AGF RESEARCH · FACT-CHECKED · 2026

The New *ladder.*

The job market did not collapse after AI. It did something stranger: it split by level. Young workers in AI-exposed occupations sit 19% below trend while experienced workers in the same fields hold or gain; UK graduate postings fell 45% in a single year while the sponsorship salary threshold rose to £41,700 — two jaws of a vise closing on exactly the rung foreigners enter through. The market that was, the market that is, the entry-versus-mid divide at home and abroad, the coming mid-level premium — and the five calls about the future this report will stand behind.

–19%	–45%	£41,700	+78m
young workers vs trend in AI-exposed occupations — experienced: flat to rising	UK graduate postings in one year — the entry gate narrows as the visa clock starts	the UK sponsorship threshold — now priced above most junior salaries	net new jobs worldwide by 2030 (WEF) — the reshuffle, not the apocalypse

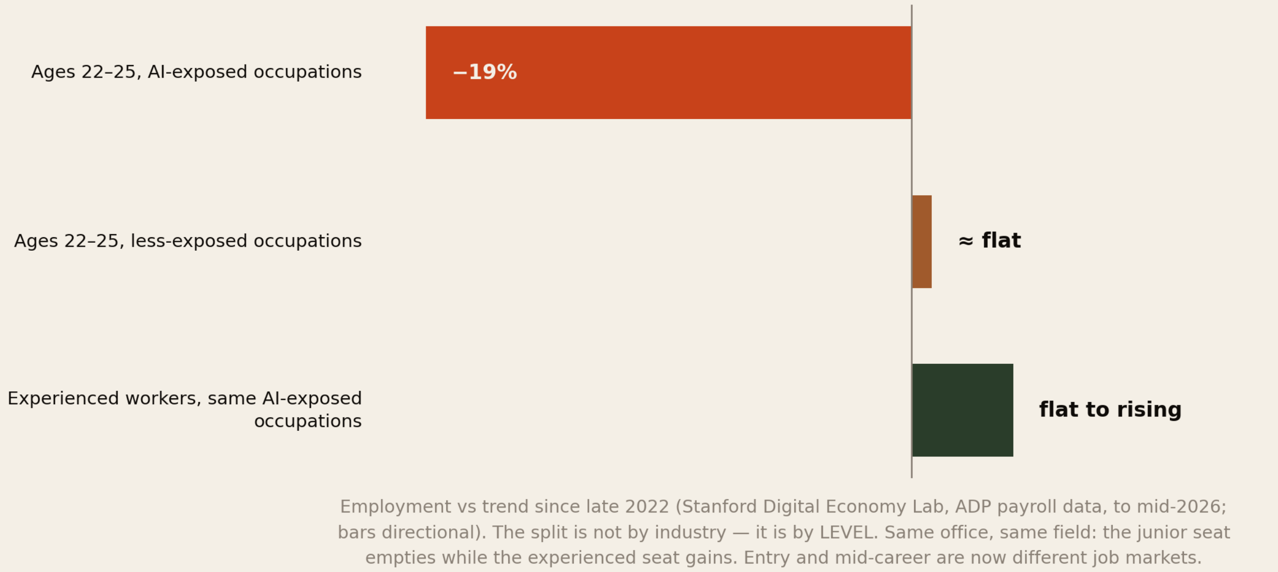

Fig 1 — The split is by level, not industry (Stanford, ADP payroll data; bars directional). Same office, same field: the junior seat empties, the experienced seat gains.

