TALiNT Partners

APAC Market Briefing

September 2026

Australian Unemployment Reaches a Post-2021 High as the RBA Tightens, and China's Youth Rate Matches Its Record

- **Australia: unemployment 4.6% in August, the highest since November 2021; employment +39,500, full-time -6,300.**
- **China: urban unemployment 5.3%; youth rate (16–24 excl. students) 18.9%, matching its record.**
- **Japan: 2.4% in July, 1.18 jobs per applicant. South Korea: 2.7%, +184,000 jobs on the year.**
- **Singapore: 1.9% in July; employment +11,400 in Q2, a 19th consecutive quarterly rise.**

The region's markets moved in different directions in August, and not all report the same month. The Reserve Bank of Australia raised the cash rate to **4.60%** on 29 September despite higher unemployment, citing inflation.

Japan's final wage figures show continued earnings growth, with total cash earnings up **4.3%** on the year in July. Youth labour markets remain the weak point in Australia, South Korea and China.

Employment and Participation Dynamics

Australian Unemployment Rises to 4.6% as Part-Time Work Drives the Gain

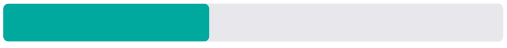
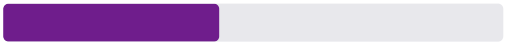
Australia's August figures were mixed. Employment rose 39,500, but full-time work fell 6,300 while part-time rose 45,800. Unemployment rose to 4.6%, and the number unemployed rose 28,200 to 722,900. Hours worked rose 0.7% to 2,009 million.

Participation rose 0.2pp to 67.1% and underemployment eased to 6.2%.

Australia: Labour Market Key Indicators

August 2026, seasonally adjusted | Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia

Note: bars use different scales and are NOT comparable across indicators. Read the value column for magnitude.

Unemployment Rate *August 2026 | ABS*		**4.6%**	Up from 4.5%; highest since November 2021
Employment Change *August 2026 | ABS*		**+39,500**	Full-time -6,300; part-time +45,800
Participation Rate *August 2026 | ABS*		**67.1%**	Up 0.2pp on the month
Underemployment *August 2026 | ABS*		**6.2%**	Eased; underutilisation held at 10.8%
Youth Unemployment *August 2026 | ABS*		**10.8%**	Up 0.4pp on the month

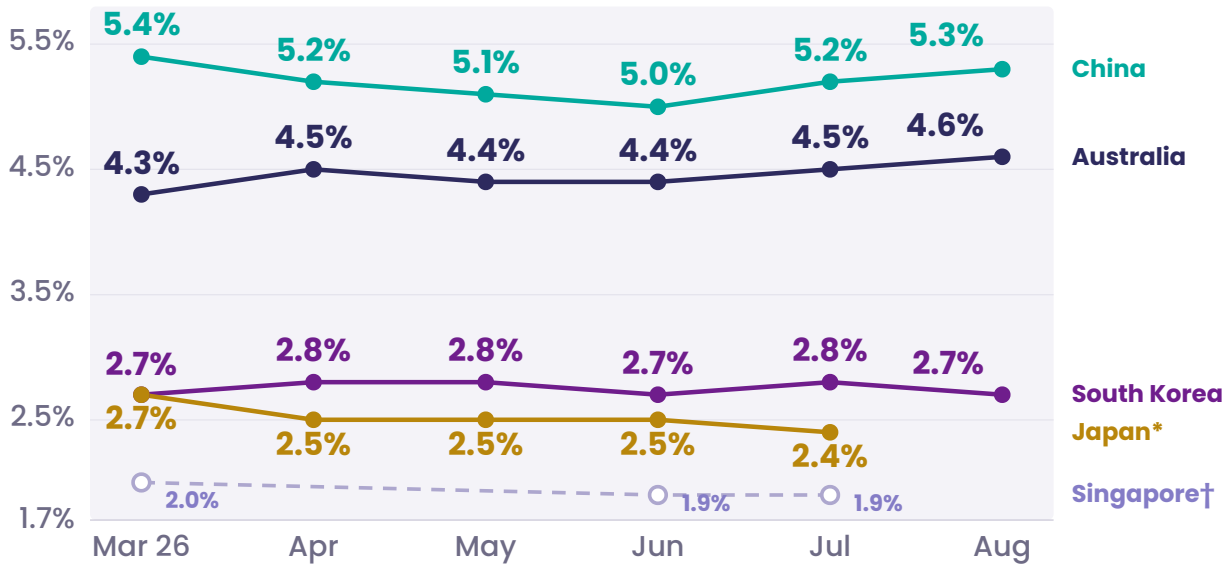
The ABS introduced a new Supplementary Survey collection model in August and recommends the trend series for underlying movements. Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, August 2026, released 24 September 2026.

