kharkiv National University of Radio Electronics

Kyiv

#1

Ukraine's largest tech hub and primary AI engineering center

Ukraine's primary hiring hub, home to the country's highest concentration of senior engineers, global R&D centers, and AI-specific research institutions.

Tech talent pool:	103,000 IT specialists, or 42% of Ukraine's tech workforce (WifiTalents Report 2026)
Leading industries:	AI and DefenceTech
R&D ecosystem:	home to R&D operations for Google, Microsoft, Boeing, Samsung, and other global technology companies
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Ukraine and #5 in Eastern Europe; 606 startups
Top universities:	Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Ukraine

 Microsoft

 SAP

 ORACLE

 NVIDIA

 IBM

Ukraine



Startup Ecosystem

874 active startups, 11 unicorns (Dealroom 2026),

Ukraine ranks

#8 in EE/#42 globally



(StartupBlink 2025). Ukraine's Brave1 defense tech initiative supports 500+ startups and attracted \$129 million in investment in 2025. The defense tech concentration has produced engineers with real-world AI deployment experience in resource-constrained, adversarial environments.



English Proficiency

#8 in EE/#45 globally

on the EF English Proficiency Index, with an **IT-sector score of 568 (B2-C1)**. Approximately 40% of IT services export revenue comes from US clients, which has driven practical English fluency in product and engineering roles well above the national baseline. For AI product engineering roles requiring daily English-language collaboration, senior engineers in Kyiv and Lviv working in international product environments operate effectively in English – but English proficiency should be validated at the screening stage more carefully than in Poland or Romania.



STEM and University Indicators

40,000

STEM and ICT graduates annually (Digital State Ukraine)



73

universities with STEM majors (EduRank)



9

higher education institutions in QS World University Rankings 2026



369

total higher education institutions (Humanitarian Media Hub)



Sector Strengths



Ukraine's strongest tech sectors – enterprise software, cybersecurity, defense tech, fintech, and AI

– have produced a senior engineering population with deep delivery experience for US and European product companies. Ukraine launched Diia.AI in late 2025, the world's first national AI agent delivering government services through chat, built and operated by Ukrainian engineers – a proof point for applied AI engineering maturity that no other market in this guide can match.

Ukraine: Verdict



Can Ukraine support AI team growth – from an initial team of 10+ engineers to 30 and beyond?

Yes,

Ukraine has exceptional technical depth and cost efficiency, with an operational context that requires active planning.



AI-specific talent depth

6,100 dedicated AI/ML specialists with a **17% annual growth rate**, #2 in EE on TopCoder, and a 13-position jump on the Oxford AI Readiness Index in a single year confirm this is a market actively deepening its AI engineering capacity, not maintaining a status quo



Production-grade AI evidence

200+ companies building AI-enabled drones, 300+ AI developments on Brave1, 70+ computer vision systems deployed in production, and Diia.AI as the world's first national AI agent represent the most concrete real-world AI engineering proof of any market in this guide



Cost efficiency

approximately 55% savings versus US senior rates, combined with Diia.City's favorable tax framework, makes Ukraine the most cost-efficient of the four Eastern European markets

Primary constraint:

Kyiv and Lviv maintain strong operational continuity, but companies should build standard contingency planning into team design from day one.

Alcor's owned legal entities and on-the-ground operational support in Ukraine directly address the most common continuity requirements.

Eastern Europe

Romania



Talent Pool and Technical Depth



Romania's tech talent pool stands at

207,800+ professionals

– the third-largest in Eastern Europe. The country combines a well-established software delivery track record with rapidly deepening AI infrastructure investment, positioning it as one of the most credible mid-tier AI engineering markets in the region.

On AI and data capability specifically, Romania ranks:

#2 in EE
for business environment conditions
(StartupBlink IBEI 2026)

#3 in EE
for programming expertise

#6 in EE
(on the Global Innovation Index 2025)

#2 in EE
(on the EF English Proficiency Index 2025)

Romania has 32 universities actively publishing AI-specific research

concentrated in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, and Craiova (EduRank). Politehnica University of Bucharest hosts over 28,000 students across 15 faculties, with AI, robotics, and nanoengineering explicitly named as focus areas woven into its engineering curriculum. The Technical University of Cluj-Napoca is building a dedicated AI research center – a \$15.6 million, 10,000 sqm facility housing 144 GPUs – embedding AI compute access directly into the university system.



The most significant infrastructure signal is Bucharest's selection as one of only 6 sites

across 16 EU member states in the EuroHPC AI Factories program, backed by **€500 million in public funding**. That places Romania in the same tier as Poland for sovereign AI compute infrastructure – a material upgrade for a market that previously lacked the GPU access required for serious AI model training and research.



Romania continues to be one of the most in-demand Eastern European markets:

22%

of all Eastern-Europe-interested companies we talked to name Romania for building their engineering teams, **led by US-headquartered companies**. Interest already reaches beyond Bucharest to hubs like Cluj, and requested team sizes lean toward smaller builds

63%

ask for single-digit teams – while a **quarter are already requesting double-digit builds of 10+**, showing room for both point hires and larger scale-ups.

Romania

Tech Hubs

Cluj-Napoca

Iasi

Bucharest

#2



Cluj-Napoca

the Silicon Valley of Romania

Romania's second tech hub and the preferred secondary market for engineering hiring, with a growing AI research infrastructure anchored by a university-built GPU facility.

AI infrastructure:	Technical University of Cluj-Napoca building a \$15.6 million, 10,000 sqm AI research center with 144 GPUs
Leading industry:	software development
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Romania; 114 startups
Cost environment:	salaries approximately 10% below Bucharest, with significantly lower operating costs
Top universities:	Babeş-Bolyai University and Technical University of Cluj-Napoca



Iasi

Romania's software and data engineering hub

Romania's third tech hub and a high-output engineering talent source, with one of the country's highest per-capita graduate rates in IT and computer science.

Tech talent pool:	25,000+ IT specialists
Leading industry:	software and data engineering
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #5 in Romania
Graduate pipeline:	one of Romania's highest per-capita IT graduate output rates
Cost environment:	salaries approximately 20% below Bucharest – the most cost-efficient of the three primary hubs
Top universities:	Alexandru Ioan Cuza University and The "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi

#3



Bucharest

Romania's primary tech hub and AI capital

#1

Selected as one of six EuroHPC AI Factory sites in the EU and home to Romania's highest concentration of AI-focused startups – the country's primary hub for AI product engineering hiring at volume.

Tech talent pool:	103,900+ IT specialists or more than half of the country's IT workforce (InvestRomania)
AI infrastructure:	selected for the EuroHPC AI Factories program, backed by €500 million in EU public funding
Leading industry:	artificial intelligence
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Romania and #8 in Eastern Europe; 392 startups
Top universities:	University of Bucharest and University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest (28,000+ students, AI and robotics focus)

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Romania

Google

IBM

Microsoft

amazon

ORACLE

Romania

Cluj-Napoca

Iasi

Bucharest



Startup Ecosystem

743 active startups, 3 unicorns (Dealroom 2026),

Romania ranks

#9 in EE/#48 globally



(StartupBlink 2025). Romania counts 2,540 funded companies that have collectively raised **\$470 million in VC and PE capital**. Romania's national AI strategy explicitly prioritizes AI adoption inside the public sector – including the tax authority (ANAF) for risk analysis and spend optimization – making the state itself an early AI demand driver, not just a regulator.



English Proficiency

#2 in Eastern Europe

on the EF English Proficiency Index 2025 – **the highest English proficiency of the four Eastern European markets** and sufficient for full participation in technical documentation, code review, architecture discussions, and real-time product planning in English. Romanian engineers working in international product environments operate comfortably in English at the senior and lead levels across all three primary hubs.



STEM and University Indicators

35,600

STEM and ICT graduates annually



\$15.6 million

dedicated AI research center with 144 GPUs under construction (Technical University of Cluj-Napoca)



28,000+

students, AI, robotics, and nanoengineering as core curriculum focus areas (Politehnica University of Bucharest)



Bucharest

selected for EuroHPC AI Factories program, one of 6 sites across 16 EU member states backed by €500 million in public funding



Sector Strengths



Romania's strongest sectors – enterprise software development, cybersecurity, fintech, and AI tooling

– have produced a senior engineering population with deep product delivery experience for Western European and US clients. EU membership provides built-in GDPR compliance and IP protections.

Romania: Verdict



Can Romania support AI team growth – from an initial team of 10+ engineers to 30 and beyond?

Yes,

Romania is the strongest value-per-engineer market in Eastern Europe, with AI infrastructure investment that deepens the case year on year.



3rd-largest tech talent pool in Eastern Europe

207,800+ IT professionals, giving companies both the scale to hire at volume and the flexibility to match talent depth against cost and speed priorities



Infrastructure momentum

EuroHPC AI Factory selection, **€500 million in EU compute funding**, a university-built GPU center in Cluj-Napoca, and **32 AI-research universities** collectively producing 487,000+ citations signal a market building genuine AI engineering depth, not just software delivery capacity



Three-hub cost tiering

Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Iași provide **geographic diversification across three cost tiers**, allowing companies to balance hiring speed, cost, and candidate depth

Primary constraint:

Romania's talent pool at 207,800 is smaller than Poland's,

and senior AI specialist availability – particularly at the lead level – requires longer pipeline timelines than Poland. Active headhunting rather than inbound sourcing is required for AI-specific roles.

Eastern Europe

Bulgaria



Talent Pool and Technical Depth



Bulgaria's tech talent pool stands at approximately

126,100+ professionals

per Eurostat (2023, most recent available), including approximately **70,000 in software development**. Bulgaria recorded the highest rate of ICT specialist employment within the Information and Communication sector of any EU country in 2023 at 76.3% per Eurostat – meaning Bulgarian engineers are overwhelmingly focused on technology delivery rather than distributed across generalist roles.

On AI and data capability specifically, Bulgaria ranks:

#1 in EE
for business environment conditions
(StartupBlink IBEI 2026)

#3 in EE
(on the Global Innovation Index 2025)

#4 in EE
(on the EF English Proficiency Index 2025)

#5 in EE
for programming expertise

Top-5 Global Tech Leaders with Engineering Operations in Bulgaria

Microsoft

IBM



CISCO

ORACLE



The strongest institutional signal for Bulgaria's AI engineering depth is INSAIT – the Institute for Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and Technology

– founded in 2022 in direct partnership with ETH Zurich and EPFL, two of the world's top-ranked technical universities. INSAIT is the first institute of its kind in Eastern Europe, anchoring Bulgaria's AI research capability to world-class academic standards rather than to domestic resources alone.



