



HR DELIVERY
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GULF COUNTRY BRIEFS / 05

KUWAIT

People, economy and working life

A country brief for HR professionals



**Understand the country.
Know the context.**

Country background / People and workforce / Major employers
Business environment / Living and working in Kuwait

OCTOBER 2026

START HERE

Understanding Kuwait

A useful country brief should help you understand the place before you try to advise the organisations within it. Kuwait deserves that attention: its merchant traditions, public institutions, oil economy and international workforce make it quite different from its Gulf neighbours.

This brief brings together the country's background, the people who live and work here, the economy, important employers and the everyday realities of doing business. It is written for HR professionals preparing for a client meeting, joining an organisation or helping colleagues settle into Kuwait. The aim is to make the country easier to understand, without reducing people to a set of assumptions.

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Read the dates as well as the numbers

This edition is dated 8 October 2026. Figures retain their own reference periods, and strategic targets are distinguished from outcomes. Numbered references link to the sources. This is a country introduction, not legal, tax or immigration advice.

01 / COUNTRY FUNDAMENTALS

The country at a glance

A northern Gulf state with a concentrated urban corridor and a substantial industrial hinterland.

17,818

square kilometres
national area ^[1]

4.988m

resident population
31 December 2024 ^[8]

KWD

Kuwaiti dinar
currency-basket regime ^[13]

A country at the head of the Gulf

Kuwait lies between Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Gulf. Kuwait City is the capital, but the connected urban area extends through several governorates. Kuwait Bay, the islands and the oil-producing interior are important parts of the geography, not simply background to the skyline. ^{[1][2]}

The workplace address matters

Sharq's offices, Shuwaikh's commercial and port activity, the residential areas around Hawalli and the energy operations around Ahmadi create different daily journeys. Kuwait has six governorates. A national salary figure or a city-centre office address will not explain the experience of a shift worker at a southern industrial site. ^{[2][3]}



Simplified country locator; boundaries and place positions are generalised. Not for legal or navigation use.

Capital / language

Kuwait City; Arabic is official and English is widely used. ^[1]

Time

GMT+3 throughout the year; no daylight saving. ^[1]

Climate

Hot desert summers, cooler winters and coastal humidity. ^{[1][2]}

Where industrial work happens

Burgan and the Ahmadi area are closely associated with oil production, while the southern coast contains refining and export facilities. KPC's businesses span production, refining, petrochemicals and international marketing. For an employer, these are operating environments with site-access, transport and safety requirements that differ from an office in the capital. ^{[3][15]}

A modern state with a long memory

Trade, state-building and energy wealth all belong in the national story.

Before the oil economy

Maritime commerce, fishing, pearling and shipbuilding connected Kuwait to other Gulf ports and the Indian Ocean. Family and merchant networks grew around that trading life. Oil changed the scale of public spending and employment, but commerce was not introduced by the petroleum industry. ^{[3][38]}

The making of the modern state

Kuwait became independent on 19 June 1961, ending its treaty relationship with Britain. The constitution followed in November 1962. The Iraqi invasion of August 1990 and liberation in February 1991 remain defining experiences; National Day is celebrated on 25 February and Liberation Day on 26 February. ^{[4][21][37]}

Institutions today

Kuwait is a hereditary emirate. Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah became Amir in December 2023. Its constitutional history includes an elected National Assembly, but the order of 10 May 2024 dissolved the Assembly and suspended specified constitutional provisions for up to four years. That change matters when reading older descriptions of government. ^{[5][6]}

A wider international presence

Kuwait invests and does business beyond its borders through petroleum companies, banks, telecoms and sovereign funds. The Kuwait Investment Board was established in 1953; today's Kuwait Investment Authority dates from 1982. The long-term investment story and the domestic employment market are connected, but they are not the same thing. ^{[14][15][18]}



Timeline sources: petroleum history ^[3]; independence and constitution ^[4]; liberation context ^[21].

Why the history still matters

For a newcomer, it is worth recognising that public service, family, national security and commercial enterprise can all carry deep meaning. A conversation about change can acknowledge what people want to preserve as well as what they hope to improve. That is a better starting point than assuming that a familiar international model must fit.

Who lives and works in Kuwait?

The balance between public employment and international labour is essential to understanding Kuwait.

