

 | abhi

EWA MARKET INSIGHTS

-UAE 2026

Overview

The UAE has built one of the world's most advanced and regulated financial ecosystems. Despite high banking penetration, access to credit is gated by income thresholds. Most salary-linked financial products require a minimum monthly income of approximately **AED 5,000**, with higher thresholds for unsecured lending.

In contrast, a large share of blue-collar and service workers earn between **AED 1,500–3,000 per month**. These workers are formally employed, WPS-registered, and paid on time, yet remain structurally excluded from mainstream financial access.

As a result, liquidity gaps have become a defining feature of the UAE labor market. Fixed monthly wage cycles, rising living costs, and persistent remittance obligations place sustained financial pressure on large segments of the workforce.

Personal Finance Benchmarks



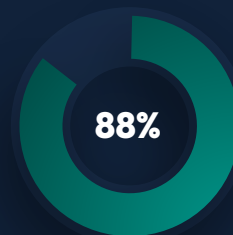
AED 5,000 - 10,000

minimum salary
(Mashreq Al Islami)



AED 8,000+

monthly income for
personal loans
(Commercial Bank of
Dubai)



**Expatriates
comprise the
workforce in the UAE**



The UAE Workforce & Labor Market Composition

The UAE total workforce



9.4m
People



88%
Expatriates

Employment is concentrated in blue-collar and service-led sectors critical to economic continuity. (under these facts combined)

Blue-collar and service workers dominate employment across:



Construction & contracting
Facilities management & security



Logistics, transportation,
and delivery



Hospitality, retail,
and FMCG

These sectors are characterized by fixed monthly wages, limited savings buffers, and heavy dependence on remittances, making liquidity timing, not income level alone, a key challenge.



2nd

Globally in foreign labor force participation

UAE among world's lowest in unemployment as labour force hits record 9.4 million

<https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/uae-among-worlds-lowest-in-unemployment-as-labour-force-hits-record-94-million-1.500309490>

Income Distribution & Structural Credit Exclusion

Despite high overall banking penetration, access to formal credit is highly segmented.



Typical minimum salary thresholds

AED 5,000–8,000/month

AED 1,500–3,000/month



- The base salary of the largest segment of the UAE workforce.

These individuals are fully integrated into the formal economy, employed, WPS-registered, and paid on time, yet remain excluded from mainstream credit.

Historically, this gap has been bridged through:

- Informal lending
- Employer salary advances
- High-cost, unregulated credit mechanisms

This structural exclusion **creates persistent financial vulnerability**, particularly in the final weeks of the pay cycle.

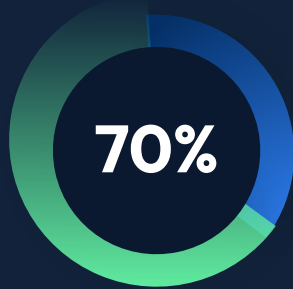
UAE sets minimum wage of Dh6,000 for Emiratis in private sector from January 1, 2026

<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/uae/uae-sets-minimum-wage-of-dh6000-for-emiratis-in-private-sector>

<https://www.bankfab.com/en-ae/personal/credit-cards#:~:text=du%20Credit%20Card,Cashback>

Financial Stress as a Labor Market Risk

Living Paycheck to Paycheck



The highest estimated share of workers living paycheck to paycheck is in the Middle East and Africa region globally.

Recent trends compound this pressure:



Wage growth of approximately 2.6%



Rising housing, transport, and remittance costs

This imbalance has measurable labor market consequences. Surveys indicate:



74% of employees are considering a job change



56% cite financial pressure as the primary reason

In this environment, financial stress is no longer a personal issue; it is a **systemic workforce risk**.

Over half of global workforce living paycheck to paycheck: ADP Report

<https://in.adp.com/about-adp/press-centre/over-half-of-global-workforce-living-paycheck-to-paycheck.aspx>

UAE jobs: Salaries to rise 4% in 2026, some roles may get over 10% hike <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/jobs/uae-salaries-to-rise-2026>

REGIONAL LANDSCAPE

While the UAE is the focal market for this paper, broader MENAP and GCC dynamics reinforce why EWA adoption is accelerating across the region.



Institutional Integration

Banks and exchange houses are partnering with fintechs to build capabilities faster, avoiding in-house complexity.

Cross-Border Remittance

As the world's largest remittance corridor, the GCC is seeing fintech-led rails reduce transfer costs and settlement times.