Bulgaria is drawing early but tangible interest:

11%

of all Eastern-Europe-interested companies we spoke with name Bulgaria for building their engineering teams, with demand **led by US-headquartered companies**.

75%

of them so far are for **single-digit teams**, though **others are asking for a build of 20 or more** – with a small number of leads overall, this points to emerging rather than established demand.



Bulgaria

Tech Hubs

Sofia

Bulgaria's primary tech hub and the center of its AI and fintech ecosystem

#1

Home to 83% of Bulgaria's startups and the only Eastern European city simultaneously in the EU, Schengen Area, and eurozone – the most operationally frictionless hiring environment in the region for European-headquartered companies.

Tech talent pool:	110,000 IT specialists (Invest Sofia and NSI, 2024)
Core engineering strengths:	FinTech, AI, enterprise software development, and R&D
Leading industry:	FinTech and AI
R&D ecosystem:	home to R&D centers for HP, SAP, Microsoft, and VMware
AI research:	home to INSAIT, founded with ETH Zurich and EPFL – the first AI research institute of its kind in Eastern Europe
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #1 in Bulgaria and #9 in Eastern Europe; 456 startups
Startup concentration:	accounts for approximately 83% of Bulgaria's startups
Startup concentration:	Sofia Tech Park anchors the city's startup, research, and technology commercialization ecosystem
Top universities:	Sofia University, Technical University of Sofia, and New Bulgarian University

Plovdiv

#2

Bulgaria's second tech hub and cost-efficient engineering alternative

Returned to the global top 1,000 in 2026 after a 163.1% increase in its StartupBlink score – the largest single-year gain among the European cities tracked that year.

Tech talent pool:	8,500 specialists across IT, BPO, and B2B sectors (Invest Plovdiv, 2023–2024)
Cost environment:	technology salaries approximately 10–25% lower than in Sofia
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #3 in Bulgaria and #64 in Eastern Europe; 18 startups
Core engineering strengths:	software development, IoT, IT services
Top universities:	Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" and Technical University of Sofia's Plovdiv branch

Varna

#3

Bulgaria's tourism-tech hub

Bulgaria's leading city for tourism technology startups, with a growing IT and shared-services market and lower operating costs than Sofia.

Cost environment:	the cost of living including rent is approximately 10.4% lower than in Sofia, while residential rents are around 28.3% lower (Numbeo, May 2026)
Leading industry:	software and data engineering
Tourism-tech ecosystem:	Bulgaria's leading city for tourism technology startups
Startup ecosystem:	ranked #2 in Bulgaria and #36 in Eastern Europe; 48 startups
Top universities:	Varna Free University, University of Economics–Varna, and Technical University of Varna

Bulgaria



Startup Ecosystem

547 active startups, **1** unicorn, Payhawk, (Dealroom 2026), ecosystem valued at **\$7.3 billion**,

Bulgaria ranks

#3 in EE/#40 globally



(StartupBlink 2026). \$91 million+ raised annually. Strong sectors include fintech, SaaS, AI, healthtech, defense/security, and gaming. 87% of software-sector revenue is export-driven (BASSCOM 2025) – a signal of an engineering workforce shaped by international delivery standards, not domestic market demand.



English Proficiency

#4 in EE/#18 in globally

on the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, with a score of 594 – High Proficiency band, though third of the four Eastern European markets behind Romania and Poland. One practical note worth flagging at the screening stage: Bulgaria's speaking sub-score (501) is meaningfully lower than its reading (613) and listening scores, meaning written technical English – code reviews, design documentation, pull requests – tends to be more consistent than spoken business English outside Sofia's senior tech and enterprise core.



STEM and University Indicators

9.6%

ICT sector contribution to GDP, the highest ICT/GDP share in the EU (ReportLinker 2024)



INSAIT

founded with ETH Zurich and EPFL, the first AI research institute of its kind in Eastern Europe



87%

of software-sector revenue is export-driven (BASSCOM 2025)



Ranked #2

in Bulgaria for Computer Science, the Technical University of Sofia counts AI, machine learning, and computer vision among its core research areas.



Sector Strengths



Bulgaria's strongest sectors – enterprise software development, fintech, cybersecurity, gaming, and SaaS

– have produced a senior engineering population with solid delivery experience for Western European and US clients.

Bulgaria's EU operating environment is the most complete of the four Eastern European markets. Euro adoption removes FX exposure on payroll. Schengen membership simplifies talent mobility. EU regulatory alignment provides built-in GDPR compliance and IP protections.

Bulgaria: Verdict



Can Bulgaria support AI team growth – from an initial team of 10+ engineers to 30 and beyond?

Yes,

Bulgaria is the most EU-integrated market in Eastern Europe on the strength of euro adoption, and best suited for focused teams rather than high-volume hiring given its smaller talent pool.



English proficiency – #18 globally

on the EF English Proficiency Index 2025 – the third among the four Eastern European markets, behind Romania and Poland, but still comfortably sufficient for senior-level technical collaboration without added screening pressure



EU infrastructure Bulgaria's euro adoption (January 2026) removes an FX friction

point that still applies in Poland and Romania. Schengen membership, EU regulatory alignment, and AI Act governance are already shared with Poland and Romania as fellow EU members



AI research depth

INSAIT, founded in Sofia in 2022 in partnership with ETH Zurich and EPFL, anchors Bulgaria's AI engineering capability to world-class research standards and signals a **market investing in deep AI talent development**, not just software delivery

Primary constraint:

Bulgaria's talent pool is the smallest of the four Eastern European markets, with 83% of tech activity concentrated in Sofia.

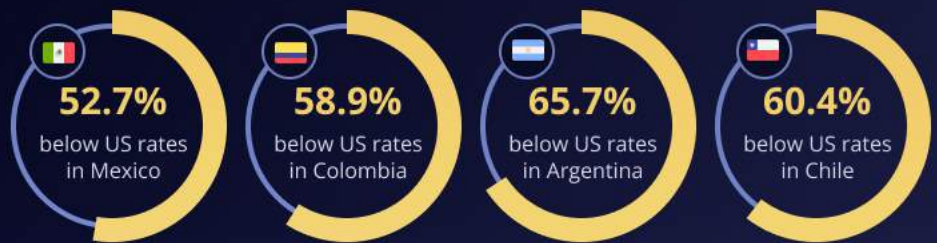
Companies needing 15+ engineers across multiple rare AI specializations will exhaust the senior candidate base faster here than in Poland or Ukraine. Bulgaria works best for focused teams of 5–15, or as part of a multi-country Eastern European strategy where Poland or Ukraine carries volume hiring.



Latin America: Mid-Level AI Product Engineering Salaries

Latin America's mid-level AI engineering talent covers the full delivery stack – model development, data engineering, AI integration, infrastructure, and product delivery – at **46–71% below US rates** depending on country and role. Typically equipped with hands-on experience building and shipping production AI systems, these engineers can own execution across defined workstreams without the senior-level price tag.

According to Alcor's 2026 salary research, mid-level annual base salaries across Latin America run:



Across individual roles and countries, savings range from **45.6% to 70.9%** below US equivalents.

Mid-Level Annual Base Salary, USD

Role	Mexico	Colombia	Argentina	Chile	USA
AI Engineer	\$81,000	\$69,000	\$57,000	\$66,000	\$162,000
ML Engineer	\$54,600	\$51,000	\$48,000	\$52,200	\$162,000
AI/ML Engineer	\$81,000	\$69,000	\$57,000	\$66,000	\$162,000
MLOps Engineer	\$58,200	\$57,000	\$44,400	\$58,800	\$141,000
AI Data Engineer	\$75,000	\$63,000	\$51,000	\$60,000	\$150,000
LLM Engineer	\$63,000	\$63,000	\$48,000	\$60,000	\$159,000
AI Agent Developer	\$93,000	\$78,000	\$66,000	\$75,000	\$171,000
AI Infrastructure Engineer	\$93,000	\$78,000	\$66,000	\$75,000	\$174,000
ML Data Scientist	\$78,000	\$66,000	\$54,000	\$63,000	\$156,000
AI Platform Engineer	\$87,000	\$72,000	\$63,000	\$72,000	\$168,000
AI Product Engineer	\$58,800	\$57,000	\$48,000	\$52,200	\$165,000
AI-Native Engineer	\$87,000	\$75,000	\$63,000	\$72,000	\$168,000
AI Quality Engineer/SDET	\$63,000	\$51,000	\$42,000	\$48,000	\$138,000
AI Research Scientist	\$99,000	\$84,000	\$72,000	\$81,000	\$186,000
AI Prompt Engineer	\$57,000	\$48,000	\$39,000	\$45,000	\$126,000

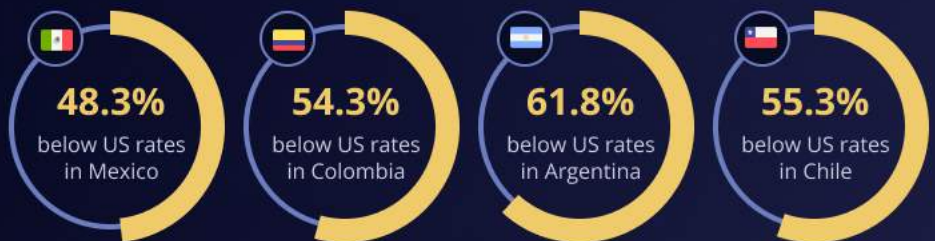
*All figures are estimated annual salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Savings percentages are calculated from the average salaries across the 15 roles shown. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.*



Latin America: Senior AI Product Engineering Salaries

Senior engineers are the core of most production AI teams – expected to work independently, make technical decisions within their domains, contribute to architecture, mentor less-experienced engineers, and take ownership across models, data pipelines, infrastructure, and product integration. In Latin America, companies can **access that profile at substantially below US rates** while expanding their search beyond the highly competitive US senior AI talent market.

According to Alcor's 2026 salary research, senior annual base salaries across Latin America run:



Across individual roles and countries, savings range from **41.8% to 68.4%** below US equivalents.