2.957m

employed people
all three sectors, Q1 2025 ^[9]

84.8%

non-Kuwaiti share
same employment base ^[9]

83.8%

of employed Kuwaitis
in government, same quarter ^{[9][11]}

A resident population, not a citizen count

PACI's year-end 2024 figures, reported by Al Jarida, recorded 4,987,826 residents: 1,567,983 Kuwaitis and 3,419,843 non-Kuwaitis. This is a dated population count, including children and people outside employment. It should not be substituted for a labour-force figure or presented as an October 2026 estimate. ^[8]

Two connected employment systems

The CSB employment tables for Q1 2025 record 450,233 employed Kuwaitis and 2,506,742 non-Kuwaitis. Of the Kuwaiti total, 377,232 worked in government and 73,001 in the private sector. Public-sector career patterns and private-sector recruitment therefore need to be understood together. ^{[9][10][11]}

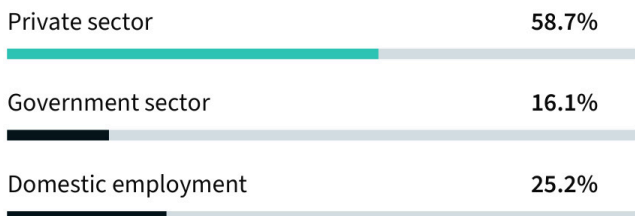
What a headline can hide

These employment totals include domestic workers. A business survey excluding household employment will produce a different total and nationality share. Government employment is also not the same as a count of every state-owned commercial company. Check the table definition before comparing one employer with 'the Kuwait workforce'. ^{[9][10][11]}

The human perspective

An international workforce is not one uniform expatriate group. A technical specialist, a retail colleague, a domestic worker and a family relocating for a professional appointment may have very different needs. Language, dependable pay, family contact and confidence in a supervisor can matter as much as a formal benefits policy.

WHERE PEOPLE WORK / Q1 2025



Calculated from CSB totals reproduced by GLMM; domestic employment is the residual. Rounded shares. ^{[9][10][11]}

Wealth, diversification and exposure

Substantial oil and investment wealth sits alongside a commercially active domestic economy.

US\$160.2bn

nominal GDP

2024, IMF series ^[12]**+1.8%**

non-oil GDP growth

2024, real terms ^[12]**2.9%**

consumer inflation

2024 annual average ^[12]

The scale of the economy

The IMF's February 2026 country report puts 2024 nominal GDP at about US\$160.2 billion. Total real GDP contracted by 2.6% that year while non-oil activity grew by 1.8%. Oil production and the domestic service economy can move in different directions; neither headline alone describes an individual employer's workload. ^[12]

Energy remains the foundation

KPC's integrated businesses connect oilfields, refineries, petrochemicals, shipping and overseas markets. The employment effects extend into engineering, maintenance, procurement and contracting. A supplier may be exposed to energy investment even when its own employees work in logistics, technology or professional services. ^[15]

Commerce extends beyond petroleum

Banking, telecommunications, property, retail and aviation are substantial business activities in their own right. NBK and KFH have international operations; Zain is a regional group; The Avenues and Alshaya illustrate the importance of property and consumer businesses. Their different business models generate different talent requirements. ^{[16][17][18][19][20]}

Wealth is also invested for the future

KIA manages the General Reserve Fund and the Future Generations Fund. Its mandate is distinct from a ministry's annual spending programme or a commercial subsidiary's staffing budget. Sovereign wealth can support national resilience without implying that every domestic organisation has unconstrained resources. ^[14]

Keep estimates separate from outcomes

The February 2026 IMF report estimated 2025 growth at 2.6% and projected 3.8% for 2026. Those figures were estimates and forecasts at publication, not completed-year 2026 results. The cards above deliberately retain one comparable 2024 reference year. ^[12]

Kuwait can contain a new project, a delayed contract and a mature service operation at the same time. Sector, ownership, funding and project stage usually explain immediate staffing needs better than a general statement that the economy is growing.

Where economic activity takes place

The employment landscape includes national industry, regional businesses and local services.