Published September 2026 by Africa Global Forum · africaglobalforum.com/reports/new-ladder-2026

01 · The Short Version

Every career plan in this network — and every family plan behind it — was drawn on a map of the old job market. The map has changed while people were mid-journey. Here is the new one, measured:

- **Before and after, in one line: the jobs did not vanish; the door moved.** The pre-AI market bought graduates in bulk and trained them on repetitive junior work. That work is precisely what AI now does — so intake collapsed at the bottom while everything above it held: UK graduate postings fell 45% year-on-year, and 73% of employers now screen with AI. The aggregate market looks fine. The *entry* market does not.
- **The split is by level, not industry.** Ages 22–25 in AI-exposed occupations are ~19% below trend while experienced workers in the *same occupations* are flat to rising. Entry-level and mid-career are now, functionally, different job markets.
- **Abroad, the split doubles.** The foreign graduate faces the entry squeeze through two gates on one clock: a hiring market that shrank exactly as the post-study window opens, and sponsorship thresholds — the UK's now £41,700 — priced above most junior salaries. Sponsorship migrated up the ladder and out to the shortage lists. Plan for where it went.
- **The global rebalance has winners in two buckets.** WEF: 170 million roles created, 92 million displaced, net +78 million by 2030 — growth in hands-and-heart work (care, health, education, trades) and frontier-tech (AI, data, security); decline in routine information-handling at every level — the diaspora's classic side doors.
- **The future's biggest prize is the middle.** Firms that stopped training juniors still need tomorrow's seniors — a bottleneck that makes trusted mid-level people the scarcest asset of the next decade. Every strategy here reduces to one instruction: cross to mid-level fastest, by any rung available — including building experience at home and entering the global ladder in the middle.

The old market sold ladders. The new one sells a gap — and pays a premium to everyone who finds a way across it.

02 · The Market That Was

THE MARKET THAT WAS (2010s)	THE MARKET THAT IS
• The degree was the ticket — credentials opened the entry rung almost anywhere	• 73% of employers screen with AI; proof and experience outrank paper
• Firms bought trainees in bulk and trained them on repetitive junior work	• The repetitive junior work is exactly what AI now does — so intake shrank
• The “war for talent”: recruiters chased graduates, tech hired ahead of need	• UK graduate postings −45% in a year; entry/junior roles −32% since 2022
• The ladder was continuous: entry → mid → senior, one employer if you liked	• The ladder is broken-laddered: a gap where the bottom rungs used to be

Not mass unemployment — a redistribution. The jobs did not vanish; the door moved. Everything in this report follows from one fact: the tasks firms used to buy juniors for are the tasks AI does first.

Fig 2 — The old deal and the new one. Not mass unemployment — a redistribution.

The 2010s labour market ran on a specific bargain: **the credential was the ticket, and the employer paid for the apprenticeship.** A degree opened a junior seat; the first years were repetitive, supervised work that was simultaneously the firm's grunt work and the worker's training. The “war for talent” years were that bargain at maximum generosity — and they are the years the diaspora's playbook was written in: study abroad, catch the scheme, convert to sponsorship, settle. The load-bearing detail: **the entry rung existed because the repetitive work existed.**

03 · What Actually Changed

The change was surgical, not apocalyptic. Total employment did not crash. What changed is **which tasks firms must buy humans for** — and the first tasks AI took were precisely the repetitive junior ones the entry bargain was built on. The result shows up where the mechanism predicts: hiring freezes at the bottom, stability above — UK graduate postings –45% year-on-year, entry/junior vacancies down roughly a third since late 2022, young-worker employment in exposed occupations sliding while experienced employment holds. And 73% of employers now screen with AI, so the shrunken doors are also guarded differently.

Both popular stories are wrong. Not “AI is taking all the jobs” — the WEF's net projection is positive and experienced workers are gaining. Not “nothing changed” — tell that to the graduate holding forty rejections. The accurate sentence: **AI repriced the ladder, rung by rung — and the bottom rung took nearly all of the hit.**