Senior Annual Base Salary, USD

Role	Mexico	Colombia	Argentina	Chile	USA
AI Engineer	\$123,000	\$105,000	\$87,000	\$102,000	\$222,000
ML Engineer	\$81,000	\$78,000	\$75,000	\$82,200	\$222,000
AI/ML Engineer	\$123,000	\$105,000	\$87,000	\$102,000	\$222,000
MLOps Engineer	\$93,000	\$93,000	\$64,800	\$93,000	\$189,000
AI Data Engineer	\$111,000	\$93,000	\$78,000	\$93,000	\$210,000
LLM Engineer	\$96,000	\$96,000	\$75,000	\$93,000	\$234,000
AI Agent Developer	\$138,000	\$120,000	\$102,000	\$117,000	\$237,000
AI Infrastructure Engineer	\$141,000	\$123,000	\$105,000	\$120,000	\$243,000
ML Data Scientist	\$117,000	\$99,000	\$81,000	\$96,000	\$216,000
AI Platform Engineer	\$132,000	\$111,000	\$96,000	\$111,000	\$228,000
AI Product Engineer	\$88,800	\$87,000	\$72,000	\$82,200	\$228,000
AI-Native Engineer	\$129,000	\$111,000	\$93,000	\$108,000	\$228,000
AI Quality Engineer/SDET	\$96,000	\$78,000	\$66,000	\$75,000	\$186,000
AI Research Scientist	\$147,000	\$129,000	\$111,000	\$126,000	\$258,000
AI Prompt Engineer	\$87,000	\$75,000	\$63,000	\$72,000	\$168,000

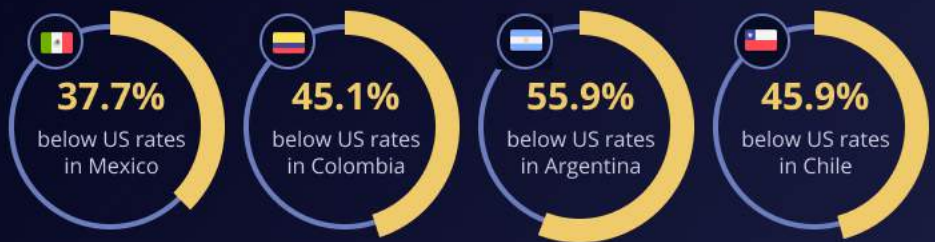
*All figures are estimated annual salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Savings percentages are calculated from the average salaries across the 15 roles shown. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.*



Latin America: Lead AI Product Engineering Salaries

Lead engineers combine deep technical expertise with architecture ownership, team mentoring, cross-functional coordination, and accountability for production outcomes. The salary gap narrows at this level relative to mid and senior – the market premium for genuine technical leadership is real in every market – but **Latin America still delivers a substantial cost advantage** for companies that need this profile.

According to Alcor's 2026 salary research, lead annual base salaries across Latin America run:



Across individual roles and countries, savings range from **30.4% to 67.2%** below US equivalents.

Lead Annual Base Salary, USD

Role	Mexico	Colombia	Argentina	Chile	USA
AI Engineer	\$171,000	\$144,000	\$120,000	\$141,000	\$252,000
ML Engineer	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$84,600	\$126,000	\$252,000
AI/ML Engineer	\$171,000	\$144,000	\$120,000	\$141,000	\$252,000
MLOps Engineer	\$135,000	\$135,000	\$84,600	\$135,000	\$222,000
AI Data Engineer	\$156,000	\$129,000	\$108,000	\$126,000	\$246,000
LLM Engineer	\$138,000	\$132,000	\$84,600	\$135,000	\$258,000
AI Agent Developer	\$192,000	\$165,000	\$138,000	\$162,000	\$276,000
AI Infrastructure Engineer	\$195,000	\$168,000	\$144,000	\$165,000	\$288,000
ML Data Scientist	\$162,000	\$135,000	\$114,000	\$132,000	\$252,000
AI Platform Engineer	\$186,000	\$156,000	\$132,000	\$153,000	\$270,000
AI Product Engineer	\$126,000	\$132,000	\$97,800	\$126,000	\$270,000
AI-Native Engineer	\$180,000	\$153,000	\$129,000	\$150,000	\$264,000
AI Quality Engineer / SDET	\$129,000	\$105,000	\$90,000	\$102,000	\$216,000
AI Research Scientist	\$204,000	\$180,000	\$153,000	\$174,000	\$306,000
AI Prompt Engineer	\$117,000	\$102,000	\$84,000	\$99,000	\$198,000

All figures are estimated annual salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Savings percentages are calculated from the average salaries across the 15 roles shown. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.

What That Difference Means in Practice

A ten-person AI product engineering team covering the full model-to-production stack – one lead AI engineer, five senior engineers across ML, MLOps, AI data, LLM, and AI infrastructure, plus four mid-level engineers across AI platform, AI product, AI quality, and ML data science – costs **\$1,977,000 per year** in base salary in the US.

The same team, with the same roles and seniority mix, runs:

Market	Annual team cost, base	Annual savings vs the US	Annual savings vs the US, %
Mexico	\$979,800	\$997,200	50%
Colombia	\$873,000	\$1,104,000	56%
Argentina	\$724,800	\$1,252,200	63%
Chile	\$857,400	\$1,119,600	57%

All figures are estimated annual base salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.

Even if your immediate hiring plan is smaller than this ten-person team, the numbers above show what your cost structure looks like as the team grows.

The cost advantage compounds with every engineer added – and gives you the budget to build a complete AI product engineering capability rather than compromising on seniority or role coverage.

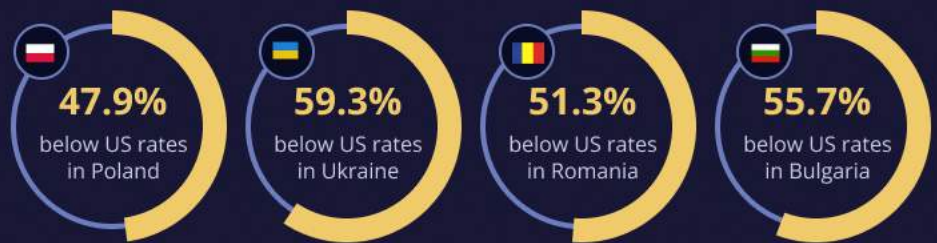




Eastern Europe: Mid-Level AI Product Engineering Salaries

Eastern Europe's mid-level AI engineering talent spans the full delivery stack – model development, data pipelines, AI integration, cloud infrastructure, testing, and production operations. The region's strong technical education traditions and established engineering markets support a deep pool of talent across software, data, and applied mathematics. Experienced mid-level engineers can own execution across defined workstreams while growing into broader technical responsibility **without the senior-level price tag.**

According to Alcor's 2026 salary research, mid-level annual base salaries across Eastern Europe run:



Across individual roles and countries, savings range from **42.1% to 72.6%** below US equivalents.

Mid-Level Annual Base Salary, USD

Role	Poland	Ukraine	Romania	Bulgaria	USA
AI Engineer	\$87,000	\$69,000	\$81,000	\$78,000	\$162,000
ML Engineer	\$67,200	\$51,600	\$66,000	\$44,400	\$162,000
AI/ML Engineer	\$87,000	\$69,000	\$81,000	\$78,000	\$162,000
MLOps Engineer	\$72,000	\$57,600	\$72,000	\$57,600	\$141,000
AI Data Engineer	\$81,000	\$63,000	\$75,000	\$69,000	\$150,000
LLM Engineer	\$69,600	\$54,000	\$66,000	\$52,800	\$159,000
AI Agent Developer	\$99,000	\$78,000	\$93,000	\$87,000	\$171,000
AI Infrastructure Engineer	\$99,000	\$78,000	\$93,000	\$87,000	\$174,000
ML Data Scientist	\$84,000	\$66,000	\$78,000	\$75,000	\$156,000
AI Platform Engineer	\$96,000	\$72,000	\$87,000	\$84,000	\$168,000
AI Product Engineer	\$72,000	\$56,400	\$66,000	\$54,600	\$165,000
AI-Native Engineer	\$93,000	\$75,000	\$87,000	\$84,000	\$168,000
AI Quality Engineer/SDET	\$69,000	\$51,000	\$63,000	\$60,000	\$138,000
AI Research Scientist	\$105,000	\$84,000	\$99,000	\$93,000	\$186,000
AI Prompt Engineer	\$63,000	\$48,000	\$57,000	\$54,000	\$126,000

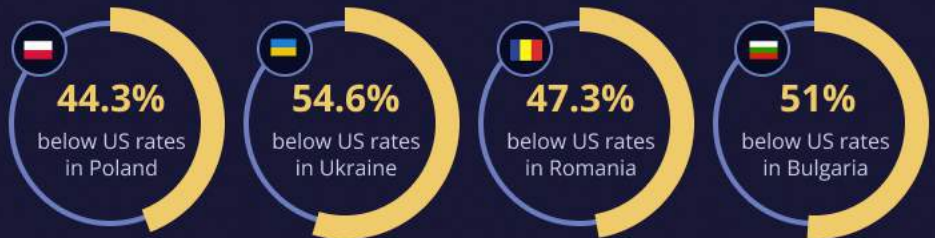
All figures are estimated annual salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Savings percentages are calculated from the average salaries across the 15 roles shown. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.



Eastern Europe: Senior AI Product Engineering Salaries

Senior engineers form the backbone of production AI teams. They work independently, make technical decisions within their domains, contribute to architecture, mentor less-experienced engineers, and take ownership across models, data infrastructure, deployment, and product integration. Eastern Europe's established software engineering markets provide access to senior specialists across AI development, data infrastructure, MLOps, cloud systems, and product engineering – **at rates that remain well below US equivalents** even at the seniority levels where experienced AI talent is hardest to recruit and commands high compensation.

According to Alcor's 2026 salary research, senior annual base salaries across Eastern Europe run:



Across individual roles and countries, savings range from **38.0% to 71.4%** below US equivalents.

