

Second Talent Releases ROI Framework to Evaluate AI Engineer Cost-Effectiveness

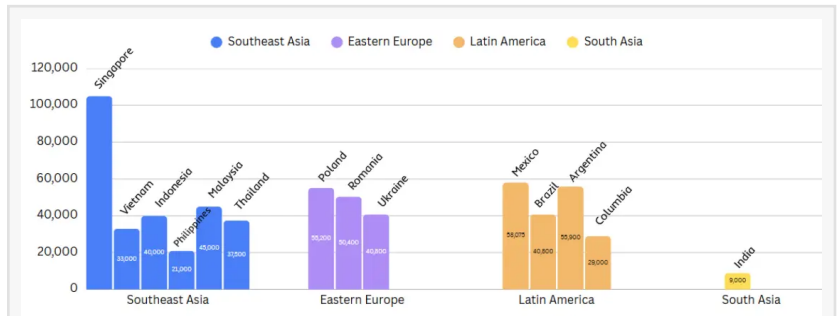
New benchmarking framework ranks 18 countries, finding startups can save over \$400,000 annually by hiring offshore AI engineers

CA, UNITED STATES, April 7, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new report has introduced the first-ever Engineering ROI Score, a composite index that gives U.S. tech startup founders a data-driven framework for making global AI hiring decisions, at a time when domestic engineering talent has never been more expensive or harder to find.

The 2026 Global [AI Engineer Rate Report](#) by [Second Talent](#) benchmarks AI and software engineering compensation across 18 countries and synthesizes cost, talent supply, English proficiency, U.S. time-zone alignment, and hiring depth into a single 0–100 score, replacing guesswork with structured, market-specific intelligence.

The Engineering ROI Score: A First-of-Its-Kind Hiring Framework

The report's most significant contribution is the Engineering ROI Score, which ranks every analyzed market across five equally critical variables: cost efficiency, talent supply, English proficiency, time-zone alignment with U.S. business hours, and hiring depth.



average salary across major city hubs



The results challenge conventional offshore hiring assumptions:

- India leads all 18 markets with a score of 83, earning perfect 10/10 ratings in both cost efficiency and talent supply — the strongest structural case for any budget-conscious startup
- The Philippines ranks second in Southeast Asia at 72, combining a 9/10 English proficiency score with one of the lowest AI engineer salary floors in the dataset — as low as \$12,000 annually
- Brazil and Colombia both score 70, driven by near-perfect U.S. time-zone alignment ratings that eliminate the collaboration friction most commonly associated with offshore hiring



Unlike raw salary comparisons, the Engineering ROI Score accounts for the operational variables communication, availability, and hiring speed, that determine whether a distributed team actually delivers.

The Cost Gap Is Bigger Than Most Founders Realize

The report's blended team modeling puts the salary disparity into stark operational terms. A standard five-person AI team costs over \$600,000 annually in the United States, compared to just \$180,000–\$280,000 in Southeast Asian or Latin American markets. That gap widens dramatically at scale: ten-person teams in mature markets exceed \$1.1 million per year, while equivalent offshore configurations remain below \$500,000.

Translated into agile delivery cycles, the difference is equally striking. The same five-person team costs approximately \$23,000 per sprint domestically versus \$8,500 offshore, a 63% reduction in per-cycle delivery cost that directly extends startup runway.

A 130% Surge in AI Job Postings Is Forcing Startups to Look Globally

Underpinning both findings is a domestic talent crisis that shows no signs of slowing. AI-related job postings have surged more than 130% since early 2020, with more than one in every 25 job ads now mentioning artificial intelligence, even as broader tech hiring has cooled.

With U.S. median AI engineer compensation sitting at \$140,910 annually per the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the arithmetic of domestic-only hiring is becoming increasingly difficult for early-stage startups to justify.

About the 2026 Global AI Engineer Rate Report

The AI Engineer Rate report analyzes compensation data across 18 countries spanning Southeast Asia, India, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, covering AI/ML, Back-end, Front-end, DevOps, and QA engineering roles at mid and senior levels.

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