AI Won't Take Your Job... But It May Keep Your Son From His First One

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> **The danger approaching our homes looks nothing like the familiar image of robots taking over offices. It is quieter than that: a first job that is never advertised, a graduate who waits, and a family that pays the cost of waiting. In my view, this is a human rights question before it is an economic one.**

A scene from an Emirati home

Abu Khalid comes home after a quarter of a century at the same organisation and tells his wife that "the new system" has cut his report-writing time in half. In the next room, Khalid, who graduated in information systems eight months ago, updates his list of applications: forty-two applications, three interviews, not a single offer.

The father has become more productive thanks to the very tool that may have allowed employers to do without his son.

This scene is a composite of common situations and does not describe any particular family. But it captures what the latest available data, mostly from the United States, suggest: so far, artificial intelligence is not pushing experienced workers out on a large scale, but in the occupations most exposed to it, it is narrowing the door through which young people used to enter the labour market. In the UAE, this is a serious possibility that calls for monitoring, not yet a fact proven by numbers.

My position in this article is clear: public debate is asking the wrong question. The more important question is "who will give our children the first opportunity to learn?", not "will the machine take my job?". And the answer is not a matter for companies alone, because it touches a right guaranteed by the Constitution and a stability on which the family rests.

What does the evidence say?

The clearest evidence available today comes from the United States, not from our region. On 12 August 2026, the Stanford Digital Economy Lab released an update to the study "Canaries in the Coal Mine?" by Erik Brynjolfsson, Bharat Chandar and Ruyu Chen, based on ADP payroll data through June 2026. Its main findings:

- The study found no evidence of widespread, economy-wide job losses.

- Employment of workers aged 22 to 25 in the occupations most exposed to AI fell by about 11% between November 2022 and June 2026, while employment of the same age group in the least exposed occupations rose by about 10%.
- The relative employment gap for this age group, compared with where it would be had it kept pace with peers in less-exposed occupations, reached about 19% in the June 2026 data, up from 15% in the July 2025 data.
- The decline is concentrated in occupations where AI is used to automate work, and does not appear to the same degree where it is used to assist the worker.

The researchers themselves describe their results as early, descriptive indicators, not causal estimates. No reader should lose sight of that caveat.

Globally, S&P Global's report "AI impact on employment 2026" found that the net employment effect reported by companies over the past year was negative, with a marginal decline expected in 2026. The same report cautions that job cuts cannot all be attributed to AI, and notes that small firms still expect a positive effect.

And in the UAE and the Gulf?

Here I must be candid: I found no Emirati or Gulf study published in 2026 that measures youth employment by occupational exposure to AI in the way the Stanford study does. What is available are indirect indicators, and they deserve a careful reading:

- **Adoption:** The UAE ranked first in the world for AI use, at 70.1% of the working-age population in the first quarter of 2026, according to Al Khaleej newspaper (11 October 2026), citing the AI diffusion report for that quarter.
- **Skills:** According to PwC's "AI Jobs Barometer 2026 – UAE analysis", the share of job postings requiring AI skills tripled, from 1% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2025. However, an analysis published by Enterprise in July 2026 noted that total postings in AI-affected fields fell between 2024 and 2025; in other words, the share grew within a shrinking pool.
- **Hiring:** The Hays GCC Salary Guide 2026 reports that 90% of participating organisations faced skills shortages in 2025, and that 66% increased headcount in 2025, while only 13% said they had no major hiring plans for 2026. ManpowerGroup's Employment Outlook Survey for Q3 2026 found that 42% of participating UAE employers planned to add staff while 25% expected cuts, a net outlook of 17% after a sharp drop linked to regional tensions, before it rebounded to 41% in the Q4 survey.
- **Emiratisation:** Figures from the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation show that more than 190,000 Emiratis were working in the private sector, at more than 32,000 companies, by the end of the first half of 2026.

The picture, then, is of a market that is hiring, complaining of skills shortages, and adopting AI faster than any other. What we do not know in numbers is how much of this hiring goes to new graduates compared with experienced workers. Filling that data gap is the first thing I call for.

Why does the newcomer pay first?

