INYA SOLUTIONS
ENABLING HUMAN PROGRESS THROUGH TALENT

SECTOR INSIGHT · 04 · DATA CENTRES

The Gulf's AI build-out is a commissioning problem.

Stargate UAE alone is a US$30bn, 5GW ambition. A data centre is a power infrastructure project wearing a technology badge — and its ready-for-service date is set by people who have commissioned critical environments before.

US$30bn+
Reported build cost of the Stargate UAE AI campus

5GW
Target scale of the UAE–US AI Campus in Abu Dhabi

6.4GW
HUMAIN's stated Saudi capacity ambition over the next decade

~3×
Forecast growth in regional capacity by 2030

A workforce intelligence briefing for developers, operators, general contractors and programme directors across the GCC.
Prepared by INYA Solutions · inyasolutions.com · Data current to July 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Announced gigawatts must become commissioned gigawatts.

The Gulf has become one of the fastest-growing data centre markets in the world. Stargate UAE — part of a UAE–US AI Campus in Abu Dhabi targeting around 5GW — has been described by the UAE's AI minister as costing more than US$30bn to build. HUMAIN intends to deliver 6.4GW of Saudi capacity over the next decade. Installed IT load across the Middle East is forecast to rise from roughly 2GW in 2026 to over 3GW by 2031, with third-party capacity expected to roughly triple by the end of the decade.

Almost all of the coverage of this build-out treats it as a technology story. It is not. A data centre is a power infrastructure project. Its delivery is gated by MEP engineering, high-voltage connection and critical-environment commissioning — disciplines that sit far closer to a substation programme than to a software rollout.

That distinction has a direct workforce consequence. The scarcest resource in the region's AI build-out is not GPUs, land or power allocation. It is people who have commissioned a critical environment before — and those people are being competed for simultaneously by the transmission programmes and renewable projects that the data centres themselves depend on.

> **The Gulf's AI infrastructure will not be delayed by chips. It will be delayed by commissioning agents.**

200MW	5,000+	~70%	US$5bn+
Stargate UAE first phase, targeted for Q3 2026	Workers reported on the Stargate UAE initial build	Share of operational UAE capacity held by Khazna	KKR and Gulf Data Hub regional expansion commitment

THE ARGUMENT OF THIS REPORT

Commissioning is the discipline that converts a built facility into a live one, and it is globally the data centre sector's rarest skill set. The GCC is attempting to commission more critical-environment capacity in the next five years than it has in its entire history, using a talent pool that has historically been concentrated in Northern Virginia, Dublin, London and Singapore. Operators who plan Cx resourcing twelve to eighteen months ahead of ready-for-service will hold their dates. Operators who procure it as a late-stage subcontract package will discover the constraint in the quarter it costs them most.

THE CAPITAL

What is being built, and by whom

The table below covers facilities and programmes that are under construction, funded or in active development as at July 2026.

Programme	Country	Scale & value	Status	Workforce signal
Stargate UAE / UAE–US AI Campus	UAE	5GW campus US$30bn+	A roughly 10-square-mile campus in Abu Dhabi built by G42. Stargate UAE is a 1GW compute cluster operated with OpenAI and Oracle, with Cisco, SoftBank and NVIDIA involved. First 200MW phase targeted for completion in Q3 2026, backed by up to US$10bn for the initial gigawatt.	Reported at over 5,000 workers and 100,000m³ of concrete on the initial build. Cx demand peaks 2026–2027.
HUMAIN	Saudi Arabia	6.4GW ambition	Intends to deliver 6.4GW of capacity over the next decade through owned facilities and leased capacity from other operators. First own facilities targeted to go live in Q2 2026.	Sustained decade-long demand across CSA, MEP, Cx and critical operations.
DataVolt Riyadh East	Saudi Arabia	US$500m 44MW	HUMAIN secured as anchor customer for more than 80% of capacity, committing to 36MW of the planned 44MW. First operational phase targeted end-2026, remaining phases mid-2027.	Compressed programme — commissioning is the schedule risk.
DataVolt Oxagon, NEOM	Saudi Arabia	1.5GW campus US$5bn	Campus agreement signed February 2025 within NEOM's Oxagon industrial zone.	Very large future demand; remote-site mobilisation and accommodation complexity.
Khazna Data Centers	UAE and regional	1GW+ expansion	Holds approximately 70% of operational UAE capacity. Announced plans to expand operational capacity by more than 1GW across the Middle East and Europe, including Saudi Arabia and Italy.	The region's largest single operator workforce requirement.
Microsoft / G42 UAE expansion	UAE	200MW	Announced data centre expansion in the UAE, with Khazna leading the project and operations.	Hyperscale-standard commissioning and critical operations.
KKR and Gulf Data Hub	UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait	US$5bn+	Strategic partnership to expand hyperscale capacity, with over US$5bn of planned investment across four GCC markets.	Multi-country delivery — four regulatory and mobilisation regimes.
Regional market (aggregate)	Middle East	US$3.52bn (2026) to US$7.19bn (2031)	Installed IT load capacity forecast to rise from roughly 1.99GW in 2026 to 3.07GW by 2031. Third-party capacity forecast to roughly triple to around 1.5GW by the end of the decade.	Structural, sustained demand rather than a single project peak.

