



UPPER INDUSTRY REPORT • RPO & IN-HOUSE TALENT TEAMS

The In-House & RPO Recruiting Market in 2026.

How AI-accelerated sourcing lets RPO providers and in-house talent teams scale capacity without headcount — a data-driven field guide for corporate TA and RPO leaders.

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11 minutes

SOURCES

17 cited (2021–2026)

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KEY FINDINGS

13.4–14open requisitions the average recruiter juggles at once — up 56% in three years.¹**44 days**average U.S. time-to-fill in 2025, up 33% from 33 days in 2021.²**23%**reduction in average TA team size since 2022, even as hiring volume rose.¹**\$5,475 ·
\$35,879**average nonexecutive and executive cost-per-hire — executives cost nearly 7x more.³**20%**of organizations currently track quality-of-hire as a metric at all.⁴

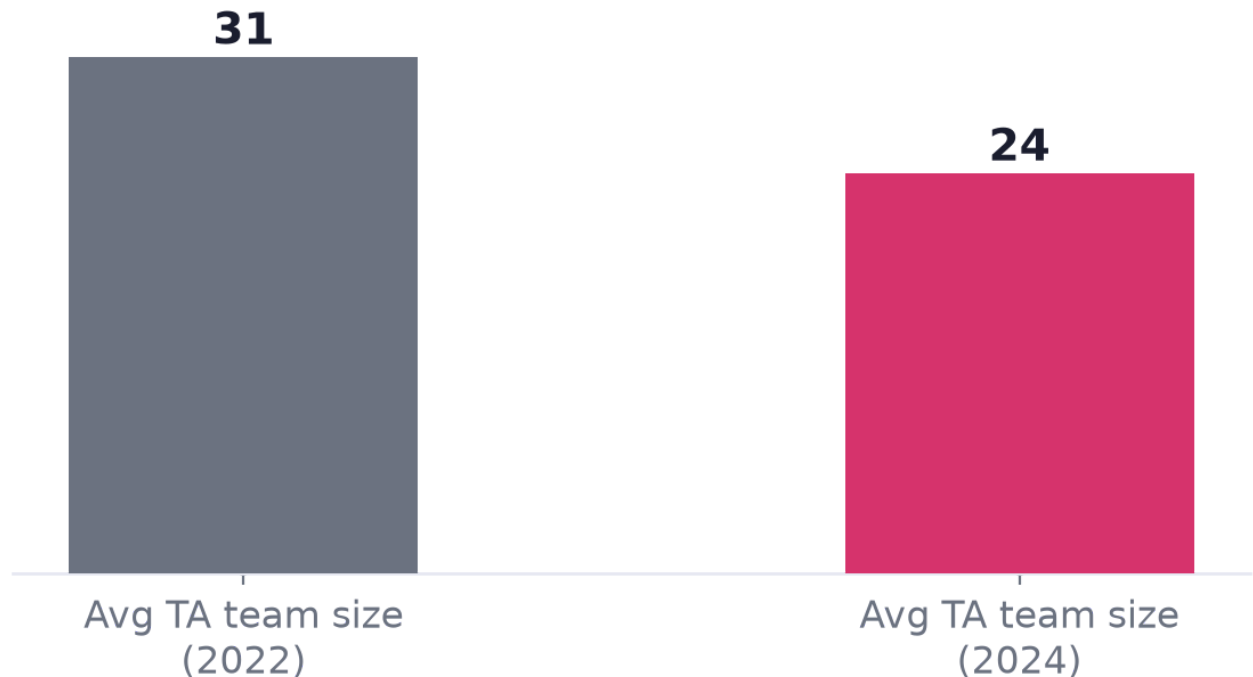
01 — The Demand

Why is recruiter capacity breaking down right now?

Because hiring volume and complexity are rising while TA headcount is falling — a structural mismatch, not a temporary spike.

Corporate talent acquisition in 2026 is defined by a structural mismatch. **The average recruiter now juggles 13.4–14 open requisitions at once — up 56% in three years** — while the average TA team has shrunk from 31 people in 2022 to 24 in 2024, a 23% reduction during a period of rising hiring volume.¹

Average TA team shrank 23% while hiring volume kept climbing



Source: Gem 2025 Recruiting Benchmarks, via The Daily Hire.