User Behavior & Product Design Localisation

Users favor transaction-based pricing and employer- or institution-backed solutions. Trust, simplicity, and financial literacy drive adoption.

Wage Infrastructure: The UAE's Strategic Advantage

WPS Overview

The **UAE's Wage Protection System (WPS)**

provides a critical foundation for reform.

Mandated by MOHRE and overseen by the Central Bank, WPS ensures that salaries are:



**Paid fully
and on time**



**Digitized and
traceable**



**Compliant
with labor
regulations**

This system has already created a verified wage trail for millions of workers.

Payroll Ecosystem

The payroll landscape in the UAE includes:



Banks



**Payroll processors
(e.g., Now Money)**



**Exchange
houses**



**Payroll cards and
wallets**



For lower-income and blue-collar workers, exchange houses and payroll cards often serve as the primary financial touchpoints. This ecosystem provides a strong foundation for EWA, as wage data, disbursement rails, and worker trust already exist.

Earned Wage Access as Workforce Infrastructure

Earned Wage Access allows employees to access a portion of wages they have already earned, before payday, without interest, penalties, or debt accumulation.

In contrast to traditional credit:



EWA is
non-debt-based



Access is capped by verified
earnings



Integration occurs through
employers and payroll
systems

When layered onto WPS, EWA benefits from:



Real-time
wage
verification



Automated
controls and
limits



Full
regulatory
traceability

This positions EWA not as an alternative lending product, but as a **natural extension of payroll modernization.**

Sectoral Impact and Workforce Stability

EWA delivers immediate value in sectors with fixed wages and high turnover:



Construction & Contracting

Monthly cycles,
remittance
dependency



Facilities Management & Security

Cash flow gaps
between paydays



Logistics & Last-Mile Delivery

On-demand income
needs



Hospitality & Retail

Shift-based work,
seasonal pressure



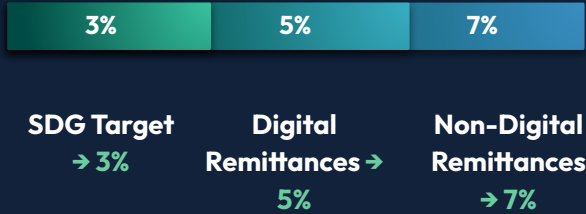
Healthcare

Nurses, technicians,
and support staff living
paycheck to paycheck

Across these sectors, EWA improves attendance, retention, and financial stability.

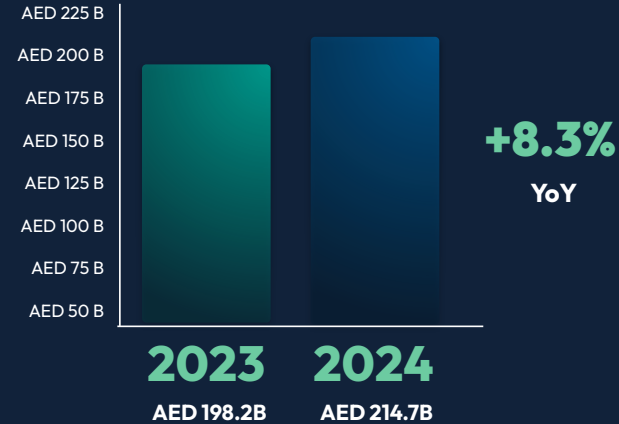
Remittances: Reframing Liquidity for Expat Workers

Remittance Cost Gap



Smaller, urgent remittances are disproportionately penalized by higher fees.

Scale of Outward Remittances



Remittances are not occasional events—they are continuous liquidity movements.

The cost of sending remittances is higher than 3% in 28 countries

[https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/the-cost-of-sending-remittances-is-higher-than-3-in-28-country#:~:text=For%20this%20reason%2C%20the%20UN,remittances%20\(%25\)%2C%202016%20and%202023](https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/the-cost-of-sending-remittances-is-higher-than-3-in-28-country#:~:text=For%20this%20reason%2C%20the%20UN,remittances%20(%25)%2C%202016%20and%202023)

Balance of Payments Developments for the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

https://www.centralbank.ae/media/aqknxvll/balance-of-payments-developments_2023_2024-oct_2025_en.pdf

Remittances: Reframing Liquidity for Expat Workers

For expatriate workers, remittances are not discretionary; they are foundational.

Traditional monthly remittance patterns often fail to align with:



Family emergencies



Education and healthcare expenses



Income volatility across borders

Exchange houses play a central role as trusted liquidity anchors.