Values and capacities as publicly reported by the operator, investor or established trade press. Market forecasts are third-party estimates and differ between providers. See the source note on the final page.

THE REAL DISCIPLINE MAP

A data centre is a power project with a server room

The workforce a hyperscale facility consumes looks almost nothing like the workforce the public conversation implies. Software and IT roles are a small fraction. The overwhelming majority of the delivery effort is construction, mechanical and electrical engineering, and commissioning.

Delivery phase	Disciplines consumed	Scarcity in the GCC
Site selection & power securing	Development managers, grid connection engineers, power systems consultants, utility interface leads.	High — grid connection engineers are the same people the transmission programmes need.
Design	MEP design engineers, electrical and mechanical leads, structural, fire and life safety, controls architects.	High — hyperscale-specific design experience is thin regionally.
CSA construction	Civil, structural and architectural engineers, construction and package managers, planners, QS, HSE at scale.	Moderate — available regionally, but data centre experience carries a premium.
MEP installation	Mechanical, electrical and public health engineers and supervisors; HV installation; cooling systems specialists.	High — volume requirement combined with critical-environment standards.
Grid connection & energisation	HV commissioning engineers, protection and control, energisation coordinators.	Critical — directly shared with the transmission sector.
Commissioning (levels 1–5)	Commissioning managers, Cx agents, integrated systems test leads, electrical and mechanical Cx specialists.	Critical — the sector's rarest skill set globally, not just regionally.
Operations & critical facilities	Critical facilities managers, shift engineers, controls and BMS specialists, maintenance planners.	High and permanent — every facility entering service adds a standing team.

WHY COMMISSIONING IS THE BINDING CONSTRAINT

— Commissioning is the last activity before handover, which means it absorbs every upstream delay and has no float behind it. A four-week Cx shortfall is a four-week revenue delay, directly.

— The discipline is small everywhere. Level 4 and 5 integrated systems testing on hyperscale facilities is practised by a global population that is measured in the low thousands, concentrated in a handful of mature markets.

— Because it arrives last, it is planned last. Operators routinely lock in GPU delivery eighteen months ahead and begin Cx resourcing three months out.

— Commissioning experience is not interchangeable with construction MEP experience. An excellent electrical installation supervisor is not a commissioning agent, and treating the two as one category is the most common resourcing error in the sector.

CRITICAL ROLES

Where the market is tightest

Difficulty ratings and lead times below are INYA's own assessment of the GCC data centre market as at July 2026.

Discipline	Phase	Difficulty	Lead time	Comment
Commissioning managers & Cx agents (L4–L5)	Cx	Critical	5–8 months	The sector's rarest skill set worldwide. Most experienced practitioners are committed a year ahead.
Electrical commissioning specialists	Cx	Critical	4–6 months	Competing directly with transmission and renewable energisation programmes.
HV connection & grid interface engineers	Power	Critical	4–6 months	See INYA Sector Insight 03 — the same population, three sectors bidding.
MEP design leads with hyperscale experience	Design	High	4–5 months	Regional design houses are staffing up, but reference-project experience is concentrated abroad.
Critical facilities managers	Operations	High	4–6 months	Every facility entering service creates a permanent requirement; supply is not keeping pace.
Controls & BMS / EPMS specialists	MEP / Ops	High	3–5 months	Vendor-specific experience narrows an already small pool.
Cooling systems specialists (incl. liquid cooling)	MEP	High	4–6 months	High-density AI workloads are changing cooling design faster than the labour market can adapt.
MEP installation supervisors	Construction	Moderate–High	3–4 months	Available, but critical-environment discipline and QA standards thin the field.
CSA construction managers	Construction	Moderate–High	3–4 months	Strong regional pool; data centre delivery experience commands a premium.
Shift engineers & technicians	Operations	Moderate	2–4 months	Best long-term vehicle for national talent development in this sector.

Lead times run from approved brief to productive on site, including visa processing and relocation. Commissioning lead times reflect both scarcity and the sector's practice of committing senior Cx resource far in advance.

LOCALISATION

A young sector with an unusual opportunity

Data centres present a genuinely different nationalisation picture from rail or grid. The construction phase is short and specialist-heavy; the operational phase is permanent, technically demanding and — importantly — teachable within a two to three year development window. Critical facilities operations is one of the strongest national career pathways available anywhere in Gulf infrastructure, and the sector has barely begun to use it.