Energy and industrial production

KPC and its operating businesses remain central to oil, gas, refining and petrochemicals. Production sites and processing facilities need engineering, maintenance, safety and operational capability, alongside a substantial contractor and supplier workforce. Industrial employment is more than a corporate headquarters story. ^[15]

Finance and business services

NBK, KFH and Gulf Bank illustrate the depth of conventional and Islamic financial services. Credit, treasury, compliance, cybersecurity and digital delivery sit alongside relationship management and branch operations. Group reporting can include overseas businesses, so the relevant employment market must be defined carefully. ^{[16][17][22]}

Aviation, distribution and trade

Kuwait Airways links the country to international passenger and cargo markets. Retail and franchise groups also need procurement, distribution, finance and logistics teams. These businesses connect a relatively concentrated domestic market to regional and international supply chains. ^{[19][21]}

Retail, property and hospitality

Alshaya's brands and Mabanee's property portfolio show how consumer spending supports a wide range of work: store operations, food service, property management, leasing and customer experience. A development project and an operating shopping destination are different workforce propositions. ^{[19][20]}

Education and healthcare

Public services operate alongside private schools and healthcare providers. The education system includes Kuwait University and applied education and training routes. Teaching, clinical and technical roles require their own qualification checks; strong administrative and service teams are important too. ^{[33][34][35]}

Digital services and enterprise

Zain's regional operations and banks' digital services demonstrate the demand for technology, data and customer capability. Smaller suppliers and professional firms participate in the same economy. Their growth depends on real client demand and delivery capacity, not simply the availability of a new platform. ^{[16][18][22]}

New Kuwait 2035: a national direction

The vision seeks a financial and commercial hub with a larger private-sector role. Its seven pillars include effective administration, a diversified economy, infrastructure, sustainable living, healthcare, creative human capital and international positioning. These are national priorities, not a guarantee that every announced project will proceed on its original timetable. ^[7]

For HR, the useful connection is between the national direction and the actual organisation: which services are being built, what skills they need and where those skills can be developed locally.

Names that shape the business landscape

A selected guide to important companies, not a league table: revenue, assets and domestic employment are different measures.

Organisation	Business	Why it is useful to know
Kuwait Petroleum Corporation	Energy group	State-owned integrated petroleum group; a major influence on industry, suppliers, technical talent and contractor employment. ^[15]
National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	KWD 45.6bn total group assets at year-end 2025; a balance-sheet measure, not domestic employee headcount. ^[16]
Kuwait Finance House	Islamic banking	KWD 42.8bn assets at year-end 2025 across its banking group, including businesses outside Kuwait. ^[17]
Zain Group	Telecoms / digital	KWD 2.3bn consolidated revenue in 2025 across its markets; not a measure of Kuwait telecoms alone. ^[18]
Alshaya Group	Retail / franchising	January 2025 disclosure: 50,000 colleagues across 16 countries. A regional retail workforce, not a Kuwait-only figure. ^[19]
Mabaneer	Property / retail	Developer and operator associated with The Avenues; activities in Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. ^[20]
Kuwait Airways	Aviation	National carrier established in 1954; flying, engineering, ground operations and international service. ^[21]
Gulf Bank	Banking	KWD 7.7bn assets at year-end 2025. Its strategy includes a planned Islamic-banking transition. ^[22]

A useful distinction for HR

A company's worldwide workforce does not tell you how many people it employs in Kuwait. Nor does its size make every subsidiary a suitable pay comparator. Establish the relevant entity, geography, occupation and job level before using a national champion as a benchmark.

Beyond the company names

Public services, investment institutions and smaller businesses matter to working life too.

The public sector is an important employer

The Q1 2025 government employment table records 476,983 people, including 377,232 Kuwaitis. This helps explain the influence of public-sector careers on the wider market. It does not mean that a private employer should adopt civil-service pay, progression or employment rules. ^[11]

Education and skills have several routes

Kuwait University, applied education and training, public institutions and private education all contribute to the talent pipeline. Employers should distinguish a qualification from readiness for a specific role. For a new entrant, supervised practice and a clear first job can make the transition into employment much more manageable. ^{[34][35]}

Healthcare as a national capability

Public health services and private provision are part of the country's employment and relocation setting. Resident health-insurance registration is linked to residence procedures. It should not be described as equivalent to a comprehensive private medical policy: access, additional charges and family cover still need a clear explanation. ^{[32][33]}