The honest complication: the attribution is genuinely contested. LinkedIn's 2026 Labor Market Report argues the slow market is *not* AI's fault — in its data, hiring trends look similar for the most- and least-exposed roles, and for entry vs experienced software engineers, with **rates and uncertainty as primary drivers**; hiring sits 20–35% below pre-pandemic across advanced economies while emerging markets surge (India +40%, UAE +37%). A Danish linked-data study found **no detectable average effect on earnings or hours** two years after ChatGPT in its occupations; the NY Fed documents graduate unemployment rising 3.6%⟶5.6% (2019⟶2026, ages 22–27) but points also at remote work destroying entry-job mentoring. The refined Stanford reading: 22–25s *fell ~11%* in the two most-exposed quintiles while *growing ~10%* in the least — a 19% *relative* shortfall, not an absolute collapse. Where that leaves a reader: **the entry squeeze is real and measured; its causes are contested — and for the jobseeker it barely matters, because every strategy in this report works under both explanations.**

The receipts — companies that cut, what they cut, and what they said (2023–2025, company statements and reporting)

Chegg	−22% of staff (May 2025), then −45% more (Oct 2025). The purest case: students went straight to the chatbot, and the revenue followed
Klarna	~700 support roles handed to its AI assistant — then quietly rehired humans when service quality dropped. The reversal the hype skips
Salesforce	customer support cut from 9,000 to 5,000; the CEO: "I need less heads" — AI agents doing roughly half the support workload
Amazon	~14,000 corporate roles (Oct 2025), after the CEO's memo that AI agents "will reduce our total corporate workforce"
Indeed + Glassdoor	1,300 roles (8% of the combined workforce), leadership citing AI job-matching — the job boards automating their own jobs
Duolingo	10% of contractors — mostly translators; ~95% of new lesson content now AI-generated, humans kept for review
IBM	~7,800 back-office and HR roles earmarked for AI since 2023 — while hiring continued in engineering and sales: the level split, in one firm

Trackers count 300,000+ jobs cut with AI cited since 2023 — a number to hold loosely: CEOs now credit AI for cuts driven by rates and over-hiring ("AI-washing"), and hide AI where the optics are worse. Read the function, not the brand: support, HR, content, translation — the entry-adjacent office work — goes first, every time.

Fig 3 — The receipts: companies that cut, what they cut, and what they said (2023–2025). Read the function, not the brand.

Because abstractions hide what names reveal, the receipts. Read Fig 3 as a pattern: **what got cut is the same function everywhere** — customer support (Klarna, Salesforce), back-office and HR (IBM, Amazon's corporate layer), content and translation (Duolingo), matching (Indeed) — the routine information-handling this report maps, and the entry-adjacent office work the diaspora's side doors ran through. Two cases deserve attention: **Chegg** is the purest displacement story on record — students walked to the chatbot and two-thirds of the company followed the revenue out; **Klarna** is the purest correction — 700 support roles handed to an AI assistant, then humans quietly rehired when quality dropped. And hold the table loosely in both directions: trackers count 300,000+ jobs cut with AI cited since 2023, but CEOs now credit AI for cuts driven by rates and over-hiring ("AI-washing"), while others automate quietly where optics are worse. The practical read: **watch the function, not the brand** — support, back-office, content and matching are the early-warning roles; judgement, licence, hands and trust are where the same firms keep hiring.

04 · Entry vs Mid: The Level Split

The Stanford payroll research separates workers by age *and* occupation exposure: **ages 22–25 in the most AI-exposed occupations are ~19% below trend; the same ages in less-exposed work are roughly flat; and experienced workers in the very same exposed occupations are flat to rising** (Fig 1). It is not that accounting is dying and nursing is thriving — it is that *junior* accounting is dying while *senior* accounting thrives. The split runs horizontally through every exposed industry.

- **Experience inflation:** with juniors optional, "entry-level" postings quietly demand two or three years of experience — the rung is advertised but not really there.

- **The queue at fewer doors:** record graduate cohorts compete for a shrunken intake, so rejection counts say less about candidates than ever — read alongside our confidence research.
- **The quiet appreciation of the middle:** the same mechanism that starves the bottom bids up everyone already across — Section 07's story. Entry and mid-career now have different prices, queues and politics. Treat them as different markets, because employers already do.