The current obligations

- **UAE:** companies with 50 or more employees must reach 10 per cent Emiratisation in skilled roles by end-2026, increasing 2 per cent annually across two half-year steps, with a 30 June deadline for the first half of 2026.
- **UAE:** from 1 July 2026, non-compliant companies face a financial contribution of AED 10,000 per month — AED 120,000 annually — for each unfilled position. A minimum monthly wage of AED 6,000 for Emiratis applied from 1 January 2026.
- **Saudi Arabia:** engineering firms with five or more engineers must maintain at least 30 per cent Saudisation, with a 30 June 2026 compliance deadline, a SAR 8,000 minimum monthly salary for counted engineering roles and Saudi Council of Engineers accreditation.
- **Saudi Arabia:** from 15 April 2026, Saudi employees count toward the quota only where the contract is electronically documented on the Qiwa platform.

THE OPPORTUNITY MOST OPERATORS ARE MISSING

Every facility entering service creates a permanent operations team: critical facilities managers, shift engineers, controls specialists, maintenance planners. These are high-quality, well-paid, career-length technical roles located in-country for the life of the asset. They are also achievable for a capable national graduate or technician inside a structured two to three year pathway. Operators who build that pathway during construction arrive at handover with both a compliant workforce and a stable one. Operators who wait until the facility is live end up recruiting internationally for roles that never needed to be filled that way — and paying a compliance penalty for the privilege. Structured technical training, started early, is what makes the difference.

WHAT TO DO

Five moves worth making this quarter

01

Resource commissioning against RFS, not against practical completion

Work backwards from your ready-for-service date and secure Cx leadership twelve to eighteen months out. This is the single highest-return workforce decision in a data centre programme, and the one most consistently left too late.

02

Stop categorising Cx as an MEP sub-package

Commissioning has its own scarce population, its own lead time and its own failure mode. Procuring it as part of an electrical package hides the risk until it is unrecoverable.

03

Understand you are bidding against the grid

Your HV and electrical commissioning engineers are the same people the region's transmission programmes need. Track substation and interconnector awards as a leading indicator of your own hiring difficulty and retention risk.

04

Build the operations team during construction

Critical facilities roles are permanent and developable. Starting national recruitment and training eighteen months before handover produces a competent, compliant, stable team on day one instead of a scramble in month three.

05

Plan mobilisation, not just recruitment

For scarce international Cx and MEP specialists, visa processing, relocation and family logistics add two to three months to every hire. Programmes planned against offer-acceptance dates under-forecast by a full quarter.

> **You can procure a gigawatt of compute. You cannot procure the people who make it live.**

METHOD & SOURCES

How this briefing was built

INYA maintains a continuously updated register of GCC infrastructure programmes across four sectors, tracking stage, value, client, consultants, contractors and workforce signals. This briefing draws on that register, on operator announcements, and on our leadership's delivery experience across the region's power and critical infrastructure programmes.

Primary sources monitored

- **Operators and developers:** Khazna Data Centers, G42 and Core42, HUMAIN, DataVolt, center3 and stc, Gulf Data Hub, EDGNEX by DAMAC, Moro Hub, Equinix, Ooredoo, MEEZA, and the hyperscale cloud providers. Operator announcements frequently precede coverage in general project databases.
- **Specialist press:** Data Center Dynamics, W.Media Middle East, DC Byte, Capacity Media and Data Centre Magazine.
- **Market research:** JLL, Knight Frank, CBRE and Cushman & Wakefield for capacity, land, power constraints and investment trends.
- **Regional project intelligence:** MEED and MEED Projects, particularly where a facility remains at land, power, design or procurement stage.
- **Regulatory:** Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and the Qiwa platform; UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation.

Notes on the figures

Data centre capacity figures require particular care. Announced, contracted, built and commissioned capacity are four different numbers, and public reporting frequently conflates them. Campus-scale figures such as the 5GW UAE–US AI Campus describe an eventual target, not current or near-term capacity; the near-term delivery is the 200MW first phase. Market size forecasts are third-party estimates and vary significantly between providers depending on whether self-build capacity is included. Difficulty ratings and lead times are INYA's own assessment of the current market.

Programme experience referenced in this document was gained by INYA's leadership in senior delivery and workforce leadership roles with major international organisations prior to founding INYA Solutions. It is referenced to demonstrate individual track record, not contracts held by INYA Solutions.

This document is provided for information. It does not constitute commercial, legal or immigration advice. Nationalisation rules and thresholds change frequently; confirm current requirements with the relevant authority before acting.

WORK WITH INYA

Commissioning talent decides whether your RFS date holds.

INYA Solutions mobilises the CSA, MEP, commissioning and critical facilities workforce behind the Gulf's data centre and AI infrastructure build-out.
The established specialist recruiters for this sector sit in Europe and North America. The projects are here. Our power and grid talent network overlaps almost entirely with the disciplines a data centre actually needs — which is why data centres are a natural INYA practice rather than an adjacent one.

- Workforce Strategy & Planning
- Specialist Search & Recruitment
- Mobilisation & Compliance
- Workforce Development & Train-to-Deploy

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