

Developing ecosystems: How Middle East governments drive entrepreneurship

Monday, February 7, 2022

9:00 – 10:30 am EST

Online event via Zoom

Speaker Bio



H.E. Dr. Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi

Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and SMEs, United Arab Emirates

H.E. Dr. Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi was named the Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and SMEs under the new UAE Government structure approved in July 2020. In this role, H.E. Dr. Al Falasi is at the forefront of designing national initiatives to strengthen the UAE's small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, one of the engines of the national economy, and promoting entrepreneurship in various industries. H.E. is also tasked with setting a strategic direction and developing a general national policy for the country's tourism sector. Before his present position, he was the Minister of State for Higher Education during which he supervised the development of higher education and scientific research in the UAE. He also formulated new policies for the sector as well as streamlined the work of higher education institutions to ensure quality outputs that match the requirements of the labor market. In October 2017, pursuant to the ministerial amendment to the UAE Government, he took on the responsibility of equipping UAE nationals with skills of the future. H.E. is also the former Chairman of the Federal Authority for Human Resources and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the UAE Space Agency. He represented the space sector at the National Committee for Science, Technology, and Innovation. Other positions he previously held include CEO of Masdar Company; Executive Director of Strategy and Tourism Sector Development at Dubai Tourism; Vice President of the Mubadala Industry Unit; and Consultant for the management consulting firm McKinsey & Company. H.E. Dr. Al Falasi holds a PhD from Monash University, a Master's degree from the University of Melbourne in Australia, and a Bachelor's degree in Communication Engineering from Khalifa University in the UAE.



H.E. Ahmad Al-Hanandeh

Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

H.E. Ahmad Al-Hanandeh is the Minister of Digital and Entrepreneurship in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Prior to this position, he served as Chief Financial Officer and later Chief Executive Officer of Zain Jordan. He began his career working as a General Manager for Posta Plus, a Gulf-based company specializing in delivery, courier, and postal services across the Middle East, and as an Accountant and later a Country Manager for Aramex Group. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Banking and Finance from Yarmouk University.


H.E. Dr. Rania Al-Mashat

Minister of International Cooperation, Arab Republic of Egypt

H.E. Dr. Rania Al-Mashat has been Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation since 2019 and previously served as the country's first female Minister of Tourism. Prior to that, she was Advisor to the Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington DC. She specialized in central banking issues and designing monetary policy frameworks. Her other former roles include serving as Sub-Governor for Monetary Policy at the Central Bank of Egypt, Senior Economist at the IMF, Deputy Project Director for the Institutional Reform and Informal Sector Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, USA, and Adjunct Professor of Economics at the American University in Cairo (AUC). Al-Mashat has several publications on monetary policy, financial stability, and institutional reforms in transition and emerging markets. She represents Egypt as Governor in several international financial institutions, including the World Bank Group, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, and Arab Bank for Economic Development; and as Alternate Governor of Egypt at the African Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Islamic Development Bank. She is also Co-Chair of the MENA Stewardship Board at the World Economic Forum (WEF); and Member of the New Economy and Society Stewardship Board at WEF. She had several board affiliations, including the Egyptian Stock Exchange, the Egyptian General Authority for Free Zones and Investment, the Arab International Bank, the Arab Investment Bank, and the Middle East Economic Association. Al-Mashat received her PhD and MA in Economics from the University of Maryland, College Park, USA, and BA in Economics from AUC. She completed executive education at Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University and Saïd Business School, Oxford University.


H.E. Zayed R. Alzayani

Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism, Kingdom of Bahrain

H.E. Zayed R. Alzayani was appointed as Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism in December 2014. Prior to his appointment, His Excellency spent 25 years with his family's business, in which he progressed up the ranks until leaving to join the Government of Bahrain. His Excellency left as Chairman of Alzayani Investments Group, Euro Motors, Zayani Motors, Zayani Leasing, Zayani Properties, Alzayani Industries, and Orient Motors. In addition, he also occupied the posts of Managing Director of First Motors, Board Director of Midal Cables, Aluwheel, Metalform, Intersteel, as well as Independent Director on the board of Saudi National Insurance Company (SNIC). His Excellency served as Chairman of the Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) until 2016, as Board Director of Edamah until December 2018, and as Chairman of the Car Dealers' Association. His Excellency received his Bachelor's degree in Business Management from University of Bahrain and his MBA in Finance from Boston University. He served as a Board Member of Boston University President International Advisory Board up until December 2014. His Excellency has served as the Chairman of the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority since 2014, as the Chairman of the Executive Council of the Arab Tourism Organization since June 2020, as the Chairman of Gulf Air (National Carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain), and as the Chairman of the SME Development Board. His Excellency currently sits on the board of the Economic Development Board (EDB), has sat on the board of the Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company since March 2015, and has acted as Minister-in-charge of Bahrain Bourse since February 2016. His Excellency has also served as a Board Member of the Real Estate Regulatory

Authority (RERA) since October 2017, as a Board Member of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports since August 2019, and as a Member of the Supreme Council for Environment since December 2019. In addition to being a Member of Cabinet, His Excellency also sits on the Cabinet Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs and Fiscal Balance, the Cabinet Committee for Development Projects and Infrastructure, the Cabinet Committee for Information and Communications Technology, and the Mumtalakat Board Audit Committee.

Moderator Bio



Mr. Amjad Ahmad

Director and Resident Senior Fellow, empowerME, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, Atlantic Council

Amjad Ahmad is director and resident senior fellow of empowerME at the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. He focuses on shaping innovative investments to empower entrepreneurs, women, and the private sector in the Middle East. He develops strategies and policies to drive sustainable prosperity through the creation of dynamic entrepreneurial economies, the economic participation of women, and educational transformation. Amjad is also managing partner of the venture capital firm Precinct Partners and serves on the boards of Homzmart, Tapal Tea, RSA Global, Mr. Usta, and The Luxury Closet. He was recently appointed to the board of Amideast, a leading US nonprofit organization engaged in international education, training, and development activities in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as building cross-cultural understanding between the United States and the region. Based in the United Arab Emirates for fifteen years prior to moving to Washington, DC, Amjad has collaborated with business leaders and entrepreneurs to build leading companies in the Middle East. Through his work as a venture capital and growth investor, Amjad established two investment firms in the region that provided over \$1 billion in funding to over fifty companies in sectors ranging from technology and education to healthcare and finance. During the past five years, Amjad has focused his investments on entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology. Amjad holds a master's degree in international affairs with a concentration in international finance and economics from Columbia University and is a graduate of the general management program at Harvard Business School.