05 · The Same Split, Abroad

The same split, abroad — the foreigner faces the entry squeeze through two gates on one clock

−45%	UK graduate postings, year on year — the market gate narrows exactly when your post-study clock starts ticking
£41,700	the UK Skilled Worker salary threshold (raised from £38,700 in 2025) — sponsorship now starts above most junior salaries
2 gates, one clock	a local graduate can wait out a bad market; the foreign graduate must clear hiring AND sponsorship inside a fixed visa window
The shift	sponsorship migrates up the ladder (mid/senior) and out to the shortage lists (health, care, trades) — plan for where it went

Fig 4 — Two gates, one clock. The entry squeeze lands hardest on the person with the least time to wait it out.

No single migrant story — official statistics by destination (INSEE, Eurostat, StatCan, BLS). The bigger foreigner problem is often not unemployment but the overqualification trap — and it predates AI.

France — unemployment, immigrants vs non-immigrants (2024)	**11.7% vs 6.9%** the gap predates GenAI — structural, not new
EU — tertiary-educated working below their qualification, non-EU vs nationals	**41.4% vs 20.0%** the overqualification trap: employed, but beneath the degree
Canada — recent immigrants reporting overqualification vs Canadian-born	**32.6% vs 19.1%** same pattern, different measure (self-reported)
United States — foreign-born vs native-born unemployment (2025)	**4.2% vs 4.3%** near parity in the aggregate — the exception that proves there is no single migrant story

Fig 5 — No single migrant story (INSEE, Eurostat, StatCan, BLS). The foreigner's bigger problem is often the overqualification trap — and it predates AI.

The honest baseline first: “foreigners abroad” is not one story. France runs a persistent gap — immigrant unemployment 11.7% vs 6.9% (2024) — predating GenAI entirely. The EU's deeper problem: **41.4% of employed tertiary-educated non-EU citizens work below their qualification, vs 20.0% of nationals**; Canada reports the same shape (32.6% vs 19.1%). The US shows near parity in aggregate (4.2% vs 4.3%). The AI-era risk for migrants is therefore not mass exclusion; it is **the deepening of the overqualification trap** — more degree-holders parked in survival work as the junior professional rung thins.

A local graduate facing the frozen rung can wait — live at home, temp, retry. The foreign graduate cannot: the post-study visa is a **fixed clock**, and it starts precisely when the market gate is narrowest. Then the second gate: the UK's general threshold, £38,700 in 2024, now sits at **£41,700** — above most junior salaries — so even the graduate who wins a rare entry seat may find it cannot legally sponsor them. Add the sponsor's calculus (why pay fees for a junior when AI plus abundant local juniors exist?) and the name discount at the algorithmic screen, and the old convert-the-degree route is triple-gated. Where did sponsorship go? **Up and sideways** — up to mid/senior hires that clear thresholds easily, and sideways to the shortage lists (health, care, trades, teaching), which carry lower thresholds, dedicated visas and political protection. The door abroad is open at the top of the ladder and at the hands-and-heart occupations — and nearly shut at the generic junior office rung in between.

06 · Where the Jobs Are Going

The global rebalance — WEF Future of Jobs 2025 (1,000+ employers, 14m workers, 55 economies)

+170m	new roles the World Economic Forum projects will be created worldwide by 2030
−92m	existing roles displaced over the same window — 22% of today's jobs disrupted one way or the other
+78m	net new jobs by 2030. The robot apocalypse is not the story. The reshuffle is — and it has winners by level and by field
39%	of today's core skills expected to change or become outdated within five years — the treadmill under every career

Fig 6 — WEF Future of Jobs 2025: the reshuffle, not the apocalypse.

FASTEST-GROWING TO 2030

- AI, big-data and security specialists — the frontier bucket
- Care workers, nurses, health professionals — the ageing-world bucket
- Educators, delivery, skilled trades, farm and green-energy work
- The pattern: hands-and-heart, or frontier-tech. Little in between

FASTEST-DECLINING

- Clerical and administrative roles — the classic first office job
- Data entry, bookkeeping, payroll — the classic diaspora side-door
- Cashiers, ticket clerks, postal service — the visible middle
- The pattern: routine information handling — at every skill level

WEF Future of Jobs 2025. Note what the growing column is made of: work AI cannot hold (care, trades, teaching) and work that builds AI. The African migration corridors already run heavily into the left column.