When integrated with EWA, they enable:



Smaller, more frequent remittances




Mid-cycle cash access




Payroll card top-ups linked to earned wages


How Remittance-Linked EWA Works




User opens your app or visits your branch.




The system displays the user's real-time accessible earned wage.



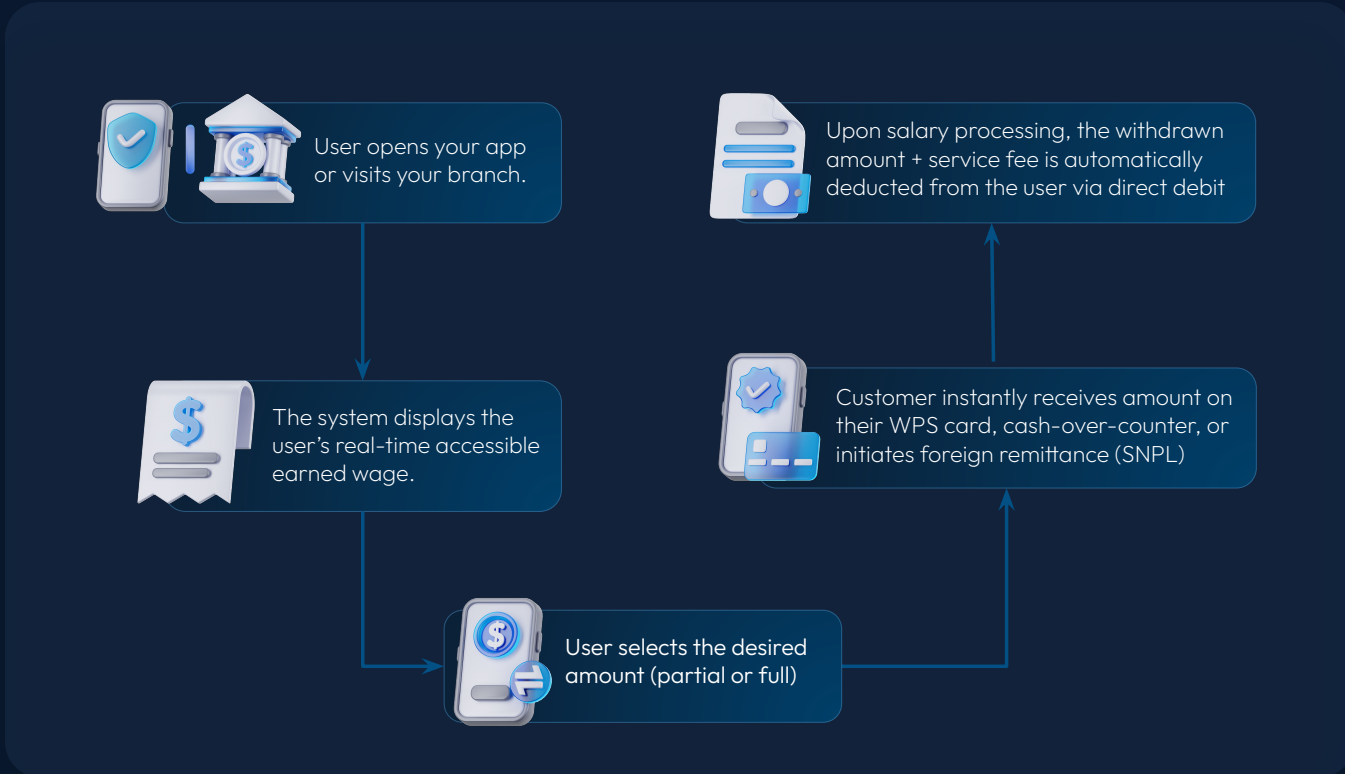
User selects the desired amount (partial or full)



Upon salary processing, the withdrawn amount + service fee is automatically deducted from the user via direct debit



Customer instantly receives amount on their WPS card, cash-over-counter, or initiates foreign remittance (SNPL)



Employer & Ecosystem Value Creation

Employers



Lower attrition and recruitment costs



Reduced absenteeism



Improved engagement and morale



Alignment with ESG and worker welfare commitments

Financial Institutions and Exchange Houses



Increases transaction volumes



Deepens payroll relationships



Enables lower-risk engagement with underbanked segments



ABHI, a Neobank of the Future

Founded in 2021, ABHI is a future-ready neobank designed to embed financial access directly into wage and payroll systems. Starting with Earned Wage Access (EWA), the company has expanded into a comprehensive financial ecosystem offering Payroll Processing, Payroll Financing, and SME Financing. In just four years, ABHI has partnered with over 5,000 companies and positively impacted the lives of more than 1 million people. With operations spanning Pakistan, the UAE, KSA, and most recently Oman through a partnership with Daud Group of Companies, ABHI continues to advance financial inclusion across the MENAP region.