Entry-level employees used to learn a profession through its small tasks: summarising files, preparing drafts, entering data, answering customers, writing basic code. These tasks were the first rung of the ladder, where a newcomer made mistakes and learned under the eye of someone more experienced. They are exactly what AI tools now do well.

What experienced staff bring — judgement, knowledge of people, an understanding of the organisation — remains hard to replace. So management faces a simple calculation: a tool reviewed by an experienced employee is cheaper and faster than a newcomer who needs a year of training.

This does not happen through waves of layoffs that make headlines. It happens quietly, through job advertisements that are never posted. That is why it may not show up in overall unemployment rates, while it does show up in Khalid's room.

For those asking which occupations are meant: tracking by the Stanford lab with ADP Research, as reported by Fortune in July 2026, points to software development and customer service among the most exposed. These are precisely among the destinations our technology and business graduates most often aim for. I have no Emirati figure proving the same effect has occurred here, but the similarity of career paths is enough reason to put the question to policymakers and universities before the market answers it in its own harsh way.

What stands out in the Stanford study is that the type of use makes the difference: where AI assists the worker, the change remains limited. This means the fate of entry-level jobs is a management decision made by people, not a technological destiny. This is my inference from the study, and it is the core of my argument.

One question remains that cost spreadsheets do not ask: if we remove the first rung today, where will tomorrow's managers come from?

What does the family lose?

I have no published Emirati data measuring the effect of delayed employment on families, so what follows is analysis based on knowledge of our society, not a documented figure.

In an Emirati home, a first job is a family event. It is tied to financial independence, readiness for marriage and starting a household, and how a young person is seen by family and by himself. When it is delayed, all of these stages are delayed with it.

Parents carry the cost of extended support. The young person carries something heavier: a feeling that years of study were not enough, and that every rejection letter is a verdict on his worth. What begins as individual anxiety easily becomes tension within the home.

Picture a mother whose relatives ask her at every gathering, “Where is your son working?”. She changes the subject with a smile, then comes home to find her son has withdrawn from the majlis so that no one asks him the same question. This, too, is an illustrative example, but many families will recognise something of their own lives in it. Long unemployment after graduation is not measured in money alone, because it affects a young person's standing among family and community.

The UAE Constitution places the family at the heart of society: Article 15 states that “the family is the basis of society; it is founded on religion, morality and love of the homeland, and the law shall guarantee its existence, safeguard it and protect it from deviation”. From this angle, any change in the labour market that delays young people's stability is a family and national matter whose effects reach far beyond human resources departments.

Families also have a role they cannot avoid. Many choices of university major are made in the family majlis, based on an outdated image of the “guaranteed job”. The more useful question today is: which skill will still be needed when the job itself changes?

The first opportunity is a right, not a favour

Article 20 of the UAE Constitution provides that society values work as a cornerstone of its progress and works to provide it for citizens and to qualify them for it. I pause at the word “qualify”: the Constitution speaks of the path to work, and training is part of that path. When entry-level jobs disappear, the most important ground for qualification disappears with them.

Internationally, Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognises everyone's right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work.

National legislation already offers tools to build on. Article 4 of Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 on the Regulation of Labour Relations prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, national or social origin, or disability where it impairs equality of opportunity.

Article 18 of Federal Decree-Law No. 45 of 2021 on the Protection of Personal Data provides an important legislative basis for protecting individuals from some of the effects of decisions resulting from automated processing, as it regulates the right to

object to such decisions and the possibility of requesting their review with human involvement, subject to the conditions and exceptions set out in the law. Hence the importance of examining how far these safeguards apply to systems that screen job applications and assess candidates, in a way that strengthens transparency and fairness and protects applicants' rights.

But there is a gap in the picture that deserves discussion, and this is my personal view: the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Labour Law does not expressly mention age. In the age of algorithms, a seemingly neutral requirement, such as two years of experience for an entry-level post, may be enough to exclude an entire generation without anyone intending to discriminate. I am not saying that every experience requirement is discrimination; some jobs genuinely need it, and what counts as indirect discrimination is for the text of the law and the courts to settle. But requiring experience for a post described as entry-level at least deserves to be questioned.