Fig 7 — The growth is hands-and-heart or frontier-tech; the decline is routine information-handling — including the diaspora's classic back-office side doors.

Read the columns as a diaspora strategist. The growing side is a barbell: hands-and-heart (care, nursing, education, trades, delivery, green energy — the ageing rich world's unfakeable needs) and frontier-tech (AI, data, security). African migration corridors already run heavily into the first bucket. The declining side contains the clerical, data-entry and bookkeeping roles that carried a generation from survival work into the middle class. Those bridges are the ones burning. Pick an end, or pick the frontier — the middle of the old office is not where the next foothold is.

The frontier end now has a headcount: LinkedIn counts **1.3 million new AI-enabled jobs globally in two years** plus 600,000 new data-centre jobs in the last year, with “AI Engineer” the #1 US role and Head-of-AI positions up ~30% across major economies — the “new-collar” era, much of it hiring without traditional gatekeeping. The US BLS puts numbers under the other end for 2025–35: healthcare support +13.3%, computer/mathematical +7.3%, office and administrative support –4.0% — and projects **60% of new jobs by 2030 from occupations not typically requiring a degree**. The culture is following the money: majorities in the US (62%) and UK (55%) now prefer trades to corporate careers, and ~6 in 10 Gen Z call trades more meaningful than office work. The barbell is not a hardship posting. It is where the market's respect went.

07 · The Mid-Level Premium

The mid-level premium — why the middle of the ladder is becoming the best real estate in the labour market

01 Judgement becomes the product

AI produces drafts, code and analysis in seconds — someone must know which output is wrong, risky or good. That someone is mid-level and up.

02 One-plus-AI replaces a team

The experienced person with AI now does what a senior plus three juniors did. Firms bid up the one; they stopped hiring the three.

03 Accountability cannot be automated

Clients, regulators and courts need a human name on the decision. The licence, the sign-off, the relationship — all live above entry.

04 The bottleneck is coming

Firms that stopped training juniors still need tomorrow's seniors. Within years, mid-level people will be the scarcest asset in the market.

05 The strategy writes itself

Everything in a career now optimises for one thing: reach trusted mid-level fastest — by any rung, door, apprenticeship or market available.

Fig 8 — Why the middle is becoming the best real estate in the labour market.

AI floods the market with drafts, code and analysis — making the scarce input **judgement**: knowing which output is wrong, risky, or good enough to sign. Judgement lives at mid-level and above. The experienced worker with AI does what a senior plus several juniors did — so firms bid up the one and stop hiring the several. **Accountability** completes the moat: clients, courts and regulators require a human name on the decision. And the twist that turns description into forecast: **the training bottleneck**. The juniors firms are not hiring today are the seniors they cannot hire in five years — the market is manufacturing a mid-level shortage, and whoever stands on the middle rungs when it bites will enjoy the best seller's market in modern white-collar history. Every strategy reduces to one sentence: **get across the gap to trusted mid-level, faster than the old ladder assumed, by any rung available.**

08 · Crossing the Gap

Crossing the gap — five ways over the missing rungs, at home and abroad

01 Take the adjacent door

Support, operations, field and client-facing roles still hire at entry — and sit one internal move from the analyst seat that never advertised.

02 Choose ladders with rungs bolted on

Licensed and apprenticed paths — nursing, trades, accounting training contracts, residencies — contractually must train you. AI cannot unbolt them.

03 Arrive pre-experienced

Internships, portfolios, freelance contracts, shipped projects: walk in with the junior years already evidenced, because nobody funds them now.

04 Sequence through home

Entry rungs still exist in Nairobi, Lagos, Kigali. Two years of real responsibility at home, then arrive abroad at mid-level — the reverse of the old playbook, and increasingly the smarter one.