Businesses beyond the state sector

Family groups, retailers, franchise operators and property businesses are important parts of commercial life. Alshaya and Mabanee demonstrate that corporate activity extends well beyond petroleum. A smaller supplier or owner-managed firm may have quite different resources and decision-making arrangements from a national champion. ^{[19][20]}

KIA

long-term investment
reserve and future funds ^[14]

PAM

labour administration
work permits and labour law ^{[26][31]}

KDIPA

investment promotion
licensed investment routes ^[23]

Reading an organisation in context

A ministry, a government-owned company, an owner-managed business and an international subsidiary can share a postcode while operating very differently. Ownership, funding and decision-making authority deserve attention before assumptions are made about pay, organisational structure or how quickly a proposal can be approved.

How the operating context works

The right country knowledge starts with the right legal entity, business activity and set of rules.

Choose the operating route carefully

Under the direct-investment framework, a licensed Kuwaiti company may have up to 100% foreign participation; branches and representative offices have separate defined roles. This is a licensing route with conditions, not blanket permission for every foreign business to undertake any activity. Establish the legal employer before making staffing commitments. ^[23]

Investment and local capability

KDIPA's framework links investment to the country's development direction. For an employer, local capability, supplier relationships and the ability to operate sustainably matter alongside incorporation. The practical HR questions concern the actual activity, occupations, operating site and skills required, not only the ownership percentage. ^{[7][23]}

Tax: avoid blanket promises

Kuwait's ordinary corporate income tax generally applies at 15% to the profits of foreign corporate bodies operating in Kuwait, subject to the framework and exemptions. A separate 15% domestic minimum top-up tax applies to qualifying large multinational groups for financial years beginning from 1 January 2025. Neither is a personal salary-tax calculation. ^{[24][25]}

Currency and international packages

The dinar is managed against an undisclosed weighted basket of international currencies. Unlike the fixed US-dollar pegs used by several neighbours, there is no permanent KWD-per-dollar parity to print as a national fact. Savings and remittances expressed in an employee's home currency can still change in value. ^[13]

A licence, a residence permit and a job are different questions

Private-sector work entry requires a PAM work permit and the relevant immigration process. Residence procedures have their own documentation. Do not assume that the right to establish a company, visit a client or hold residence automatically answers every question about a particular assignment. ^{[31][32]}

Country knowledge helps when it is tied to the actual client. Understand who employs the staff, which operation earns the income, where decisions are made and whether the assignment concerns Kuwait operations or an international group.

The rules behind working life

A short orientation to general private-sector law, with important boundaries.

Labour Law No. 6 of 2010, as amended, is a principal private-sector reference. Public employment, domestic work and the oil sector require separate scope checks. Some English copies retain superseded wording, so amendments matter as much as the original text. ^{[26][27]}

Topic	General baseline for covered employees
Ordinary hours	Generally 8 hours a day / 48 a week; during Ramadan, 36 hours a week. Statutory exceptions apply. ^[26]
Probation	Up to 100 working days, stated in the contract; one probation per employer. ^[26]
Annual leave	At least 30 working days; first-year entitlement after six months. Weekly rest and public holidays are excluded. ^[27]
Sick leave	15 days full pay, then 10 each at 75%, 50% and 25%, followed by 30 unpaid days; medical evidence applies. ^[26]
Maternity	70 days on full pay, including childbirth; further unpaid leave may apply. ^[26]
Notice	For indefinite contracts: generally three months for monthly-paid workers, one month for others. ^[26]
End-of-service	Monthly-paid staff: 15 days per year for the first five years, then one month; cap and termination rules apply. ^[26]

General orientation, not an individual settlement calculation. Remuneration basis, service and the reason for leaving can change the result. ^[26]

A material change to travel administration

Employer-approved exit permits became mandatory for covered expatriate private-sector workers from 1 July 2025. This is distinct from employment notice or the right to change employer. HR teams need a workable travel-approval process, including for urgent personal circumstances. ^[28]

Joining the workforce

National participation and international recruitment both shape the country's direction.