POLICY UPDATE

The Reserve Bank raised the cash rate to 4.60% on 29 September despite higher unemployment, citing inflation.

APAC Unemployment Trends, March – August 2026

Monthly unemployment rates (%), seasonally adjusted where published



Japan's latest month at the cutoff is July. †Singapore publishes monthly; March (revised), June and July are shown, with April and May omitted. South Korea seasonally adjusted; South Korea and Japan were both 2.7% in March.

Australia and China rose in August while South Korea eased. Singapore and Japan report the lowest unemployment rates among the markets shown.

North & Southeast Asia Labour Market Indicators

August 2026, or latest available

MARKET & PERIOD	RATE	CONTEXT
Japan July 2026 | Statistics Bureau	2.4% ▼	**Down from 2.5%; 1.18 jobs per applicant** Employment 68.50 million, unchanged on the year.
South Korea August 2026 | MODS	2.7% ▼	**Down from 2.8%; +184,000 jobs on the year** Unadjusted headline 2.0%; the two rates are not interchangeable.
China August 2026 | NBS	5.3% ▲	**Up 0.1pp; youth rate 18.9%, matching its record** Youth measure excludes students, on the method introduced in January 2024.
Singapore July 2026 | MOM	1.9% ▶	**Unchanged from June; Q2 employment +11,400** June resident rate 2.9%, citizen rate 3.0%.

South Korea seasonally adjusted. MODS: Ministry of Data and Statistics, formerly Statistics Korea. Sources: Statistics Bureau of Japan, MODS, NBS, MOM.

North Asia Dynamics

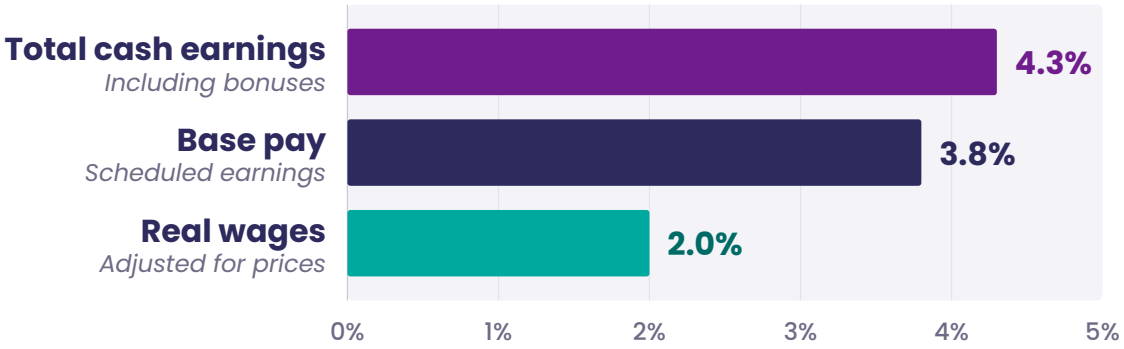
Japanese Earnings Grow Strongly as Korean Youth Employment Falls

Japan's latest data at the cutoff is for July. Unemployment fell 0.1pp to 2.4% and the jobs-to-applicants ratio held at 1.18. On final figures, total cash earnings rose 4.3% on the year, base pay 3.8% and real wages 2.0%.

South Korea added 184,000 jobs on the year in August, its largest annual gain in five months, led by health and social welfare. Youth employment fell 143,000, and the youth employment rate fell 1.0pp on the year to 44.1%.

Japan: Earnings Growth, July 2026

Year-on-year change (%), final figures | Source: Monthly Labour Survey, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare



Total cash earnings include bonuses and overtime. Final July figures, revised from the preliminary 4.7%, 4.1% and 2.4%. Source: MHLW, Monthly Labour Survey, released 28 September 2026.

KOREAN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

44.1%

The employment rate for those aged 15 to 29 has fallen year on year for 28 months, not month on month: it rose from 43.9% in June to 44.2% in July.