05 Make AI your seniority prosthetic

The junior who reviews AI output like a manager — and can prove it — is functionally mid-level early. Use the tool to climb, not to coast.

Fig 9 — Five ways over the missing rungs, at home and abroad.

The adjacent door: services, operations, support and field roles still hire at entry — and sit one internal move from the analyst seat that never advertises externally; inside beats outside in a frozen market. **Bolted-on rungs**: licensed and apprenticed paths — nursing, trades, training contracts, residencies — are the one part of the economy where training is *contractual*, and the shortage lists make them the most visa-durable routes abroad. **Arriving pre-experienced**: nobody funds the junior years anymore, so evidence them yourself — internships, freelance contracts, shipped projects. **Sequencing through home** — Section 10. And **AI as seniority prosthetic**: the junior who manages AI output like a supervisor — delegating, reviewing, catching errors, taking responsibility — is performing the mid-level act early; documented, that is the fastest synthetic experience available.

09 · What Employers Now Buy

Four things, in rising order of scarcity. **AI-fluency as a floor** — assumed, the way spreadsheet literacy was in 2010. **Proof over paper** — portfolios and shipped outcomes carry the interview; degrees still matter to visas and licences, decreasingly to the market. **Judgement with accountability** — the willingness to say “this is right, and I answer for it” is the human act AI cannot perform and firms most underprice in juniors who show it early. And rarest: **trust across contexts** — holding a client, reading a room, carrying bad news, bridging a Lagos supplier and a London boardroom. Note who that favours: the relational attention our cultures train, the code-switching the diaspora lives daily, the voice this series has been rebuilding. The market that stopped buying our paperwork has started, without noticing, to price our upbringing. The platform data agrees: US postings requiring AI-literacy skills grew 70% YoY; 75% of companies say people skills matter *more* in the AI age; skills-first organisations grew AI talent pipelines 8.2×; and applicants connected to an employee are 3.6× more likely to be hired — network-building as measured arithmetic.

10 · The Home-First Sequence

The old playbook sequenced abroad-first: leave at the bottom, climb over there — rational when foreign entry rungs were plentiful. The new market inverts the arithmetic. **Entry rungs still exist at home**: Nairobi, Lagos, Accra and Kigali firms still hire juniors and hand them real responsibility fast — the thing the Western market stopped doing. Meanwhile the door abroad now opens at *mid-level*, where thresholds clear easily and sponsors compete. Put the facts together: **two or three years of genuine responsibility at home, then entering the global ladder in the middle, increasingly beats arriving abroad at a bottom rung that no longer exists.**

Run the numbers: the home-first candidate arrives above the £41,700 threshold instead of under it; skips the entry bloodbath; carries managed-real-projects proof no graduate scheme provides; and pays for none of it in survival-job years. The costs are real — home salaries during the building years, the WhatsApp optics of classmates who flew first, and the discipline of choosing employers who genuinely develop people. The macro data backs the sequence directly: advanced-economy hiring runs 20–35% below pre-pandemic while **India is +40% and the UAE +37%**; and the landmark AI-at-work study (5,172 support agents, mostly in the Philippines) found productivity gains land largest on the *less experienced* — AI compresses the junior learning curve fastest exactly where juniors still get hired. The direction is unmistakable, and it redeems something this library keeps finding: the diaspora's strongest position was never “escaped” — it is **bilingual in both economies**, and the new ladder now pays for the home years instead of discounting them.

11 · What to Expect Next

What to expect — the five calls this report is willing to make across every AI scenario

01 **The entry squeeze persists**

Whatever AI's ceiling, firms have learned to run leaner at the bottom.
Plan careers assuming the old bulk graduate intake never returns.

02 **The mid-level shortage arrives**

The training pipeline firms switched off becomes a seniority famine within years — enormous leverage for whoever crossed the gap.