Kuwaitisation has an organisational context

National-employment ratios are organised by activity and occupational category; they should not be reduced to one universal percentage. The Kuwait Chamber's published material explains that structure. The current requirement must be confirmed with PAM for the employer and job categories concerned, rather than copied from an old sector table. ^[29]

Careers, support and participation

National labour-support arrangements sit alongside employment policy. A 2023 Cabinet decision extended support to specified eligible micro-enterprise and self-employment categories. Eligibility-based public support is different from an employer's own salary commitment. Real work, progression and capable managers still determine whether a private-sector career is attractive. ^[30]

Recruitment draws on several markets

Employers recruit Kuwaitis, existing residents and people overseas. Private-sector entry and Article 18 residence are formal processes, not an assumed start date following an accepted offer. The work permit, job category, documents and immigration route should be checked together, particularly for regulated or specialist work. ^{[31][32]}

Packages need a clear explanation

A professional hire may compare basic pay, allowances, variable pay, housing, schooling, medical insurance and travel. None should be left to an informal assumption. A public-sector package, a bank appointment and a contractor role can be quite different propositions even when the job titles sound similar.

The transition into private employment deserves attention

In the comparable Q1 2025 tables, about 83.8% of employed Kuwaitis were in government and 16.2% in the private sector. These are observed shares, not company quotas. They help explain why career expectations and the quality of a first private-sector role matter. ^{[9][10][11]}

There is no single meaningful 'Kuwait salary' without a role, level, sector and package definition. Compare like with like: basic pay, guaranteed allowances, variable reward and family costs.

The everyday side of a move

Housing, schooling, healthcare and the journey to work turn an employment offer into a real life.

A move involves a household

Someone can accept a role with enthusiasm and still find the first month unsettling. Housing, family paperwork, school places and a partner's plans influence whether the move feels manageable. Explain the sequence and likely dependencies before arrival rather than leaving a family to discover them later.

Housing and location

Kuwait City's urban corridor extends through connected governorates, while southern energy sites can involve a different commute. Start with the workplace, school and shift pattern. A pleasant address or lower rent is not enough: test the journey, parking and transport arrangements that the household will actually use. ^[2]

Schools and childcare

The government portal provides public and private school directories. For a relocating family, curriculum continuity, admissions, support needs, fees and school transport should be checked individually. Nursery arrangements are a separate question. A schooling allowance is not evidence that a suitable place is available. ^[34]

Healthcare and family cover

Resident health-insurance registration is part of the administrative picture, but private medical benefits need separate explanation. Check providers, exclusions, dependants, emergency treatment and any additional charges. A visiting consultant should arrange cover appropriate to the assignment rather than assume an employee scheme applies. ^{[32][33]}

Getting around

KPTC publishes the K-Bus network and route information. Public transport can help some journeys, but an available bus route does not guarantee convenient access to a particular site or shift. Consider the final part of the journey, summer heat and reliable transport home after late work. ^[36]

A realistic cost-of-living view

Build the decision around a household budget: rent, deposits, utilities, transport, school, childcare, insurance and travel. Use dated quotations for the relevant neighbourhood. The same monthly salary can leave two households with very different disposable incomes.

For a visiting consultant

Agree the work location, access arrangements and contact person before travelling. Confirm entry and work-permission requirements for the activities you will undertake, together with insurance and any relevant exit-permit arrangements. A familiar client is not a substitute for checking the next assignment. ^{[28][31][32]}

Working with consideration

Country knowledge is most useful when it helps people feel understood, not categorised.

Make room for relationships

Kuwait's traditions include strong family and community ties. Allow time for introductions, take an interest in the organisation and follow through reliably. Attention and courtesy are more useful than an exaggerated performance of local etiquette. ^[38]

Communicate without assumptions

Arabic is official and English is widely used. A multilingual workplace does not mean everyone can interpret a contract or technical policy in meeting-room English. Ask which language helps the audience understand, particularly when discussing safety, benefits or a sensitive concern. ^[1]

Respect the setting

Ramadan, religious occasions and family gatherings are part of the social calendar. Professional dress, consideration around prayer and respectful conduct are sensible starting points. Avoid assuming that every Kuwaiti colleague or expatriate team shares identical preferences. ^[38]