TWO KOREAN RATES

2.7% vs 2.0%

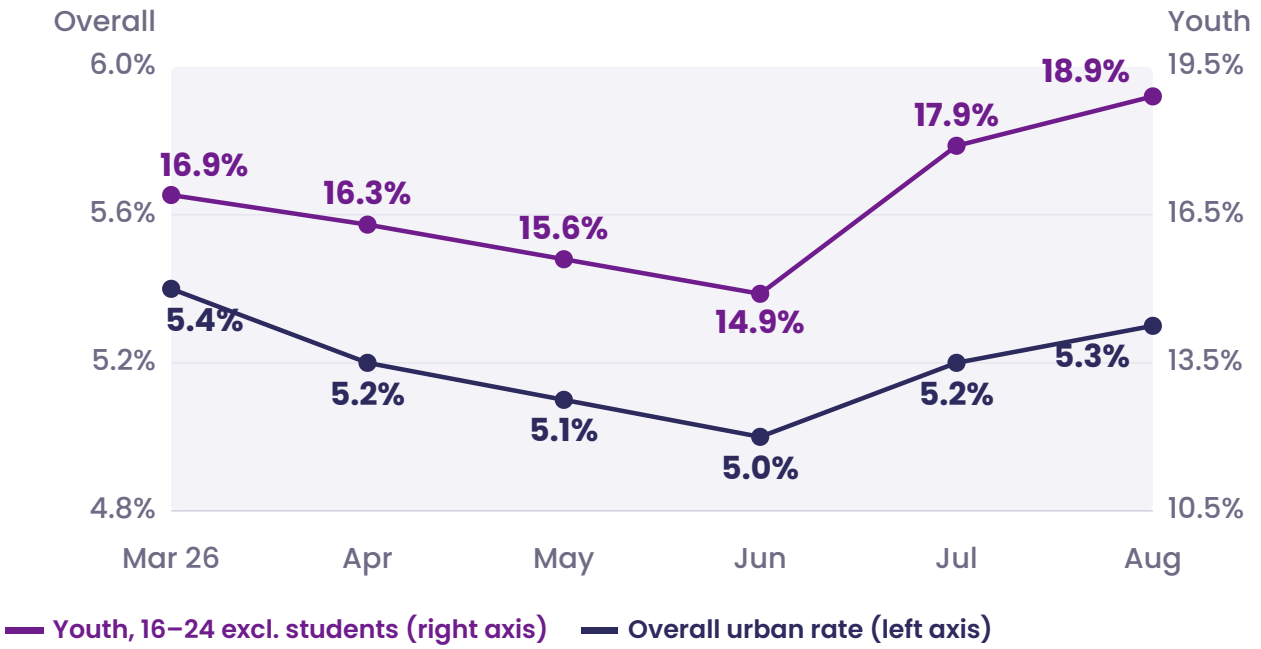
The seasonally adjusted rate was 2.7% and the unadjusted headline 2.0%. The two are not interchangeable; this briefing uses the adjusted rate for all comparisons.

Sectoral and Regional Variation

China's surveyed urban unemployment rose 0.1pp to 5.3% in August. The youth rate for 16 to 24-year-olds excluding students rose 1.0pp to 18.9%, matching the record under the method introduced in January 2024. The overall rate has stayed between 5.0% and 5.4% since March.

China: Surveyed Urban Unemployment, March – August 2026

Left axis: overall rate | Right axis: youth rate, 16–24 excluding students. Axes are scaled independently; the gap between the lines is not like-for-like.



The youth rate rose from 14.9% in June to 17.9% in July and 18.9% in August. Source: NBS China, August 2026; age breakdown released 17 September 2026.

CHINA BY AGE

18.9% vs 3.9%

The rate for 25 to 29-year-olds was 7.5% and for 30 to 59-year-olds 3.9%, so the pressure sits with the youngest cohort.