03 **Credentials deflate; proof appreciates**

Degrees remain visas' and licences' key, but stop being the market's.
Every year, what you can show beats what you can certify.

04 **Migration politics tighten before easing**

Where domestic juniors sit idle, sponsorship gets politically harder — except along shortage lists, which grow. Ride the lists, not the vibes.

05 **Reskilling becomes rent, not renovation**

39% of core skills turn over in five years. The one-degree career is gone at every level — budget learning like a recurring bill, forever.

Fig 10 — The five calls this report will stand behind across every AI scenario.

Nobody knows AI's ceiling, so this report only makes calls that hold across scenarios. **The entry squeeze persists** — firms have learned to run leaner at the bottom, and organisational learning does not un-learn. **The mid-level shortage arrives** on the training-bottleneck logic — the single best positioning bet available. **Credentials deflate, proof appreciates** — monotonic in every scenario. **Migration politics tighten before easing** — electorates watching their own graduates idle will not liberalise junior sponsorship, while the same ageing electorates expand the shortage lists; ride the lists, not the vibes. And **reskilling becomes rent** — with 39% of core skills turning over in five years, learning is a standing charge, not a phase. Two more currents, without betting the house: **the third door is opening** — with 52% of professionals job-hunting and seekers outpacing openings at the highest rate since the pandemic, “founder” profiles grew 60% YoY and “creator” nearly 90% since 2021, with 4 in 10 Gen Z wanting self-employment; for a diaspora over-indexed on entrepreneurship, the squeezed ladder makes the built-your-own rung more rational. And **adoption lags exposure**: only 20.2% of OECD firms reported using AI in 2025 (52% of large firms, 17% of small) — the squeeze is sharpest at the prestige employers graduates queue for, and smaller firms remain the under-fished pond. What this report will *not* predict: which job titles are “safe”. The honest unit of safety is the level, the licence, and the proof.

12 · The African Advantage

The growing barbell's hands-and-heart end is where African corridors already run, with visas attached and AI structurally locked out. The trust-and-judgement premium prices the capacities our cultures train. The home-first sequence converts Africa's young labour markets from the thing you flee into **the continent's apprenticeship system** — the place the entry rung still exists — feeding the global mid-level shortage richer markets are manufacturing. And demography does the long arithmetic: the ageing world is running out of exactly the people the youngest continent produces. AI changes which door they enter through. It does not change that the doors, on a twenty-year view, need them more than ever. The diaspora's role: **the bridge** — the mid-level professional mentoring the junior at home across the gap; the chama funding a training contract instead of a generic master's; the Forum thread mapping which employers develop and which sponsors sponsor. The old ladder was climbed alone, in one country. The new one is crossed in networks, across two — and a diaspora is, by definition, the network that spans them.

13 · The Uncomfortable Part

First: some people mid-journey are on the wrong ladder, and kindness is saying so early. The cousin two years into a generic degree chosen for the old market; the graduate burning their visa window on the vanished analyst intake; the family still selling land for repriced credentials — the sunk-cost instinct will keep them climbing toward a missing rung. Name where the ladder actually goes, grieve the plan briefly, re-route while the window is open. A hard conversation this year beats a survival-job decade.

Second: the entry squeeze is doing quiet damage this community should name. Behind every “lazy graduate” joke at a family gathering is a young person with eighty applications into a market 45% smaller, judged by elders whose entry rung existed. The rejection arithmetic has changed; the shame machinery has not. A community that understands Fig 1 stops auditing its juniors and starts building them bridges — introductions, first contracts, portfolio commissions. Judge the market, not the child.

Third: the mid-level premium has an expiry date too. This report's central bet — cross to mid, collect the shortage premium — is a decade's strategy, not a lifetime's. AI capability is not finished, and the judgement moat will be tested from below continuously. The durable posture is not a rung but a habit: re-skill annually, keep proof current, hold a licence where possible, maintain the two-economy network — and never let one country, one employer, or one ladder own your whole plan. That is the oldest diaspora skill there is.