Working across the year

National Day is 25 February and Liberation Day 26 February. Ramadan and Eid affect work and family routines; exact religious holidays follow announcements. Government closure dates are not automatically the operating roster of a hospital, airline, retailer or refinery. Plan coverage with the actual business. ^{[26][37][38]}

Summer is an operating condition

The 2026 outdoor-work rule prohibited exposed work from 11:00 to 16:00 between 1 June and 31 August. It also addressed unsafe climatic conditions and protective measures. A permitted hour is not automatically a safe hour: water, shade, rest and appropriate supervision remain important. ^[39]

See beyond the meeting room

Al-Mubarakiya brings Kuwait's trading heritage into everyday life. Time in the market and along the waterfront can give a fuller sense of the country than an airport-office-hotel itinerary. The purpose is not a checklist of attractions, but an interest in the place where colleagues are building their lives. ^[40]

A brief, not a stereotype

Kuwait's institutions, employers and residents are not interchangeable. Use the country context to ask more thoughtful questions and interpret what you see. Then let the organisation and the people themselves tell you what matters in their particular situation.

REFERENCE / EVIDENCE AND READING

Sources and further reading

Select a reference to open the original source. The numbers match the links in the brief.

01 Kuwait Government Online

Geographical location, area and country setting
e.gov.kw

02 Kuwait Government Online

Governorates and physical geography
e.gov.kw

03 Kuwait Petroleum Corporation

Oil history: discovery, exports and industry milestones
kpc.com.kw

04 Kuwait Government Online

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kdipa.gov.kw

08 Al Jarida / PACI figures

Year-end 2024 population: 4,987,826 residents
aljarida.com

09 GLMM / Central Statistical Bureau

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gulfmigration.grc.net

10 GLMM / Central Statistical Bureau

Private-sector employment, Q1 2025
gulfmigration.grc.net

11 GLMM / Central Statistical Bureau

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gulfmigration.grc.net

12 International Monetary Fund

2025 Article IV, released February 2026; dated economic series
imf.org

13 Central Bank of Kuwait

Exchange-rate policy: weighted currency basket
cbk.gov.kw

14 Kuwait Investment Authority

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kia.gov.kw

15 Kuwait Petroleum Corporation

Integrated group and operating activities
kpc.com.kw

16 National Bank of Kuwait

2025 annual financial statements and reports
nbk.com

17 Kuwait Finance House

2025 results and total group assets
kfh.com

18 Zain Group

2025 full-year financial results
zain.com

19 Alshaya Group

Company footprint and workforce; January 2025 disclosure
alshaya.com

20 Mabane

Chairman statement: The Avenues and regional activities
mabane.com

What the company figures mean

Company amounts retain the reporting period and group scope stated by the issuer. Revenue, assets, output and headcount are different measures. No comprehensive ranking of Kuwait-based employee numbers is claimed.

REFERENCE / EVIDENCE AND READING

Source notes and publication details

Official information is the starting point; definitions and reporting periods still need care.

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Corporate profile, airline history and operations
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29 Kuwait Chamber of Commerce

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kcci.org.kw

30 Kuwait Government / Cabinet

National labour support and eligible enterprise categories
e.gov.kw

31 Kuwait Government / Interior

Private-sector work entry visa and PAM work permit
e.gov.kw

32 Kuwait Government / Interior

Article 18 residence procedures and documentation
e.gov.kw

33 Kuwait Government / Health

Resident health-insurance registration
e.gov.kw

34 Kuwait Government / Education

Public and private school directories
e.gov.kw

35 Kuwait Government

Education, applied training and citizen/resident services
e.gov.kw

36 Kuwait Public Transport Company

K-Bus route network and journey information
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37 Kuwait Government / CSC

National and Liberation Day holidays, February 2026
e.gov.kw

38 Kuwait Government Online

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e.gov.kw

39 Kuwait Times / KUNA / PAM

Ministerial Decree 3/2026: summer outdoor-work controls
kuwaittimes.com

40 Kuwait Government / KUNA

Al-Mubarakiya: heritage and national celebrations
e.gov.kw

Data note. Population uses PACI's 31 December 2024 count reported by Al Jarida. Employment uses comparable CSB Q1 2025 tables reproduced by GLMM; percentages are calculated from those counts and include domestic employment. Economic cards retain IMF's 2024 series. Company figures retain the issuer's reporting scope.

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