Senior Annual Base Salary, USD

Role	Poland	Ukraine	Romania	Bulgaria	USA
AI Engineer	\$129,000	\$105,000	\$123,000	\$117,000	\$222,000
ML Engineer	\$99,600	\$84,000	\$97,200	\$63,600	\$222,000
AI/ML Engineer	\$129,000	\$105,000	\$123,000	\$117,000	\$222,000
MLOps Engineer	\$102,000	\$90,000	\$99,600	\$85,800	\$189,000
AI Data Engineer	\$117,000	\$93,000	\$111,000	\$105,000	\$210,000
LLM Engineer	\$102,000	\$86,400	\$97,800	\$90,000	\$234,000
AI Agent Developer	\$147,000	\$120,000	\$138,000	\$132,000	\$237,000
AI Infrastructure Engineer	\$150,000	\$123,000	\$141,000	\$135,000	\$243,000
ML Data Scientist	\$123,000	\$99,000	\$117,000	\$111,000	\$216,000
AI Platform Engineer	\$141,000	\$111,000	\$132,000	\$126,000	\$228,000
AI Product Engineer	\$103,800	\$84,000	\$97,200	\$87,600	\$228,000
AI-Native Engineer	\$138,000	\$111,000	\$129,000	\$123,000	\$228,000
AI Quality Engineer/SDET	\$102,000	\$78,000	\$96,000	\$90,000	\$186,000
AI Research Scientist	\$156,000	\$129,000	\$147,000	\$144,000	\$258,000
AI Prompt Engineer	\$93,000	\$75,000	\$87,000	\$84,000	\$168,000

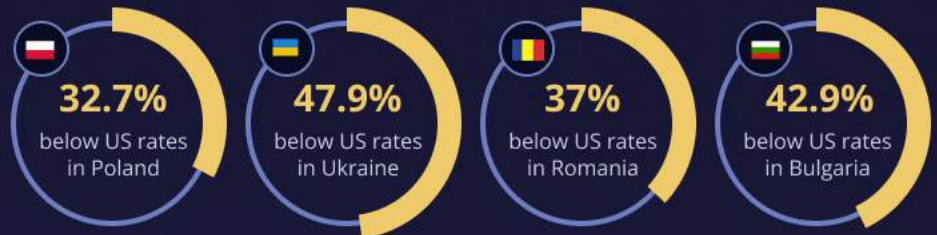
All figures are estimated annual salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Savings percentages are calculated from the average salaries across the 15 roles shown. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.



Eastern Europe: Lead AI Product Engineering Salaries

Lead engineers combine deep technical expertise with architecture ownership, mentoring, delivery oversight, and coordination across engineering, product, data, and infrastructure teams. The salary gap narrows at this level – as it does in Latin America – because experienced technical leaders command a premium in every market. Eastern Europe still offers a **meaningful cost advantage**, even for this profile.

According to Alcor's 2026 salary research, lead annual base salaries across Eastern Europe run:



Across individual roles and countries, savings range from **26.1% to 70.0%** below US equivalents.

Lead Annual Base Salary, USD

Role	Poland	Ukraine	Romania	Bulgaria	USA
AI Engineer	\$180,000	\$144,000	\$171,000	\$162,000	\$252,000
ML Engineer	\$150,000	\$102,000	\$132,000	\$75,600	\$252,000
AI/ML Engineer	\$180,000	\$144,000	\$171,000	\$162,000	\$252,000
MLOps Engineer	\$156,000	\$105,600	\$141,000	\$110,400	\$222,000
AI Data Engineer	\$165,000	\$129,000	\$156,000	\$147,000	\$246,000
LLM Engineer	\$150,000	\$102,000	\$132,000	\$111,600	\$258,000
AI Agent Developer	\$204,000	\$165,000	\$192,000	\$183,000	\$276,000
AI Infrastructure Engineer	\$210,000	\$168,000	\$195,000	\$186,000	\$288,000
ML Data Scientist	\$171,000	\$135,000	\$162,000	\$153,000	\$252,000
AI Platform Engineer	\$195,000	\$156,000	\$186,000	\$177,000	\$270,000
AI Product Engineer	\$132,000	\$102,000	\$138,000	\$109,200	\$270,000
AI-Native Engineer	\$192,000	\$153,000	\$180,000	\$171,000	\$264,000
AI Quality Engineer/SDET	\$141,000	\$105,000	\$129,000	\$123,000	\$216,000
AI Research Scientist	\$216,000	\$180,000	\$204,000	\$198,000	\$306,000
AI Prompt Engineer	\$129,000	\$102,000	\$117,000	\$114,000	\$198,000

All figures are estimated annual salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Savings percentages are calculated from the average salaries across the 15 roles shown. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.

What That Difference Means in Practice

A ten-person AI product engineering team covering the full model-to-production stack – one lead AI engineer, five senior engineers across ML, MLOps, AI data, LLM, and AI infrastructure, plus four mid-level engineers across AI platform, AI product, AI quality, and ML data science – costs **\$1,977,000 per year** in base salary in the US.

The same team, with the same roles and seniority mix, runs:

Market	Annual team cost, base	Annual savings vs the US	Annual savings vs the US, %
Poland	\$1,071,600	\$905,400	46%
Ukraine	\$865,800	\$1,111,200	56%
Romania	\$1,011,600	\$965,400	49%
Bulgaria	\$915,000	\$1,062,000	54%

*All figures are estimated annual base salaries in USD for 2026, **sourced from Alcor's salary dataset**. Employer taxes, statutory benefits, bonuses, equity, recruitment costs, and operating expenses are excluded.*

The cost advantage holds across all four Eastern European markets even at the lead and senior levels where AI engineering talent is globally scarcest.

Ukraine delivers the widest savings at 56% below US rates -

and Poland, the highest-cost market in the region, still cuts the team's annual base salary by **46%**.



Labor Law and Compliance Across Latin America and Eastern Europe

Compliance isn't the fine print behind the hiring decision. For any VC- or PE-backed tech company, unicorn, or public product company unwilling to learn the hard way, it is the hiring decision.

Across every market in this guide, building an AI product engineering team abroad comes down to the same two paths, with only one market adding a third: an **employment agreement** that puts the engineer on your payroll under local labor law, or a **B2B contract** that treats the engineer as an independent contractor under civil or commercial law. Ukraine adds a third option built specifically for tech: the **Diia.City gig contract**.

Available to companies that are resident in the special Diia.City regime, it gives engineers take-home pay similar to B2B, along with protections and paid guarantees closer to employment.

What changes market to market isn't the shape of that choice – it's the cost of getting it wrong. Notice periods, severance formulas, and probation rules vary widely across markets, and a termination that's routine in one country can trigger months of severance liability in another. **The snapshot below covers employment terms and termination law in each location.**

The relationship, tax treatment, and trade-offs behind each path hold steady across all eight markets in this guide – what differs by country is the **governing law** behind them, which we call out market by market below. The comparison below applies everywhere:

FTE vs B2B vs Diia.City Gig Contract Types

	Employment Agreement	B2B Contract	Diia.City Gig Contract (Ukraine-specific)
Relationship	Employer–employee	Contractor–client	Gig specialist–Diia.City resident company
Tax liability	Employer pays SSC & payroll tax and withholds employee PIT, SSC and military levy	Engineers register as sole traders and handle their taxes	Resident company withholds PIT, military levy, and SSC of minimum wage
For tech firms 	Pros		
	Stable , long-term cooperation	Zero employer payroll tax & SSC burden	IT-friendly , predictable taxes, and solid IP
	Cons		
	Strict compliance with labor laws	Contractor misclassification risk	Requires Diia.City residency
For engineers 	Pros		
	Secure and benefit-rich employment	Higher take-home pay tied to the USD rate	Net similar to B2B with more protections and paid guarantees
	Cons		
	Lower net salary due to withholding taxes	Limited benefits, PTO, and working terms	Limited benefits depend on gig contract

Latin America



Mexico

Mexico carries the longest probation allowance for technical roles of any market in this guide.

An employment agreement is governed by the **Federal Labor Law**, one of the most protective labor codes in Latin America, whereas a B2B contract is governed by **Civil/Commercial Law**.

Employment Terms



Standard workweek
48 hours
(as of 2026)



Overtime pay
200% of the regular rate or
300% after nine weekly overtime hours, plus applicable Sunday or holiday pay



Overtime
3 hours/day and
9 hours/week



Probation
6 months for specialized technical/professional or managerial roles;
30 days otherwise

Termination Laws in Mexico

	General rules	Probation period
Notice period	Not required (written cause must be notified by the employer within 5 days to court)	Not required
Local requirements	Dismissal can be with or without cause; however, justified dismissals usually require witnesses and proper documentation	Dismissal can be justified or without cause
Termination payments	• Compensation for unused vacation days • Pro-rated 13th-month salary • Any pending compensation for days worked but not yet paid	
Severance payments	• 90 days' salary • 20 days' salary per year of employment • 12 days' salary per year of employment	Not presupposed

Latin America

Colombia

Colombia layers a dedicated severance fund, the Cesantía, on top of standard termination pay, a distinctive feature of the Colombian system.

An employment agreement is governed by the **Labor Code**, while a B2B contract is governed by **Civil/Commercial Law**, the standard split across most of Latin America.

Employment Terms



Standard workweek

42 hours
(as of 2026)



Overtime pay

125% of the regular rate &
190% on holidays or Sunday



Overtime

2 hours/day and
12 hours/week



Probation

Up to 2 months for indefinite-term contracts; for fixed-term contracts under a year it's one-fifth of the term, capped at two months

Termination Laws in Colombia

General rules

Probation period

Notice period	At least 15 days, unless a severe reason for dismissal (e.g. violence, revelation of industrial secrets, etc.)	Not required
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Local requirements	Dismissal can be justified or without cause
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Termination payments	• Compensation for unused vacation days • Pro-rated 13th-month salary • Any pending compensation for days worked but not yet paid
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	• 30 days of salary per worked year (Cesantía)	Not presupposed
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Severance payments	Employees: a) Earning $< 10 \times$ the monthly minimum wage: • 30 days' salary for the first year of service; • +20 days/subsequent year b) Earning $\geq 10 \times$ the monthly minimum wage: • 20 days' salary for the first year of service; • +15 days/subsequent year	Not presupposed
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Latin America

Argentina

Argentina ties much of its employment framework to Collective Bargaining Agreements,

adding a layer of sector-specific obligations on top of the national **Labor Code**, which governs employment agreements here; B2B contracts fall under **Civil/Commercial Law**, though CBAs can still shape what that B2B relationship is allowed to look like in practice.