14 · Method & Limits

This report combines payroll-data research, vacancy statistics, visa-policy records and employer surveys, as at 14 September 2026 — with the futures flag its forward sections require.

- **The level-split findings** (~13% in the 2025 paper, ~19% by mid-2026; less-exposed peers flat; experienced flat to rising) are Brynjolfsson, Chandar & Chen (Stanford; ADP payroll data) — US data, one large provider, relative-to-trend measures. Fig 1's bars are directional renderings, not exact magnitudes for the second and third rows.

- **The UK vacancy figures** (graduate postings –45% YoY; positions –33% in 2025 to the lowest since 2018; entry/junior –32% since late 2022) come from job-board and institute analyses with differing definitions; we cite the consistent direction. Attribution to AI specifically is partial — interest rates and post-pandemic correction contribute.

- **The threshold figures** (£38,700 → £41,700) are UK policy as amended July 2025; occupation and shortage-list thresholds differ, and other destinations vary — the UK is the emblematic case, not a universal quote.

- **The WEF projections** are employer *expectations* from a structured survey, not a forecast model. We use them for composition and direction.

- **The attribution debate is presented as live, because it is.** LinkedIn's Labor Market Report attributes the slow market to rates and uncertainty, finding similar trends across exposure levels; Stanford's revision finds the exposed-young gap persists after firm-shock controls but attenuated by education controls — a ~19% relative shortfall (–11% most-exposed quintiles vs +10% least), not an absolute decline; Denmark's linked-data study bounds average effects near zero for its window; the NY Fed adds remote-work mentoring loss as a rival channel. We treat the squeeze as fact and its causes as contested.

- **The migrant-outcome statistics** (France 11.7/6.9%; EU overqualification 41.4/20.0%; Canada 32.6/19.1%; US 4.2/4.3%) use differing definitions of “immigrant” and are context, not a ranking — none isolates an AI effect.

- **The LinkedIn figures** (1.3m AI-enabled jobs; 600k data-centre roles; +70% AI-literacy postings; 75% people-skills; 8.2× and 3.6×; founder/creator growth; trades sentiment) are platform and commissioned-survey data with the selection biases of both. The BLS projections are US-only.

- **The 73% AI-screening figure** is from employer surveys of varying methodology; estimates range ~70–90%+. The direction — automated screening as the norm — is not in dispute.
- **Sections 07, 10, 11 and 12 are interpretive:** the mid-level-shortage thesis extrapolates the visible training bottleneck forward; home-first sequencing is strategy built on documented dynamics, not a measured cohort outcome; the five “expect” calls are judgement limited to scenario-robust claims.
- **Nothing here is career advice for a specific situation** — corridors, fields and licences differ enormously. And per this library's standing disclosure: AI was used in producing this research, under the same editorial and verification standards as every report — maximum tool, human voice, receipts kept.

Principal sources

Brynjolfsson, Chandar & Chen, “Canaries in the Coal Mine” (Stanford Digital Economy Lab) and its 2026 update; LinkedIn's Labor Market Report 2026; a member-shared research dossier (“Jobs Before and After Generative AI”, Sept 2026) whose primary citations — ILO youth trends and GenAI exposure index, OECD adoption data, the Denmark NBER study, the QJE support-agent study, NY Fed advisories, INSEE, Eurostat, StatCan and BLS — we verified and cite; WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025; IES and HEPI on the UK graduate market; UK Skilled Worker threshold analyses; employer AI-screening surveys via industry reporting; and this library's prior measurement in the graduate-market, CV, visa, student-cost and AI reports. Full inline links in the web edition.

Africa Global Forum is a peer network for Africans abroad — help each other, sit together, and bounce ideas. This research is part of an open library, free to read and share. The Forum itself is by application.

Read the web edition with live source links: africaglobalforum.com/reports/new-ladder-2026
Companion reports: The Algorithm at the Border · The Graduate Job Market · The Name on the CV · Open-Door Countries
Apply to join: africaglobalforum.com