74–76% of employers globally report difficulty finding the talent they need in 2024–2025 — near an 18-year high — even as overall hiring volume growth decelerates.⁵

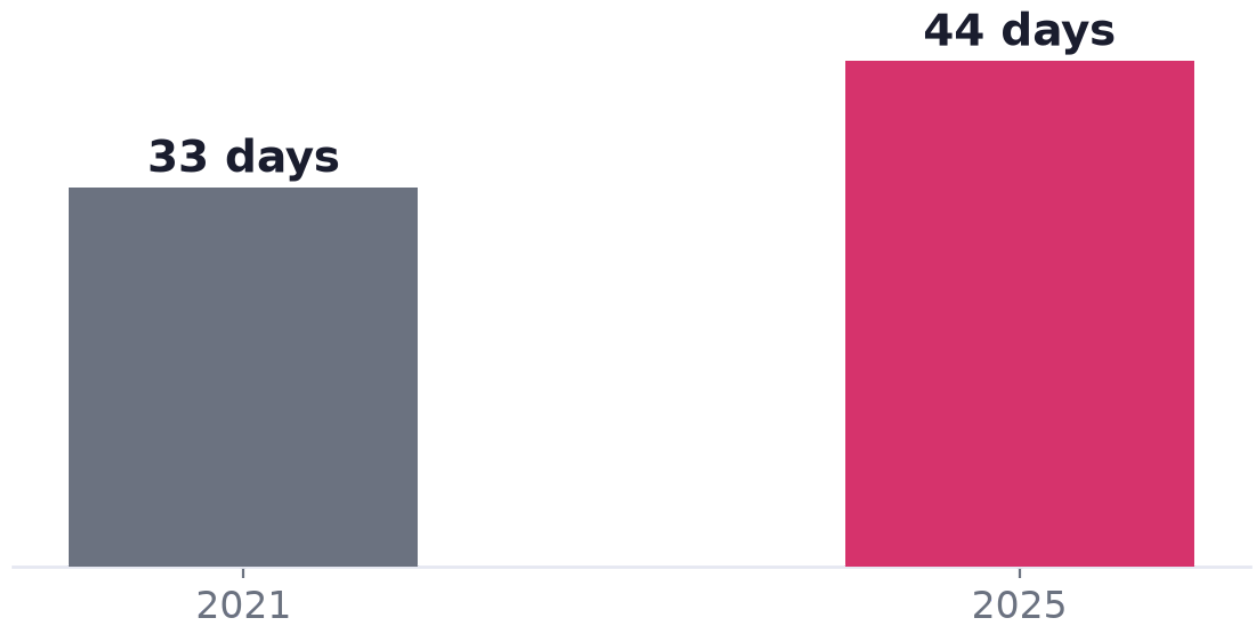
02 – The Clock

Why is hiring getting slower even as AI adoption rises?

Because the bottleneck is systemic — recruiter bandwidth and process design — not just a missing tool.

U.S. average time-to-fill has climbed to 44 days in 2025, up 33% from 33 days in 2021 — even as AI adoption inside HR teams nearly doubled from 26% to 43% over the same period.²