Employment Terms



**Standard
workweek**

48 hours
(as of 2026)



Overtime pay

150% of the regular
rate in regular hours
200% on Sundays
or holidays



Working-time flexibility

written and voluntary
bank-of-hours or
compensatory-rest
arrangements may
be agreed



Overtime

3 hours/day and
30 hours/month,
200 hours/year



Probation

6 months for standard roles; A CBA may
extend this period to **8** months for
companies with 6–100 employees or to
12 months for companies with up to 5
employees

Termination Laws in Argentina

	General rules	Probation period
Notice period	30 days for employees < 5 years, 60 days for employees with > 5 years of experience	Not required
Local requirements	If the dismissal is justified, the employer must notify it in writing	If the employment relationship is not properly registered with local authorities, the employer is deemed to have waived the probation period and the employment relationship is considered indefinite
Termination payments	• Compensation for unused vacation days; • Pro-rated 13th-month salary; • Any pending compensation for days worked but not yet paid.	
Severance payments	30 days' salary per year of service	Not presupposed

Latin America

Chile

Chile is the outlier of the group: it recognizes no formal probation period at all, and reserves no-cause termination for managerial roles only.

An employment agreement is governed by the **Labor Code**, and a B2B contract by **Civil/Commercial Law**, which is applied here with far fewer guardrails regarding probation.

Employment Terms



**Standard
workweek**

42 hours
(as of 2026)



Overtime pay

150% of the regular rate in regular hours



Overtime

2 hours/day and
12 hours/week



Probation

not recognized by labor law

Termination Laws in Chile

General rules		Probation period
Notice period	30 days	
Local requirements	The employer can terminate the contract without a reason, only for managerial positions	Not recognized by labor law.
Termination payments	Compensation for unused vacation days, pro-rated legal bonus, and any pending compensation for days worked but not yet paid	However, some companies choose to sign a short-term agreement with employees as a form of probation. If the collaboration does not work out or does not meet their needs, they simply do not proceed with a subsequent agreement.
Severance payments	30 days' salary per year of service, up to 11 months. Depending on the severity of the dismissal reason, this compensation may increase by 30% to 100% of the compensation for years of service	

Eastern Europe

Poland

Poland's talent pool is the deepest in the region, and its labor code reflects a mature, stable market built around long-term employment.

An employment agreement there falls under the **Labour Code**, while a B2B contract runs on the **Civil Code** – the same civil framework that lets many senior engineers here register as sole traders and negotiate rates directly in USD.

Employment Terms



Standard workweek

40 hours
(as of 2026)



Overtime pay

150% in regular hours
200% at night, on Sundays, or public holidays (alternatively compensated with time off)



Overtime

8 hours/week



Probation

1 month (fixed-term contracts under 6 months);
2 months (contracts between 6–12 months);
3 months (all other cases)

Termination Laws in Poland

	General rules	Probation period
Notice period	2 weeks (under 6 months of employment); 1 month (6 months to under 3 years); 3 months (3+ years). <i>No prior notice is needed for serious misconduct or long-term absence</i>	3 working days (probation up to 2 weeks); 1 week (probation over 2 weeks but under 3 months); 2 weeks (probation of 3 months)
Local requirements	In all cases, dismissal must be justified	A probation contract can be freely terminated by either party
Termination payments	Compensation for all unused paid vacation days and any outstanding payments	Compensation for all unused paid vacation days accrued
Severance payments	Applicable only when an employer has 20+ employees and dismisses for non-employee-related reasons: 1 month's salary (<2 years' service); 2 months' salary (2–8 years); 3 months' salary (8+ years); capped at 15× the minimum wage (max. PLN 72,090 or ~ \$18,900)	Not presupposed

Eastern Europe

Ukraine

Ukraine is the only market in this guide with a third path of engaging developers.

An employment agreement is governed by the **Labor Code plus tax and social insurance law**; a B2B contract by **Civil/Commercial Law**; the Diia.City gig contract by Ukraine's dedicated **Law on Stimulating the Development of the Digital Economy**, introduced specifically to keep IT talent and tax revenue onshore, with predictable taxes and strong IP protection built in, in exchange for requiring Diia.City residency.

Employment Terms



Standard workweek

40 hours
(as of 2026)



Overtime pay

200% of the regular rate in regular hours and public holidays



Overtime

4 hours
for 2 consecutive days;
120 hours/year
(not applicable during martial law)



Probation

1 month for workmen;
3 months for other roles;
6 months with trade union consent.

Termination Laws in Ukraine

General rules

Probation period

Notice period

Not required (in some cases, a 2-month notice applies)

3 days

Local requirements

Dismissal only on specific legal grounds, following all statutory procedures and forms

Dismissal only with the employee's incompatibility with the position, which must be justified

Termination payments

- Compensation for unused vacation days + outstanding payments
- Any pending compensation for days worked but not yet paid

Severance payments

Depending on certain causes, ranging from 1 to 6 months of the average salary

Not presupposed

Eastern Europe



Romania

Romania offers one of the most employer-friendly termination frameworks in the region:

no severance obligation outside of medical unfitness cases, and a shorter, more predictable notice period. An employment agreement sits under the **Labour Code** and a B2B contract under the **Civil Code**, the same split as Poland, though Romania's shorter notice periods make the employment path noticeably less rigid for employers.

Employment Terms			
	Standard workweek 40 hours (as of 2026)		Overtime pay 175% in regular hours; 200% on bank holidays
	Overtime 8 hours/week		Probation 90 days for standard roles; 120 days for managerial roles

Termination Laws in Romania

	General rules	Probation period
Notice period	20 working days ; no prior notice required for disciplinary terminations or if the employee is under arrest for over 30 days	Not required
Local requirements	Dismissal can be for cause (medical, disciplinary, professional unfitness) or without cause (redundancy, collective layoff); specific termination procedures apply in each case	A probation contract can be freely terminated by either party
Termination payments	Compensation for all unused paid vacation days and any outstanding payments	Compensation for all unused paid vacation days accrued
Severance payments	Not mandatory (except in cases of medical unfitness – then paid as agreed in the employment contract or collective agreement)	Not presupposed (except for special cases)

Eastern Europe

Bulgaria

Bulgaria's euro adoption in January 2026 made it the most EU-integrated market in the region.

An employment agreement runs under the **Labour Code**, while a B2B contract is governed by **Civil/Commercial Law**.

Employment Terms



Standard workweek

40 hours
(as of 2026)



Overtime pay

150% for work on business days or under summarized working time;
175% on weekends;
200% on holidays



Overtime

150 hours/year;
30 hours/1 month;
6 hours/1 week;
3 hours/day (max. 2 consecutive working days)



Probation

1 month for fixed-term contracts under 1 year;
6 months in all other cases

Termination Laws in Bulgaria

	General rules	Probation period
Notice period	30 days for indefinite contracts; 3 months for fixed-term contracts	Not required
Local requirements	Dismissal by the employer only under specific, legally defined circumstances	A probation contract can be freely terminated by either party
Termination payments	Compensation for all unused paid vacation days and any outstanding payments	Compensation for all unused paid vacation days accrued
Severance payments	Required in certain cases, ranging from 1 to 6 months' gross salary of last full calendar month worked (except for unused-leave compensation calculated based on average daily gross remuneration)	Not presupposed

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire



Salary in a job offer is rarely the full budget figure. **Statutory benefits** are the legal baseline for every hire; leaving them out is not just underestimating cost, but miscalculating compliance. Under an **employment agreement**, **social security contributions** add an often overlooked percentage on top of salary.

Benefits packages are optional, but still important: in competitive markets, top engineers compare offers on more than base pay, and companies that match those expectations are more likely to retain them.

Latin America

Mexico

Employment agreement (FTE)



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation	12 days (1 yr) rising to 30 days (26+ yrs) on a seniority scale
Sick leave	60% of salary from the 4th day, up to 52 weeks (100% if job-related)
Maternity leave	84 calendar days, paid 100% by Social Security
Paternity leave	5 days at 100% of average daily salary, covered by the employer
Holidays	7 paid public holidays (2026)



Social security contributions (employer)

Sickness and maternity (fixed)	20.40%
Sickness and maternity	1.75%
Sickness and maternity (additional fee)	1.10%
Disability and Life	1.75%
Retirement	2%
Unemployment and old-age scheme	Up to 7.513%
Occupational risk	0.54%–7.59% (by risk category)
Nursery and social benefits	1%
Housing Fund (INFONAVIT)	5%

Effective employer SSC rate: ~26.3% on top of a \$5,000 salary

Additional obligations:

local payroll tax
4% in Mexico City, 3% in Guadalajara
Aguinaldo
15 days' salary by Dec 20
vacation bonus
25% premium
Profit Sharing/PTU
10% of annual taxable profits, subject to statutory caps



Benefits package (optional)

Private health insurance	~\$1,500/year
Meal vouchers	~\$1,000/year
Home office allowance	~\$800/year (not optional for remote workers)
Learning budget	~\$1,500/year
Wellness	~\$700/year



Total:
~\$5,500/year
per engineer

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire



Latin America

Colombia

Employment agreement (FTE)



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation	15 working days after 1 year of service (at least 6 days must be taken annually)
Sick leave	first 2 days paid fully; then 66.7% (up to day 90) and 50% (days 91–180), paid by the Social Security Institute (EPS)
Maternity leave	126 calendar days (18 weeks); 1 prenatal week mandatory; +2 weeks for multiple births; up to 6 weeks shareable between both parents
Paternity leave	14 days at 100% of salary, paid by the employer and reimbursed by the health insurer
Mourning leave	up to 5 days
Education leave	up to 10 days
Holidays	19 paid public holidays (2026)



Social security contributions (employer)

Pension fund	12%
Health insurance	8.5% (only above 10 × minimum monthly wage)
Labor risks system	From 0.522%
Payroll tax:	
Family Welfare (ICBF)	3%
National Apprenticeship Service (SENA)	2%
Family Compensation Fund	4%

Effective employer SSC rate: **~30%**
on top of a \$5,000 salary

Additional obligations:

Prima de Servicios
1 month's salary, two installments

Cesantía
1 month's salary per year worked, deposited into a third-party severance fund

Cesantía interest
12% of the Cesantía payment



Benefits package (optional)

Transportation/connectivity allowance	~\$500/year
Health insurance	~\$1,500/year
Meal vouchers or food allowances	~\$500/year
Home office allowance	~\$800/year



Total:

~\$3,300/year
per engineer

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire



Latin America

Argentina

Employment agreement (FTE)