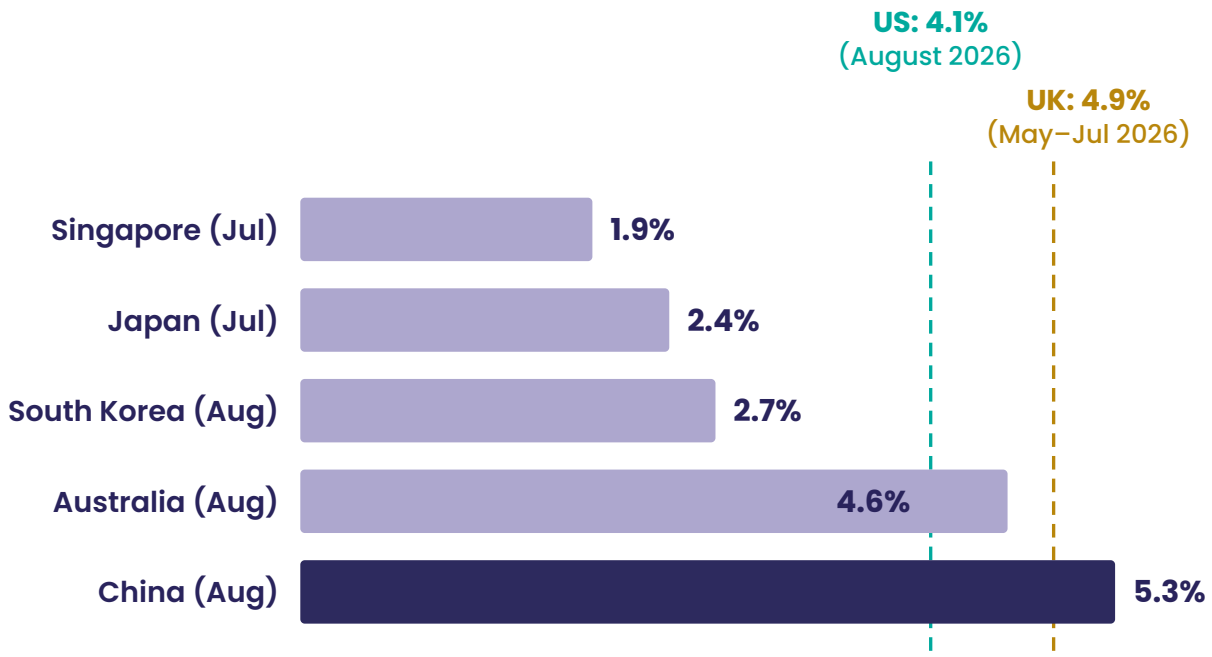
SINGAPORE, Q2 2026

+11,400

A 19th consecutive quarter of employment growth. Retrenchments rose to 4,620 and vacancies fell to 68,600, consistent with restructuring, though sector weakness cannot be ruled out.

APAC Unemployment Rates, with UK and US Reference Lines

August 2026 rates (%), or latest available. National measures use differing definitions and age ranges; comparison is indicative, not exact.



China highlighted. South Korea seasonally adjusted. Singapore: MOM, July 2026. Reference lines: US 4.1% (BLS, August 2026); UK 4.9% (ONS, May to July 2026).

Published APAC rates range from 1.9% in Singapore to 5.3% in China. Reference periods and definitions differ by market, so the comparison is indicative.

Comparative Analysis: APAC, UK and US

Against the UK's 4.9% for May to July and the US rate of 4.1% in August, Australia at 4.6% and China at 5.3% sit in a broadly similar range. Japan, South Korea and Singapore remain well below both benchmarks.

Looking Ahead

Youth weakness shows in three markets: Australia's youth rate rose to 10.8%, South Korea's youth employment rate fell on the year for a 28th month and China's youth rate matched its record. Comparable UK and US youth series are not assessed here, so this is not presented as a pattern unique to the region.

Strategic Implications for HR and Talent Acquisition

Track Australian Full-Time and Part-Time Hiring Separately

Part-time work rose 45,800 in August and more than accounted for the net gain of 39,500, while full-time employment fell 6,300. The headline gain says little about full-time hiring conditions, so track full-time demand and time-to-hire directly.

Benchmark Japanese Base Salary and Total Pay Separately

4.3%

Total cash earnings growth, July (final)

Total cash earnings, including bonuses and overtime, rose 4.3% on the year against 3.8% for base pay. Guaranteed salary is best benchmarked separately from total compensation, with real wages up 2.0%.

Give Korean Early-Careers Hiring Its Own Plan

44.1%

Youth employment rate, aged 15 to 29, August

The youth employment rate has fallen year on year for 28 consecutive months, while total employment rose 184,000 year on year in August. Weak youth employment does not by itself indicate a graduate shortage, but early-careers hiring is likely to benefit from a separate plan.