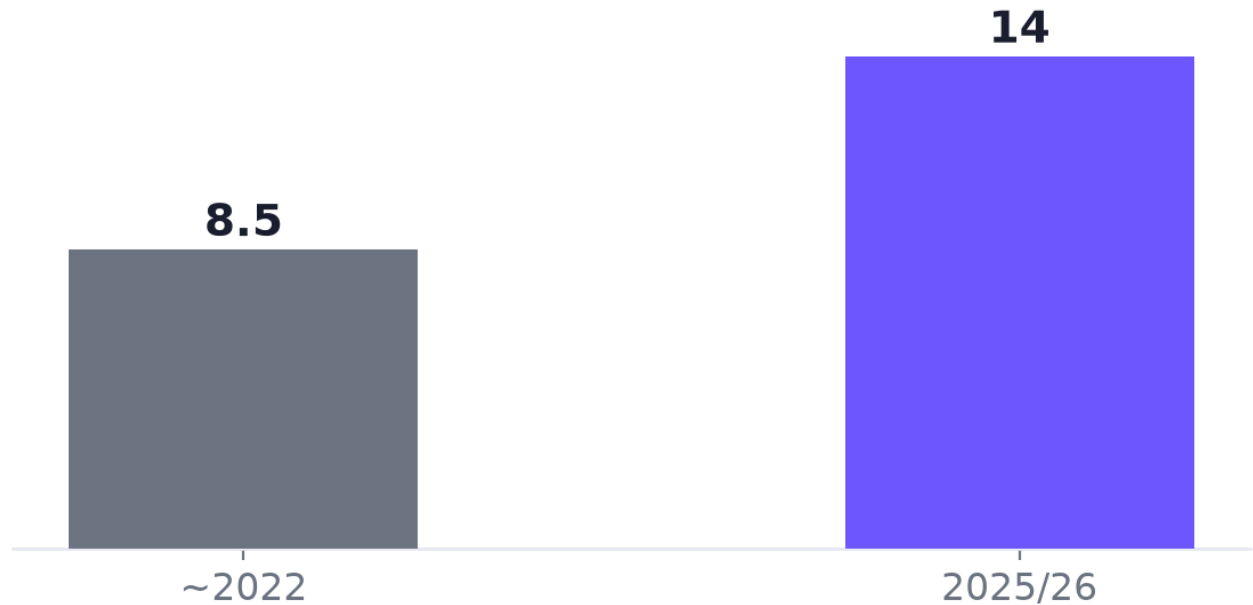
Average U.S. time-to-fill climbed 33% from 2021 to 2025 — despite rising AI adoption



Source: SHRM 2025 Recruiting Benchmarking Report.

Open reqs per recruiter climbed from roughly 8–9 to 13.4–14 over the same period — a 56% increase.⁶ Cost-per-hire and time-to-hire have both increased over the same three-year period that saw AI adoption inside HR surge.⁷

Open requisitions per recruiter rose 56% in three years (ATS-measured)



Source: Gem 2025/2026 Recruiting Benchmarks, via Pin.

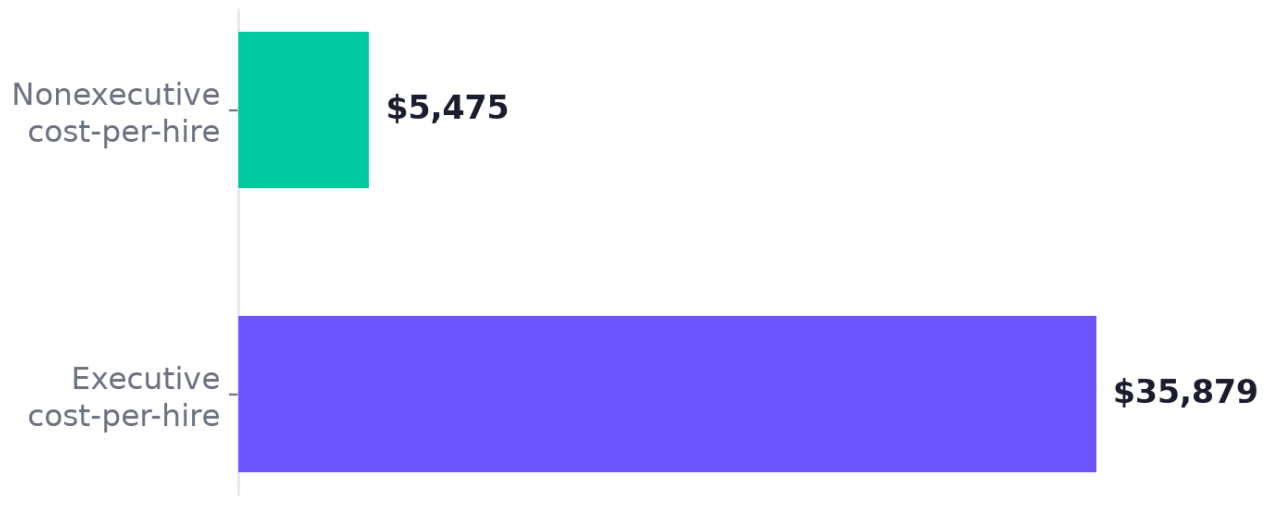
03 – The Cost

What does the capacity squeeze actually cost?

