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THE QSR FRONTLINE WORKFORCE REPORT

2026 data on turnover, AI adoption, and compliance for restaurant hiring and operations leaders

September 2026



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Quick-service restaurants run the youngest, fastest-moving hourly workforce in the U.S. economy, under thinner margins, expanding labor rules, and mounting pressure to show returns on technology spending.

This report synthesizes federal labor statistics, the National Restaurant Association's 2026 outlook, multi-brand technology benchmarks, Gartner® research, Fountain's own frontline workforce research, and enforcement records from the jurisdictions that regulate hourly scheduling.

It is written for the people who own those numbers: HR, talent, and operations leaders at multi-location QSR brands and franchise groups.

> **Inside:** What turnover actually costs at unit level, where AI investment is and is not paying off, the compliance map redrawing technology decisions, and the five expectations now shaping vendor selection.

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