Further solidifying its impact on Pakistan's financial sector, ABHI, in partnership with TPL, has acquired FINCA Microfinance Bank. This acquisition marks a transformative step towards expanding microfinance services and deepening financial inclusion in the country.





GLOBAL RECOGNITION

World Economic Forum
Technology Pioneer (2023)



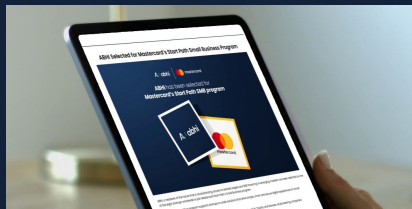
Future 100 UAE List



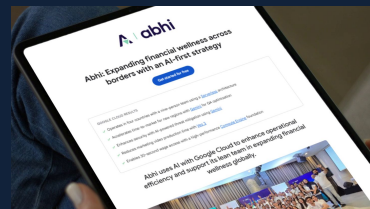
Hub71 & Endeavor
network member



Selected for Mastercard Start
Path SMB program



Google Cloud
featured ABHI



ABHI's Role in the UAE's Ecosystem

ABHI approaches EWA not as a standalone product, but as an embedded financial infrastructure. With experience across Pakistan, UAE, and KSA, ABHI brings:

- Regulatory-first design
- Deep understanding of expatriate wage dynamics
- Flexible integration models:



**Direct employer
integrations**



**Payroll processor
partnerships**



**Exchange house
and card-based
rails**



EMBEDDED FINANCE **AT WORK**

ABHI's flagship engine meets your customer touchpoints.

ABHI Backend



Our Backend –
Tech Infrastructure



Powered by ABHI's
flagship engine



Secure integration
via ABHI's APIs



PARTNER Frontend



Integration with
your middleware



Your app, cards, and
physical touchpoints
as EWA channels

Sources



1. UAE among world's lowest in unemployment as labour force hits record 9.4 million
<https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/uae-among-worlds-lowest-in-unemployment-as-labour-force-hits-record-94-million-1.500309490>
2. UAE sets minimum wage of Dh6,000 for Emiratis in private sector from January 1, 2026
<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/uae/uae-sets-minimum-wage-of-dh6000-for-emiratis-in-private-sector>
3. <https://www.bankfab.com/en-ae/personal/credit-cards#:~:text=du%20Credit%20Card,Cashback>
4. Over half of global workforce living paycheck to paycheck: ADP Report
<https://in.adp.com/about-adp/press-centre/over-half-of-global-workforce-living-paycheck-to-paycheck.aspx>
5. UAE jobs: Salaries to rise 4% in 2026, some roles may get over 10% hike
<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/jobs/uae-salaries-to-rise-2026>
6. The cost of sending remittances is higher than 3% in 28 countries
[https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/odata/the-cost-of-sending-remittances-is-higher-than-3--in-28-countries#:~:text=For%20this%20reason%2C%20the%20UN,remittances%20\(%25\)%2C%202016%20and%202023](https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/odata/the-cost-of-sending-remittances-is-higher-than-3--in-28-countries#:~:text=For%20this%20reason%2C%20the%20UN,remittances%20(%25)%2C%202016%20and%202023)
7. Balance of Payments Developments for the United Arab Emirates (UAE)
https://www.centralbank.ae/media/aqknxvll/balance-of-payments-developments_2023_2024-oct_2025_en.pdf
8. Average Salary in UAE
<https://huduri.com/average-salary-in-uae/>
9. Average Workers Salaries in Dubai for Foreigners: A 2026 Guide for Employers and Workers
<https://www.laboraccommodation.ae/average-workers-salaries-in-dubai-for-foreigners-a-2026-guide-for-employers-and-workers/>
10. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) POPULATION STATISTICS 2025
<https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/uae-population-statistics/>

In an economy built ***on expatriate labor***, ensuring ***timely access to earned income*** is no longer a benefit; ***it is foundational*** to workforce resilience, productivity, and long-term competitiveness.

**THANK
YOU**

A | abhi