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation	14 days (6 months–5 yrs) rising to 35 days (20+ yrs) on a seniority scale
Sick leave	fully covered by the employer for 3 months (under 5 years' service) or 6 months (5+ years)
Maternity leave	90 calendar days (typically 45 before + 45 after birth), paid by social security as a family allowance
Paternity leave	2 calendar days
Mourning leave	up to 3 days
New marriage leave	up to 10 calendar days
Holidays	19 paid public holidays (2026)



Social security contributions (employer)

Pension funds	16%
Health insurance	2%
Social services	6%
Unemployment insurance	1.5%
Life insurance	0.3%
Employment risk	2% (can run higher by activity)

Effective employer SSC rate: **~27.8%**
on top of a \$5,000 salary

Additional obligations:

Aguinaldo
30 days' salary, split into two payments of 15 days every 6 months

vacation bonus
20% premium during vacation days



Benefits package (optional)

Work injury/health insurance	~\$1,600/year
Meal vouchers	~\$1,000/year
Transport allowances	~\$500/year
Performance bonuses	
Professional development support	~\$1,000/year
Internet/home office	~\$1,000/year



Total:

~\$5,100/year
per engineer

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire



Latin America

Chile

Employment agreement (FTE)



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation	15 working days after 1 year of service; +1 extra day for every 3 years of service after year 10
Sick leave	first 3 days unpaid if leave runs under 10 days; Health Insurance System covers 100% of salary from day 4 through day 180
Maternity leave	126 calendar days (42 before + 84 after birth)
Paternity leave	5 days
Mourning leave	up to 10 days
Holidays	17 paid public holidays (2026)



Social security contributions (employer)

Disability and Survivor's Insurance (SIS)	1.54%
SANNA	0.03%
Mutual (risks fund)	0.9%
Social Services (AFC)	2.4%
SSP	3.5% (from August 2026)

Effective employer SSC rate: **~8%** on top of a \$5,000 salary

Additional obligations:

legal bonus
25% of monthly salary, or –
if the employer opts out –
30% of net company profits distributed
proportionally among employees



Benefits package (optional)

Private health insurance	~\$1,000 /year
Meal and transportation vouchers	~\$1,300 /year
Wellness (gym, mental health)	~\$700 /year
Home office allowance	~\$700 /year
Professional development (training & certifications)	~\$1,800 /year
English language courses	~\$900 /year

* Performance bonuses and profit sharing programs

Private life and accident insurance **~\$350**/year



Total:

~\$6,750/year
per engineer

* The amount varies by role, salary, individual performance, and company results and should therefore be calculated on a case-by-case basis.

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire

Eastern Europe



Poland

Employment agreement (FTE)



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation	20 working days (under 10 years' service); 26 days (10+ years); many IT employers add 2-5 extra days in practice
Sick leave	paid at 80% of salary; first 33 days (14 for employees 50+) covered by the employer, up to 182 days thereafter covered by ZUS
Maternity leave	140 calendar days (at least 98 after childbirth)
Paternity leave	14 days at 100% of salary, paid by ZUS; must be taken within 24 months of birth, in up to two one-week installments
Parental leave	287 calendar days (1 child)/ 301 days (2+); ZUS pays either 70% of salary for the period after maternity leave ends, or, if applied for within 21 days of birth, a flat 81.5% for the entire maternity and parental period combined
Disability leave	+10 working days of annual leave for employees with a moderate or severe disability
Childcare leave	2 paid days/year for parents of children under 14
Special event leave	up to 2 working days for family life events
Force majeure leave	up to 2 working days for urgent family matters
Holidays	14 paid public holidays (2026)



Social security contributions (employer)

Retirement pension	9.76%
Disability pension	6.5%
Accident insurance	0.67%-3.33%
Employment Fund	2.45%
Fund of Guaranteed Employee Benefits	0.1%

Effective employer SSC rate: **~20%**
on top of a \$5,000 salary



Benefits package (optional)

Private health insurance	~\$600/year
Professional development (training & certifications)	~\$1,500/year
English language courses	~\$800/year
Home office / IT equipment	~\$600/year
Wellness (MultiSport card, mental health support)	~\$600/year
Meal cards	~\$900/year



Total:

~\$5,000/year
per engineer

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire

Eastern Europe



Ukraine

Employment agreement (FTE)

Diia.City Gig Contract



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation 24 calendar days

Sick leave employer covers **50–100%** of salary for the first **5** calendar days; the Pension Fund covers the remainder
Many IT employers may voluntarily grant **2–5** additional days off for well-being

Maternity leave **126** calendar days (**70** before birth + **56** after, or **70** after for complications/multiple births); paid by the Social Insurance Fund

Paternity leave **14** days

Additional parental leave **10–17** days for parents of 2+ children under 15

Adoption leave **56** days

Holidays **11** paid public holidays (2026)

Governed separately under the **Diia.City framework** – broadly comparable protections, with specifics set out in the gig contract itself



Social security contributions (employer)

22%, capped at UAH 172,940 (~\$3,955) monthly base; max monthly contribution UAH 38,046.80 (~\$870)

Effective employer SSC rate: **~17.4%** on top of a \$5,000 salary

SSC charged at the statutory minimum salary only – not gross salary – at the same **22%** rate.

Effective employer SSC rate: **~0.8%** at \$5,000/month



Benefits package (optional)

- Private health insurance
- English language courses
- Professional development (training & conferences)
- Wellness benefits (gym and/or mental health support)
- Home office allowance/IT equipment/coworking allowance
- Corporate events and employee gifts
- Military leave and support programs for active service members and veterans

Same optional package as FTE



Total:
~\$1,800–\$2,000/year
per engineer

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire



Eastern Europe

Romania

Employment agreement (FTE)



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation	20 business days statutory minimum; most IT employers offer 22–26 days in practice
Sick leave	day 1 unpaid; days 2–6 covered by the employer; day 7 through day 183 (extendable by 90 days) covered by health insurance at 55% (≤7 days), 65% (8–14 days), 75% (15+ days), up to 100% for oncological illness or work accidents
Maternity leave	126 days (63 before + 63 after)
Paternity leave	10 working days (+5 extra with a completed childcare course)
Mourning leave	3 days
Holidays	17 paid public holidays (2026)



Social security contributions (employer)

Pension insurance	0%–8% (0% normal conditions; 4% hard conditions; 8% special conditions)
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Labor insurance **2.25%**

Effective employer SSC rate: **~2.25%**
on top of a \$5,000 salary

Additional obligations:

mandatory pre-hire medical checks
(fully employer-covered)

mandatory Health & Safety training with documentation



Benefits package (optional)

Private health insurance	~\$900/year
English language courses	~\$1,000/year
Professional development (training & conferences)	~\$1,000–\$2,000/year
Wellness (gym, mental health, massage)	~\$400–500/year
Home office/coworking/IT equipment	~\$700/year
Voluntary pension plan	~\$450/year



Total:
~\$4,450–\$5,550/year
per engineer

The Cost of a Compliant AI Hire



Eastern Europe

Bulgaria

Employment agreement (FTE)



Statutory employee benefits

Vacation	20 working days statutory minimum; most IT employers offer 22–25 days in practice
Sick leave	first 2 days covered by the employer at 70% of salary; thereafter social security pays 80–90% , capped at 30 days post-termination for fixed-term or management contracts
Maternity leave	410 calendar days per child (45 before birth)
Paternity leave	15 days
Parental leave	for one parent, until the child turns 2
Adoption leave	1 year
Additional parental leave	2–4 working days depending on number of children under 18
Holidays	12 paid public holidays (2026)



Social security contributions (employer)

Mandatory state pension fund	8.22%
Additional mandatory pension insurance	2.8%
General illness and maternity fund	2.1%
Unemployment fund	0.6%
Accident at work and occupational disease fund	0.4%–1.1% (0.5% for administration & services)
Health insurance fund	4.8%

Effective employer SSC rate: **~9.5%**
on top of a \$5,000 salary



Benefits package (optional)

Private health insurance	~\$500 /year
Professional development (training & certifications)	~\$1,500 /year
English language courses	~\$1,000 /year
Wellness (gym, mental health, massage)	~500 /year
Home office/coworking/IT equipment	~\$600 /year
Meal vouchers	~\$1,100 /year
Voluntary pension plan/life insurance	~\$500 /year



Total:
~\$5,700/year
per engineer

Common to every market

Under the **B2B engagement**, the engineer registers as a private entrepreneur and covers their own taxes. For you, that means paying only the agreed monthly reward with **zero SSC and taxes** – a cost-effective option for fast time-to-first delivery, in any of the eight markets above.

Two additional costs apply regardless of contract type or country:



EOR/COR fee (monthly payment)

Covers employment contracts, payroll, tax filings, statutory benefits, IP protection clauses, and ongoing HR and legal compliance in the target country. Most providers charge either a flat fee per engineer or a percentage of gross salary, with volume discounts as headcount grows.



Recruitment fee (one-time payment)

Covers sourcing, screening, technical assessment, and shortlisting for each role. Standard market rate: 15–25% of annual base salary per successful placement, with AI and ML roles typically at the higher end given the depth of screening required.

Full Ownership and Control of an AI Product

IP gaps tend to surface during fundraising, enterprise due diligence, or an acquisition, after engineers have already contributed to the product building.

Alcor closes them before the first engineer enters the client's development environment.

What Alcor model guarantees

Alcor guarantee	Client benefit
 Full product control	The client directly manages the engineering team and controls the roadmap, architecture, repositories, standards, performance, and day-to-day work.
 Locally enforceable IP assignment	FTE and B2B documentation is adapted to the laws of the applicable jurisdiction rather than copied from a generic global template.
 Protection before product access	NDAs, confidentiality terms, and applicable IP documentation are completed before engineers receive confidential product information.
 Control throughout the engagement	The client controls repositories, datasets, tools, and permissions. At offboarding, access is revoked, equipment is returned, and confidentiality obligations continue.
 No vendor lock-in	The client can bring the engineering team into their own entity without paying a team buyout or reconstructing product ownership.

The split of responsibilities is equally clear:

the **client** runs the **AI team + product**

Alcor runs the **legal + operational infrastructure** around them.

IP protection built into the cooperation structure from the start.