SHRM's benchmarking puts a hard number on it — and executive hiring carries a very different price tag.

SHRM's 2025 Benchmarking Report puts average cost-per-hire at **\$5,475 for nonexecutive roles** and **\$35,879 for executive roles** — executives now cost nearly 7x more to hire.³

Executive hires cost nearly 7x more than nonexecutive hires (SHRM 2025)



Source: SHRM 2025 Benchmarking Report, via InterviewCost.com.

“Recruiter-to-requisition ratios have blown through every prior 'healthy' benchmark — the trajectory, not just the level, is the warning sign.”

04 — The Governance Gap

Why is quality of hire still an afterthought?

Because most TA functions are optimizing for speed and volume without a systematic quality feedback loop.

Only about **20% of organizations currently track quality-of-hire as a metric at all.**⁴

Candidates sourced proactively by recruiters are reported to be **8x more likely to be hired** than inbound job-board applicants, reinforcing that the scarce resource in TA isn't application volume — it's qualified, engaged, sourced candidates.⁸

05 — The Reset

How does AI actually change the capacity math?

By absorbing the top of the funnel first — sourcing and initial screening — where it delivers the largest throughput gains.

AI-augmented recruiters can review **40–80 candidate screens per day versus 6–10 manual phone screens** — a 5–8x throughput increase.⁹ Time from first contact to offer acceptance averages **28 days with AI-assisted sourcing versus 41 days with manual sourcing**.¹⁰ Companies using AI sourcing tools report **35–45% lower cost-per-hire** than those relying exclusively on job boards and agencies.¹⁰

With AI handling high-volume initial evaluation, sustainable requisition load per recruiter can rise from an unaided 15–25 reqs to 25–40 reqs without quality degradation — resetting the capacity ceiling today's leaner teams are slamming into.⁹

06 – The Playbook

What should RPO providers and in-house TA leaders do about it?

Five moves separate the teams that will win the next 24 months of corporate talent acquisition:

- 1. Benchmark against ATS-measured reality, not aspirational ratios.** Plan capacity around the 13–14 req/recruiter reality, and treat the 20–30 req band as a hard ceiling.
- 2. Automate the top of the funnel first.** Sourcing and initial screening consume the most recruiter hours and are where AI delivers the largest throughput gains.
- 3. Make quality-of-hire a tracked, closed-loop metric.** With only 20% of organizations currently tracking it, this is a genuine differentiator.
- 4. Shift recruiter time from admin to coordination and closing.** Redeploy reclaimed time to hiring-manager alignment and candidate experience.
- 5. Sell capacity elasticity, not headcount replacement.** Position autonomous AI sourcing as a way to absorb rising req loads without permanently expanding fixed TA headcount.¹

This is precisely the model UPPER was built to run: autonomous sourcing, scoring, and outreach as one connected loop — so a leaner TA team or RPO provider can absorb rising requisition load without adding headcount, and prove quality of hire instead of just activity.

Sources

1. Pin — Recruiting Team Structure (Gem 2026 Benchmarks synthesis)
2. SHRM — 2025 Recruiting Benchmarking Report
3. InterviewCost.com — SHRM Average Cost Per Hire 2025

4. [Pin — High-Volume Hiring with AI: The Complete Playbook](#)
5. [SocialTalent — The 2025 Hiring Reality Check \(ManpowerGroup data\)](#)
6. [Pin — Recruiter Capacity Benchmarks 2026](#)
7. [Intervuebox — Staffing Firm AI Hiring: The Gap Costing Talent Teams](#)
8. [HiredAi — Recruiter Outreach Stats 2026](#)
9. [Outhire — Recruiter Productivity Benchmarks 2026](#)
10. [Noon AI — Recruitment Statistics 2026 \(Aptitude Research data\)](#)

This report synthesizes third-party research current as of July 2026; figures are attributed to their original sources above. Some forward projections are inherently uncertain. UPPER edition H2 2026 — refreshed semiannually.