Review Entry-Level Routes in China

18.9%

Youth rate, 16 to 24 excl. students, August

Matching the record under the current method, against 3.9% for those aged 30 to 59. The rate does not directly measure graduate availability or application volumes, but entry-level routes should be prepared if applicant volumes increase.

Separate Growth from Displacement in Singapore

4,620

Retrenchments, Q2 2026, up from 3,830

Employment rose 11,400 in the second quarter while vacancies fell to 68,600 from 73,300. Consistent with restructuring, though particular sectors may be weakening. Plan redeployment alongside hiring; unemployment was 1.9% in July.

Forecast for the Remainder of 2026

Australia

4.6%

August; expected to drift higher into Q4

Unemployment is expected to edge higher through the fourth quarter without a sharp rise, with the part-time skew likely to persist while the Reserve Bank keeps policy restrictive. The ABS collection change may make coming releases harder to read, so the trend series carries more weight. This is the view most likely to be revised, though underemployment eased to 6.2% in August.

Japan

1.18

Jobs per applicant, July

Further releases will show whether July's fall to 2.4% is sustained. The jobs-to-applicants ratio has held between 1.17 and 1.19 since January. Tight conditions and strong earnings growth are expected to continue through year-end, keeping offer levels under pressure. Base pay growth of 3.8% suggests the pressure is not limited to bonuses, with employment steady at 68.50 million.

South Korea

+184,000

Jobs on the year, August

Employment is expected to keep rising on health and social welfare demand, while the youth employment rate continues to fall. Headline gains have not translated into stronger youth employment, so on their own they are unlikely to signal easier graduate hiring conditions. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate eased to 2.7% in August.

China & Singapore

18.9%

China youth rate; expected to ease

China's youth rate is likely to ease as the graduate intake clears, in line with the usual seasonal pattern. This view would be revised early if the September figure fails to fall. Singapore is expected to show continued employment growth alongside elevated retrenchments, with unemployment at 1.9% in July. China's overall urban rate has held between 5.0% and 5.4% since March.

TALiNT forecasts as of 1 October 2026. These are judgement-based scenarios, not official forecasts.

Sources & Assumptions

- *Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, August 2026 (released 24 September 2026) - unemployment 4.6%, 722,900 unemployed, employment +39,500 (full-time -6,300, part-time +45,800), participation 67.1%, underemployment 6.2%, youth unemployment 10.8%, hours worked +0.7%.*
- *Reserve Bank of Australia, Monetary Policy Decision, 29 September 2026 - cash rate raised to 4.60%.*
- *Statistics Bureau of Japan, Labour Force Survey, July 2026 (published 28 August 2026) - unemployment 2.4%, employment 68.50 million; MHLW jobs-to-applicants ratio 1.18. MHLW, Monthly Labour Survey, July 2026 final (released 28 September 2026) - total cash earnings +4.3%, base pay +3.8%, real wages +2.0%.*
- *Ministry of Data and Statistics, Republic of Korea (formerly Statistics Korea), August 2026 (released 9 September) - employment +184,000 on the year, unadjusted unemployment 2.0%, youth employment rate 44.1%, seasonally adjusted 2.7%.*
- *National Bureau of Statistics of China, August 2026 - surveyed urban unemployment 5.3%; youth (16 to 24 excluding students) 18.9%, 25 to 29 at 7.5%, 30 to 59 at 3.9% (age breakdown released 17 September 2026), via Caixin Global. Earlier youth history from NBS-derived secondary sources.*
- *Singapore Ministry of Manpower, Labour Market Report Second Quarter 2026 (released 21 September 2026) - employment +11,400, unemployment 1.9% (resident 2.9%, citizen 3.0%), retrenchments 4,620, vacancies 68,600. July unemployment 1.9% (released 8 September); March revised to 2.0%.*
- *Benchmarks: ONS, Labour Market Overview, UK: September 2026 (4.9%, May to July 2026) | US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Situation (4.1%, August 2026).*
- *Assumptions and data quality: reference periods differ and are labelled throughout. Singapore publishes unemployment monthly and employment quarterly; selected months are plotted. Employment change is monthly for Australia, annual for South Korea and quarterly for Singapore. Nothing has been estimated. Japan's August data followed on 2 October, after the cutoff.*

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