There is another dimension of professional dignity that is rarely mentioned: silence. An applicant rejected by a human manager may hear a reason, or at least knows that a person read the application. An automated rejection usually arrives as a template message, with no explanation and no one to ask. Repeated dozens of times, this silence leaves a psychological mark that statistics do not capture. Respect for a person begins with knowing who decided about him, and why.

How many young people know the legal safeguards that may allow them to object to a decision resulting from automated processing, and to request a human review of it, where the provisions of the law apply?

The counter-arguments, and my response

"AI creates more jobs than it destroys." That may be true in the long run, and Gulf figures do show employers planning to hire. But new jobs mostly require experience and advanced skills, and organisations themselves complain of skills shortages. So the question is about the path to these jobs, not their number. A young person denied a first job will not gain the experience the new jobs demand.

"Correlation is not causation." True, and the researchers themselves claim nothing more. But in a note published by the Stanford lab on 9 February 2026, they tested the leading alternative explanation, rising interest rates, and found no support for the view that it explains the disproportionate decline in entry-level jobs. At the same time, they acknowledged that the AI-linked decline becomes statistically significant only from 2024, and that part of the earlier decline is due to other factors. Moreover, a gap that widened from 15% to 19% in a single year justifies caution. Sound public policy does not wait for complete certainty when the potential price is a generation's future.

"The study is American, our market is different, and Emiratisation protects citizens." This is the strongest argument, and I take it seriously. Emiratisation is an effective tool for securing numbers, and the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council (Nafis) announced in early 2026 a shift from focusing on numbers to the quality of Emiratisation. That shift supports my argument: if the jobs young people hold are the kind that tools automate, the number protects the present and leaves the career path exposed. And the fact that the UAE leads the world in adoption suggests — an estimate, not a certainty — that the effect may reach us faster, not slower.

"Companies have the right to seek efficiency." Yes, and I am not calling for a ban on automation. But a company that eliminates all its entry-level jobs is consuming its own stock of future leaders. Short-term interest does not cancel the social responsibility on which the country's development model rests.

"The responsibility lies with young people: let them learn the tools and adapt." I agree with part of this, and I ask it of our young people. But skill alone does not create experience. A graduate who has mastered AI tools still needs an organisation that allows room for mistakes and correction, and a supervisor who passes on what is not written in books. Placing the whole burden of a structural market shift on the individual is like asking someone to learn to swim and then closing every pool.

What I call for

These are my proposals, a personal position for which I take responsibility:

1. **National data on graduates:** Competent authorities should regularly publish data on the employment of new graduates by sector and by occupational exposure to automation. What we do not measure, we cannot fix.
2. **Incentives for learning jobs:** Emiratisation policies should reward companies that keep entry-level positions and redesign them as supervised learning roles.
3. **Transparency in automated hiring:** Applicants should be told when an automated tool takes part in assessing them, and be given a genuine human review, in keeping with the spirit of Article 18 of the Personal Data Protection Law.
4. **A calm legislative discussion:** Consideration should be given to expressly including age among the prohibited grounds of discrimination in employment.
5. **The role of the home:** Parents should sit with their children once each semester to review skills and practical experience, alongside grades.

Universities share in this responsibility. The internship, now often treated as a formality for graduation, could become the bridge the labour market has lost: longer placements, real tasks, binding partnerships with companies, and assessment that measures what the

student actually learned. This, too, is a personal proposal, but it costs far less than a generation waiting years for its first chance.

The decision is in our hands

Tomorrow Khalid will send his forty-third application. His future will not be decided by a machine. It will be decided by a manager choosing between a tool and a trainee, a legislator deciding what to measure and what to protect, and a father choosing which question to ask at the dinner table.

AI will most likely not take your job. As for your son's first job, its fate depends on what we do now — in the company, in the majlis and at home. This is a battle that can be won, if we begin it before its effects show up in the numbers.

Methodological note

- **Documented facts:** figures attributed to their sources and dates, and the texts of the Constitution and laws cited.
- **Estimates:** any application of the US study's findings to the UAE market, given the absence of a comparable local study published in 2026.
- **Personal views:** the analysis of family impact, the position on the absence of age from the grounds of discrimination, and the proposals.
- **The two human scenes:** illustrative composites that do not refer to real people.

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