The **protection framework** depends on whether engineers are engaged as full-time employees or B2B contractors:

FTE via Alcor's EOR		B2B via Alcor's COR
Governing framework		Client-Alcor cooperation agreement
Engagement contract	Locally compliant employment contract	Independent contractor agreement & deliverable-based Statement of Work
Confidentiality	NDA and confidentiality provisions	Signed NDA
IP transfer mechanism	IP and invention-assignment clauses as part of the FTE contract	Per-delivery transfer confirmation where required by local law
Data handling		Data-processing terms included where required

For **FTE hires**, Alcor serves as the local Employer of Record and incorporates IP and invention-assignment terms into the employment documents. The published EOR framework provides for exclusive worldwide rights to employee-created deliverables under the agreed transfer terms.

For **B2B engineers**, the contractor agreement, Statement of Work, NDA, and IP provisions work as one document chain. This matters because contractors may retain rights to the code, architecture, or documentation they create unless those rights are expressly transferred under locally enforceable terms.



Alcor's legal team aligns this framework before work begins, reducing the risk of having to repair missing assignments later.



Full AI IP stack protection

The most valuable part of an AI product may not sit in its main repository. Contracts that cover only "software" or "source code" can leave critical assets open to interpretation.

Alcor's IP framework can define rights to the AI work products created during the engagement, including:

- Application code and infrastructure-as-code
- Custom models, fine-tuned weights, and model configurations
- Training, fine-tuning, and evaluation pipelines
- Proprietary datasets and data transformations
- RAG components, embeddings, and retrieval workflows
- Prompts, agents, and orchestration logic
- Testing frameworks, documentation, and AI-assisted work products

The **client** also controls how these assets are created, including repository and dataset access, approved development tools, code-review standards, and the use of proprietary information in external AI systems.

Alcor does not control the codebase or take over product delivery.

Common Hiring Models for Scaling AI Engineering Teams Abroad

Expanding into Latin America or Eastern Europe is not only a location decision. The hiring model determines:

how quickly the team can start

who controls the engineers and product

who owns the IP

how much legal and operational work remains with the client.

Most tech companies choose between four paths:



opening a
local entity



getting software
development via an
IT outsourcing provider



hiring through an
EOR or COR vendor



building a dedicated
engineering team via the
**software R&D
center model**

	Own legal entity	IT outsourcing	EOR/COR	Software R&D center
Entity setup	Yes	No	No	No
Upfront cost	\$5K-\$25K+ for incorporation	Deposit, advance payment, or minimum commitment	Advance payments or deposit, onboarding charges	No setup fees or deposits
Time to team launch	4-6 months	Up to 1 month	Up to 2 weeks for talent onboarding	1 month
Compliance burden	High	Low	Low	Low
Team dedication	Full	Shared	Full	Full
IP control	Full	Shared	Full	Full
Exit or insourcing cost	Dissolution, legal, severance, and admin costs	Buyout, non-solicitation, or knowledge-transfer costs	Offboarding or transfer charges	No exit or buyout fees
Best for	Long-term presence with a large local headcount	Fixed-scope, temporary, or non-core delivery	Initial market testing or distributed team management	Initial market testing or distributed team management

◆ Own legal entity

Expanding tech companies incorporate a local subsidiary and **become the direct employer of their engineering teams**. They must **establish the complete operating layer** around that team, including tax registration, banking, accounting, payroll, employment contracts, statutory benefits, HR policies, data protection, insurance, and regulatory reporting.

The tech company also **builds or sources its own recruitment and operational capabilities**.

Once the infrastructure is operational, the company has **complete authority** over employment, compensation, benefits, culture, product development, IP, and local business decisions.

Advantages: 	Limitations: 	Best fit for: 
• Full legal and operational autonomy • Direct employment of AI engineers • Complete control over expenses, IP, and product development • Ability to build a local employer brand • Fixed infrastructure costs and no vendor overhead	• Incorporation is only the first step; banking, tax registration, payroll, accounting, employment documentation, and benefits must also be established • Setup commonly requires 3+ months and significant upfront spending • Local legal, finance, payroll, HR, and compliance expertise must be hired or sourced • Expansion into another country requires building another legal and operational structure • Downsizing, restructuring, or dissolving the entity can trigger legal, severance, and administrative costs	• Mature technology companies with internal legal, finance, HR, and operations teams ready to support the entity • Enterprises building a major regional operation or global capability centers • Companies that require local commercial activity, customer contracts, or regulatory licenses

◆ IT outsourcing

The expanding tech company contracts a software development vendor to **deliver an MVP, project, feature set, or fill the missing tech capacity**. The provider supplies engineers through a fixed-price, time-and-materials, or dedicated-team arrangement.

They usually manage delivery and engineer day-to-day work, handle admin and other operational functions to sustain the team. The **IT outsourcing vendor** charges the client for completed work or team capacity. The **client** buys access to a vendor-managed capability rather than building its own internal engineering team.

Advantages: 	Limitations: 	Best fit for: 
• Fast access to an existing engineering workforce • No local entity or employment administration • Vendor-managed staffing and operational support • Predictable structure for a clearly scoped project	• The client may have limited control over candidate selection, compensation, performance management, career development, and retention • Engineers can be reassigned, substituted, or rotated according to the vendor's resource needs • Inflated hourly or monthly rates include team management, bench risk, operational expenses, and vendor margin • Possible overpayment for mid-level developers charged as senior-level ones • Product knowledge may remain with the vendor after the contract ends • IP ownership agreements may contain provider-owned frameworks, reusable components, or code restrictions that complicate future insourcing • Buyout fees and non-solicitation clauses may make direct hiring difficult	• Early-stage startups that need an MVP or proof of concept • Companies covering a temporary capacity gap • Non-tech businesses that don't need internal engineering capability

◆ EOR or COR

Tech companies that need to engage developers from abroad without opening a legal entity or dealing with local labor laws can choose between EOR or COR models.

An **Employer of Record (EOR)** is a provider that is legally present in the country of the client's expansion and legally employs engineers abroad on the client's behalf. They manage employment contracts, payroll, tax withholding, statutory benefits, onboarding, offboarding, and local labor-law compliance.

A **Contractor of Record (COR)** structures and administers B2B relationships with independent contractors. It prepares local agreements, manages payments and documentation, and helps assess and reduce classification risk. The contractor remains responsible for their own tax obligations. Under both models, the client **directly manages the engineers and their product work**. However, **recruitment and broader team operations usually sit outside the standard service**.

Advantages:	Limitations:	Best fit for:
• No local entity required • Faster and less capital-intensive market entry • Direct management of engineers • Admin coverage and compliance risk minimization	• Engagement contracts and IP clauses may be too generic to provide full legal coverage for tech teams • An incorrectly structured relationship can trigger worker misclassification or permanent establishment risk • Deposits, FX markups, onboarding/offboarding charges, and late payment fees may increase the total cost • Heavy reliance on ticketing and self-service workflows can move administrative work back to the client • Managing separate EOR, recruitment, legal, equipment, and operational vendors creates hidden coordination overhead	• VC- or PE-backed startups building pilot engineering teams abroad • Mature tech companies testing new markets before incorporation • Large companies with distributed teams and a strong internal admin

◆ Software R&D Center

A software R&D center **combines the legal speed of EOR and COR with in-house tech recruitment and local operational support** to help tech companies enter LATAM or Eastern Europe within **1 month** and scale their team to **30+** senior engineers within **3 months**.

Alcor builds and sustains the infrastructure around the client's dedicated engineering team, covering:

- ◆ Full-cycle tech recruitment with an average of **8 CVs per offer** and **2-6 weeks to close an AI position**
- ◆ Locally adapted FTE and B2B contracts, NDAs, and IP provisions
- ◆ **10-day onboarding** with compliance, payroll/contractor payments, taxes, and benefits covered
- ◆ Hardware procurement and IT support
- ◆ Office, coworking leasing & WFH arrangement
- ◆ Stock options, HR, insurance, visa, travel support, employer branding, and other on-demand operations

The **client selects every hire** from the provided candidate pipeline and gets them **fully integrated into their in-house team from day 1**, without a middleman layer and buyout fees.

The client further keeps **full control** over the product development, engineering standards, performance management, product IP, and expenses.

Advantages:



- ⦿ Start hiring without waiting for an entity
- ⦿ Team, product control, and IP ownership remain with the client
- ⦿ Owned entities and legal shield for continuous compliance
- ⦿ Tailored service fee and volume discounts as your team grows
- ⦿ One partner for recruitment, EOR/COR, and local operations
- ⦿ Dedicated Ops Manager for a lower internal coordination burden
- ⦿ Consistent employer brand and engineer experience
- ⦿ Ability to insource the team without a buyout or exit fees

Limitations:



- ⦿ The model is designed for long-term capability building rather than fixed-price or one-off project delivery
- ⦿ It is less suitable when the company wants a vendor to assume responsibility for scope, deadlines, and delivery outcomes
- ⦿ The model is available only in tech talent-rich and cost-effective markets across Latin America and Eastern Europe
- ⦿ The complete model may be unnecessary for a company engaging only one or two tech specialists without recruitment or operational needs

Best fit for:



- ⦿ VC- or PE-backed tech companies, at any stage from Series A through late-stage or post-acquisition, that need to build an AI or product engineering team abroad because local hiring is slow, competitive, or too expensive
- ⦿ Unicorns and mature tech product companies scaling an AI engineering capability without admin or entity hassle
- ⦿ Tech product companies that started with IT outsourcing for speed and flexibility and are now ready to build a dedicated engineering team with direct product ownership, full organizational integration, and long-term retention
- ⦿ Tech businesses that have outgrown a standalone EOR or COR model and need recruitment, compliance, and local operations under one roof to turn individual international hires into a fully integrated engineering team



5-Step AI Team Launch Checklist

1

Research the markets

Compare the tech markets in go-to regions to narrow your search to markets that align with your expansion goals.

- ☐ Identify countries with sufficient AI and product engineering talent
- ☐ Compare technical depth, seniority mix, and English proficiency
- ☐ Review tech ecosystem maturity, economic stability, and long-term scaling potential

2

Estimate the real budget

A lower base salary does not always translate into a lower total hiring cost.

- ☐ Compare monthly base salaries for the required senior and lead AI roles
- ☐ Add payroll taxes, employer contributions, statutory benefits, and a benefits package (optional) to estimate your employment cost
- ☐ Estimate your savings to shortlist the most cost-effective tech markets

3

Validate labor law requirements

Check whether the local legal framework supports the cooperation model and level of flexibility you need.

