

Second Talent Analysis Ranks APAC as Most Cost-Effective Region for Hiring AI Engineers

Fully loaded cost lands at \$48,600 a year in APAC, against \$77,100 in Central and Eastern Europe and \$87,500 in Latin America.

HOUSTON, TX, UNITED STATES, August 21, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Second Talent, an Asia-focused talent and Employer of Record platform, has published a comparison of twelve markets across three regions, pricing the same role the same way in each one. A [senior AI engineer](#), five to eight years in, owning production LLM and agent systems, retrieval, evaluation or MLOps.



On salary alone, Latin America is about 14% cheaper than Central and Eastern Europe. Add the statutory employer contributions each market actually charges, and LATAM becomes roughly 14% more expensive than CEE.

LATAM salary averages \$60,400. Add \$27,200 in employer burden and the total comes to \$87,500. CEE starts higher on salary, \$70,400, but the burden is a fraction of LATAM's, just \$6,700, which brings it to \$77,100. APAC is the cheapest on both counts. Salary averages \$43,500, burden is just \$5,100, for a total of \$48,600. Measured against the US baseline of \$218,000, APAC runs 78% lower, CEE 65% lower and LATAM 60% lower.

Brazil's CLT stack adds close to 60% once the 13th salary and vacation provisions are annualized, and Colombia's parafiscales aren't far behind. Poland is the exception because roughly 65% of Polish developers invoice as B2B sole traders, so the statutory employer rate on the dominant engagement type is zero. Romania shifted its social burden onto the employee in 2025, and Ukraine's Diia City regime caps the employer contribution at 22% of the minimum wage, a few hundred dollars a year rather than a percentage of a senior salary.

At the individual market level, Brazil comes in at \$100,800 fully loaded and Czechia at \$97,200, both above Poland's \$83,000 despite Poland's higher headline salary band. In APAC, the

Philippines sits at \$42,200, [Vietnam](#) at \$47,900, Indonesia at \$47,100 and India at \$57,200.

English proficiency and time-zone overlap

The report also tests the English-proficiency argument common in nearshore sales materials. Using the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, APAC averages 506 across its four tracked markets, against LATAM's 494. Argentina ranks 26th in the world, and the Philippines isn't far off at 28th, ahead of every other LATAM market in the set. Mexico's ranking is 103rd of 123 after falling 19 points in a single year. CEE tops the table with a 578 average, led by Romania at 11th and Poland at 15th.

Time zones are where LATAM pulls ahead. It provides 7.8 hours of shared working time against a standard US Eastern day, well above CEE's 2.5 hours and APAC's zero. Flip the reference point to a Central European day, though, and the order reverses. CEE provides 8.5 hours, LATAM 3.8, APAC 3.1. Second Talent notes that shifted schedules are standard practice in APAC hiring and are typically negotiated into the offer, adding back three to five hours of overlap. So LATAM's overlap comes free with a standard schedule, while CEE and APAC build theirs through negotiated hours.

Talent supply and screening

India added 5.2 million new developers to GitHub in 2025, roughly 14% of every new developer worldwide, according to GitHub Octoverse 2025. NASSCOM and Deloitte put India's requirement at 1.25 million AI professionals by 2027, against a demand-supply gap of about 51%. Coursera recorded 2.6 million generative-AI course enrollments in India in 2025, more than any other country, up 107% year on year. Brazil's developer population grew 4x over five years, the fastest rate in LATAM, and Ukraine's Diia City regime accounts for 104,000 specialists across more than 1,700 companies.

Coursera's 2025 proficiency ranking places Vietnam 33rd, Poland 34th, Brazil 62nd and India 89th. India ranks first globally in generative-AI enrollments and 89th on proficiency, a gap Second Talent attributes to screening processes rather than talent availability.

"There is no single winner here, only a constraint you care about most," said Elton Chan, Co-founder and CEO at Second Talent. "If your AI engineers pair daily with US product and design, budget for the overlap. If you're EU-headquartered and want research-grade ML, CEE justifies the premium. If you're scaling a team and your process can run async-first, APAC offers the lowest loaded cost and the largest talent pool."

Chan added that measurement methodology accounts for much of the confusion in existing comparisons. "A salary figure and a fully loaded figure differ by half again in Brazil, and by nothing at all in Poland on a B2B contract. They're often presented side by side as if they were the same number."

The figures exclude recruitment fees, EOR or entity costs, equipment, discretionary benefits, equity and bonus, which apply across every market and would not change the ranking. Salary bands are triangulated from national IT salary surveys, remote-hiring platform data and Second Talent placement history, converted at spot rates on August 20, 2026. Country-level English scores reflect adult populations, not engineers specifically, who tend to score higher across all markets.

The full report is available: [LATAM vs CEE vs APAC for Hiring AI Engineers](#)

About Second Talent

Second Talent is a global talent platform that connects startups and enterprises with AI-Native tech talent across Asia. The company matches clients with pre-vetted, senior engineers within 24 hours and manages the contracts, payroll and compliance behind every hire, so clients can build without opening a local entity.

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