

HR RESEARCH SERIES 2026 - REPORT R50 OF 10 (EXTENDED)

# The Complete ATS Buyer's Guide 2026

Everything you need to select, evaluate and switch ATS, vendor comparison, TCO and EU AI Act compliance checklist.

Buying an ATS is one of the highest-impact HR technology decisions a company makes. The right ATS is the foundation of effective talent acquisition, enabling faster hiring, better candidate quality, legal compliance and strategic visibility. The wrong ATS is a multi-year commitment that costs far more than the headline price and creates compliance exposure that grows worse every year.



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This guide provides everything you need to make an excellent ATS buying decision in 2026: a complete evaluation framework, vendor landscape analysis, total cost of ownership methodology, EU AI Act compliance checklist and a practical switching guide.

## The 2026 ATS market landscape

Segment	Key players	Target market	AI capability	EU AI Act status
Global enterprise	Greenhouse, Lever, iCIMS	1,000+ employees	AI overlay on legacy DB	Mostly non-compliant
European mid-market	Teamtailor, Recrutee, Personio ATS	100-1,000 employees	Variable, improving	GDPR mostly OK, AI Act mixed
HRIS-embedded	Personio, HiBob, Factorial	50-500 employees	Weak, HR-platform focus	GDPR strong, AI Act minimal
AI-native challengers	tenperzent.com	10-500 employees	AI-first, semantic, explainable	Built compliant from ground up

## The ATS evaluation framework

Phase	Actions	Output	Timeline
1. Requirements	Define business outcomes, not features	Requirements scorecard	Week 1
2. Compliance screen	Assess each vendor on EU AI Act + GDPR	Compliant shortlist	Weeks 1-2
3. Market scan	RFI to 6-8 vendors, review capabilities	Longlist of 3-4	Weeks 2-3
4. Live pilot	Run real roles through each platform	Outcome-based pilot results	Weeks 3-7
5. TCO calculation	Full 3-year cost model per finalist	Financial decision model	Weeks 7-8
6. Contract negotiation	Data portability, exit, SLAs	Signed contract with protections	Weeks 8-10

## EU AI Act compliance checklist

Requirement	Question to ask	Pass signal	Fail signal
Explainability (Art. 13)	Can the system explain why each candidate was ranked?	Factor breakdown per candidate	Score 73% with no explanation
Human override (Art. 14)	One-click recruiter override?	Yes, documented	Override requires manual workaround
Candidate notification	Can the system notify candidates AI evaluated them?	Configurable mechanism	No notification capability
Audit logging (Art. 12)	Are all AI inputs and outputs logged with timestamps?	Immutable audit log	No AI decision logging
Bias monitoring	Demographic parity reports?	Reports available	No parity monitoring

## Total cost of ownership

Cost element	Enterprise ATS	Mid-market ATS	AI-native (tenperzent)
Annual licence	EUR 18,000	EUR 8,000	EUR 948
Implementation	EUR 22,000	EUR 6,000	EUR 0
Training	EUR 8,500	EUR 3,500	EUR 0
Integration development	EUR 14,000	EUR 5,500	EUR 0
Compliance maintenance	EUR 12,000	EUR 4,000	EUR 0
Year 1 total	EUR 85,500	EUR 31,500	EUR 948
3-year total	EUR 187,500	EUR 75,500	EUR 2,844

## The switching checklist

- **Data export first**, before signing anything new, request a full export, assess completeness and format.
- **Clean before migrating**, delete data exceeding GDPR retention, do not migrate expired data.
- **Parallel run period**, run both systems for 30 days on new roles, confirm before decommissioning the old one.
- **Communication plan**, notify hiring managers two weeks before go-live, brief on the new process.
- **Contract exit**, check notice period, data export rights, post-contract retention, ensure clean exit.

## Why tenperzent.com

**tenperzent.com is the AI-native ATS built for European companies hiring in 2026. Semantic AI replaces keyword matching, every ranking is explainable, EU AI Act compliance is built in (not bolted on), GDPR is the default architecture, and pricing is EUR 79/month with a free starter tier. Year-1 TCO at a 50-person company is EUR 948 vs. EUR 31,500-85,500 for legacy alternatives, with a 9-day payback period vs. spreadsheet hiring.**

## Forward outlook 2026-2030

EU AI Act enforcement triggers a wave of ATS switching from August 2026 as legacy vendors fail compliance audits. By 2027, AI-native ATS becomes the default for new buyers under 1,000 employees. By 2028, ATS and HRIS converge for SMEs, with single-platform vendors dominating. By 2030, keyword-based ATS is effectively obsolete; semantic AI with full explainability is the market standard.

### **Built for what's next.**

tenperzent.com is the AI-native ATS designed for European hiring in 2026 - GDPR by default, EU AI Act compliant, free to start, €79/month to scale.

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