- ☐ Review working hours, leave, probation, termination, and severance requirements
- ☐ Confirm whether FTE, B2B, or both structures are viable for the planned roles
- ☐ Identify payroll, tax, benefits, invoicing, and reporting obligations

5-Step AI Team Launch Checklist



4

Choose the hiring model

The hiring model determines how quickly the team can launch, who manages the engineers, how much infrastructure the company must build, and whether the capability remains inside the business.

Expansion goal		Best-fit model
Build and scale a fully owned AI engineering team without setting up local infrastructure	→	Software R&D Center
Test a new market or engage a few engineers without opening an entity	→	EOR/COR
Establish a permanent operation abroad with a large, predictable headcount	→	Own legal entity
Deliver a fixed-scope MVP, feature, or non-core project	→	IT outsourcing

Is Alcor's software R&D center model the right fit?

This model is designed for VC- and PE-backed startups, unicorns, and mature tech companies that plan to scale their strategic AI engineering teams in LATAM or Eastern Europe. The model is likely a strong fit for your company if most of the following statements apply:

- ☐ We are building a long-term AI product engineering capability rather than renting temporary delivery capacity
- ☐ We want to select and manage every engineer directly while keeping control of the roadmap, product decisions, and IP
- ☐ We need local tech recruitment alongside compliant FTE or B2B engagement
- ☐ We want transparent scaling costs without team buyouts, setup deposits, or exit fees
- ☐ We want to launch an engineering team within weeks, rather than wait for the entity to be incorporated
- ☐ We want one partner to coordinate recruitment, compliance, payroll, benefits, and local operations

5

Protect the product and prepare the launch

Work with a trusted local partner, such as Alcor, to close ownership and access gaps before engineers enter the product environment.

- ☐ Use locally adapted FTE or B2B agreements that assign the engineers' work to the tech company
- ☐ Complete NDAs, confidentiality terms, and IP provisions before granting product access
- ☐ Define the protected AI assets, including code, models, datasets, pipelines, prompts, and technical documentation
- ☐ Document offboarding, access revocation, continuing confidentiality, and future team-transfer terms

Build Your AI Product Engineering Team in Latin America or Eastern Europe

You now know where the strongest AI talent markets are, what senior engineers cost, and which hiring models protect product ownership. The next step is turning those benchmarks into a team that can start shipping.

Alcor helps US and European tech companies **hire and operate fully owned AI engineering teams** across Latin America and Eastern Europe – without opening a legal entity, coordinating multiple vendors, or handing product control to an outsourcing layer.

Here is what that model looks like in practice:



7 Senior Mobile Engineers hired in Latin America

Franki needed to build a senior mobile engineering team close to its Los Angeles headquarters without opening a local entity or handing product control to an outsourcing vendor. Mexico was the obvious choice: **full time zone overlap with LA** and a **solid pool of senior Mobile Engineers** in Mexico City.

We provided our client with a direct, compliant route into Mexico and hired seven hard-to-find Mobile Engineers in just 4 weeks per role.

What Franki achieved:

- ♦ **7** senior iOS, Android, and QA Engineers, including scarce RxSwift specialists
- ♦ **4-5**-week average time-to-hire
- ♦ **100%** probation pass rate
- ♦ A fully integrated team reporting directly to Franki
- ♦ Contractor agreements, IP protection, benefits, and PTO managed end-to-end
- ♦ Hardware, onboarding, and daily operations handled without additional internal HR capacity

Business impact:

With its Latin American engineering foundation in place, **Franki doubled revenue quarter-over-quarter** and gained the capacity to continue expanding its product offering.





A 30-person in-house engineering team in Eastern Europe

Pindrop needed to replace a fragmented outsourcing setup with a fully owned engineering team – without paying engineer buyouts, disrupting product delivery, or leaving IP behind. Ukraine was chosen for its **outstanding technical expertise, engineers adapted to American corporate culture**, and a Senior Director of Engineering already based in Kyiv who knew the market firsthand.

Alcor built the local recruitment and operational infrastructure Pindrop needed to bring engineering ownership in-house and scale to 30 people in Eastern Europe.

What Pindrop achieved:

- ◆ A **30**-person in-house engineering team reporting directly to Pindrop
- ◆ Complete team, product knowledge, and IP ownership
- ◆ The **1st senior role** filled with the first CV submitted
- ◆ Just **6 CVs** required per hire on average
- ◆ **100%** probation pass rate across engineers hired by Alcor
- ◆ Senior software and cloud roles filled in as little as **6 weeks**
- ◆ Existing engineers transferred from the outsourcing provider without losing a sprint, deadline, or team member
- ◆ Contracts, NDAs, payments, tax documentation, equipment, and onboarding managed end-to-end



Business impact:

Pindrop **replaced vendor dependency with a scalable in-house engineering foundation** without establishing a local entity or adding administrative overhead. After seeing the initial results, the company chose to continue scaling in Ukraine rather than the US.

Different markets. The same level of ownership.

Franki entered Latin America. Pindrop scaled in Eastern Europe. Their roles, markets, and company stages were different. The operating model was the same:

engineers hired specifically for the company, reporting directly to the client, with full ownership of the team, product knowledge, and IP – and one partner managing recruitment, compliance, employment, and operations.

That is the infrastructure Alcor provides for AI product companies.

The level of engineer Alcor can bring to your team



One senior AI engineer from our talent pipeline:

- ◆ Built AI agents with Python, LangGraph, LangChain, and LiteLLM, reducing prospecting workflows from 2–3 hours to 5 minutes
- ◆ Improved backend throughput from 500 TPS to 3,000 TPS using event-driven AWS services
- ◆ Designed AI quality evaluation systems for generated emails using LiteLLM and F1 score-based metrics
- ◆ Reduced integration sync time from 1 day to 1–2 hours, improving throughput by 30%
- ◆ Integrated AI-powered recommendation features through third-party APIs in a production SaaS platform

These are engineers who have already moved AI systems from prototypes into production environments.

What Alcor delivers



AI recruitment built for specialized roles

Alcor sources from its

own vetted network of 325,000+ engineers and other external sources

across eight markets, with **40 in-house researchers and recruiters** working directly in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

For AI product engineering roles:

5 business days
to get first CVs



2–6 weeks
to fill a role, even specialized AI roles



8 CVs
per accepted offer on average

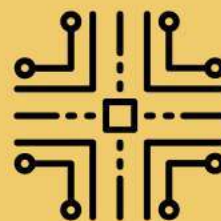


98.6%
probation pass rate



Infrastructure that scales with your roadmap

- ◆ **Team of 5 engineers within the first month**, 30+ within 90 days
- ◆ FTE and B2B **onboarding completed in as little as 10 days**
- ◆ **Employer of Record service** in Mexico, Colombia, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania
- ◆ **Contractor of Record service** in Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria
- ◆ **IP clauses, NDAs, misclassification protection, and equity agreements** handled in every market
- ◆ Dedicated Ops Manager as a **single point of contact** across recruitment, employment, and operations
- ◆ **No deposits, buyout fees, FX charges, or hidden markups**



Leading tech product companies build and scale engineering teams with Alcor:



Get your custom AI team launch plan

Tell us your

target roles

timeline

expected team size

We will prepare

relevant blind CVs

verified salary benchmarks

a hiring plan scoped to your specific
AI product engineering requirements

- across Latin America, Eastern Europe, or both.

No entity required. No outsourcing layer.

Operating as your true in-house team – full control, IP included.

Build your next AI engineering team with Alcor

Methodology

The data in this guide comes from four sources, each covering a different part of the decision picture.



Salary benchmarks

Annual salary figures for AI Engineer, ML Engineer, AI/ML Engineer, MLOps Engineer, AI Data Engineer, LLM Engineer, AI Agent Developer, AI Infrastructure Engineer, ML Data Scientist, AI Platform Engineer, AI Product Engineer, AI-Native Engineer, AI Quality Engineer/SDET, AI Research Scientist, and AI Prompt Engineer across Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria were gathered by Alcor's in-house tech research and recruitment team. Figures reflect base annual wages in USD at the middle, senior, and lead seniority levels, based on active market observation and candidate pipeline data collected in 2026.

All salary figures in this guide are presented as annual amounts. This guide provides the additional cost factors – social security contributions, payroll taxes, statutory benefits, and other employment obligations – needed to calculate the full annual employment cost for each role and country. Salary figures reflect a single average number per role, seniority, and country, based on real market data – not averaged-down composites or externally sourced estimates.



Employment cost and labor law data

Payroll tax rates, statutory employer contributions, mandatory benefits, probation terms, termination conditions, severance rules, and contractor risk considerations were compiled from official government sources and cross-checked against current 2026 regulatory updates for Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria. This data reflects the legal and regulatory environment as of the first half of 2026. Employment law changes frequently – readers should treat the figures as a practical starting framework, not a substitute for country-specific legal advice before hiring.

Methodology



Tech market and talent availability data

Country-level tech market statistics – talent pool size, STEM graduate output, startup ecosystem strength, English proficiency, innovation rankings, and university presence – were sourced from independent third-party authorities including Eurostat, the EF English Proficiency Index, the World Economic Forum, the Global Innovation Index, StartupBlink, Coursera Global Skills Report, and national government and industry sources. Regional totals (e.g., total tech professionals across Latin America or Eastern Europe) reflect broader regional estimates and may exceed the sum of the individual countries profiled in this guide, which cover the primary hiring markets rather than every country in each region. All market statistics are cited in the References section. Where data points reflect estimates or derived figures, this is noted inline.



Internal hiring observations

Hiring feasibility assessments, candidate availability notes, role scarcity signals, and time-to-hire observations draw on Alcor's direct experience placing engineering talent across Latin America and Eastern Europe since 2017, including AI Engineer, ML Engineer, AI/ML Engineer, MLOps Engineer, AI Data Engineer, LLM Engineer, AI Agent Developer, AI Infrastructure Engineer, ML Data Scientist, AI Platform Engineer, AI Product Engineer, AI-Native Engineer, AI Quality Engineer/SDET, AI Research Scientist, and AI Prompt Engineer roles as these specializations emerged. These observations reflect patterns across thousands of active hiring engagements and are intended to give readers a ground-level read on what local hiring actually looks like in practice – not just what published market data suggests.

Important note:

Salary figures and employment cost calculations in this guide are practical reference points, not guarantees. Actual compensation depends on a candidate's specific experience, technical specialization, seniority within a level, and current market conditions at the time of hiring. The figures here are designed to give you a reliable baseline for planning and comparison – precise enough to support real budget decisions, without the false precision of a single number presented as a universal fact.

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