

February 2022

Greetings from Washington,

Salesforce's CEO in India, Arundhati Bhattacharya, recently sounded the alarm on the skills shortage in the IT sector, [calling it](#) a "crisis." She was highlighting the increasing competition for workers as more companies accelerate their transition to digital. Interestingly, her biggest competitors are not other large multinational firms but rather well-funded startups. One might assume that this is because India's youth population (the [largest](#) in the world at approximately 600 million) has an entrepreneurial culture of risk taking. However, I would argue that a separate dynamic is playing out in India that is effectively reducing the downside of joining a startup, which is a robust job market for IT talent.

Our empowerME Initiative recently held an event with ministers from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE, "[Developing ecosystems: How Middle East governments drive entrepreneurship](#)." The ministers provided valuable insights into actions and plans to continue the momentum of the early success we are seeing in the rise in entrepreneurship in MENA. A shared policy goal is to change the culture around entrepreneurship, failure, and risk-taking through education and championing role models. While that is certainly an important long-term initiative, reducing the risk of entrepreneurship in the marketplace would make a larger and more immediate impact.

A robust job market cushions failure and provides optionality for those who do not succeed. The more companies and startups there are in the market, the more willing entrepreneurs are to take the risk, especially the predominant group in MENA: youth with limited resources. Likewise, strong labor mobility offers access to jobs elsewhere and helps countries with smaller populations attract the talent they need.

Business failure in India today means you can raise money for another enterprise, work for a large company, or join another startup. Failure in MENA could mean you cannot provide for your family or worse. The options are limited because labor mobility needs to be improved region-wide and because the public sector – which dominates the job market – is shrinking without a corresponding rise in the private sector.

In addition to asking whether young people in MENA have a risk-taking attitude, we should be asking: Is their downside risk acceptable?

Stay safe and well,

Amjad Ahmad
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Applications Closing Soon: WIn Fellowship

The Atlantic Council's empowerME Initiative has teamed up with [Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business](#) to offer a new WIn (Women Innovators) Fellowship to forty Saudi women entrepreneurs who are ready to scale their companies.



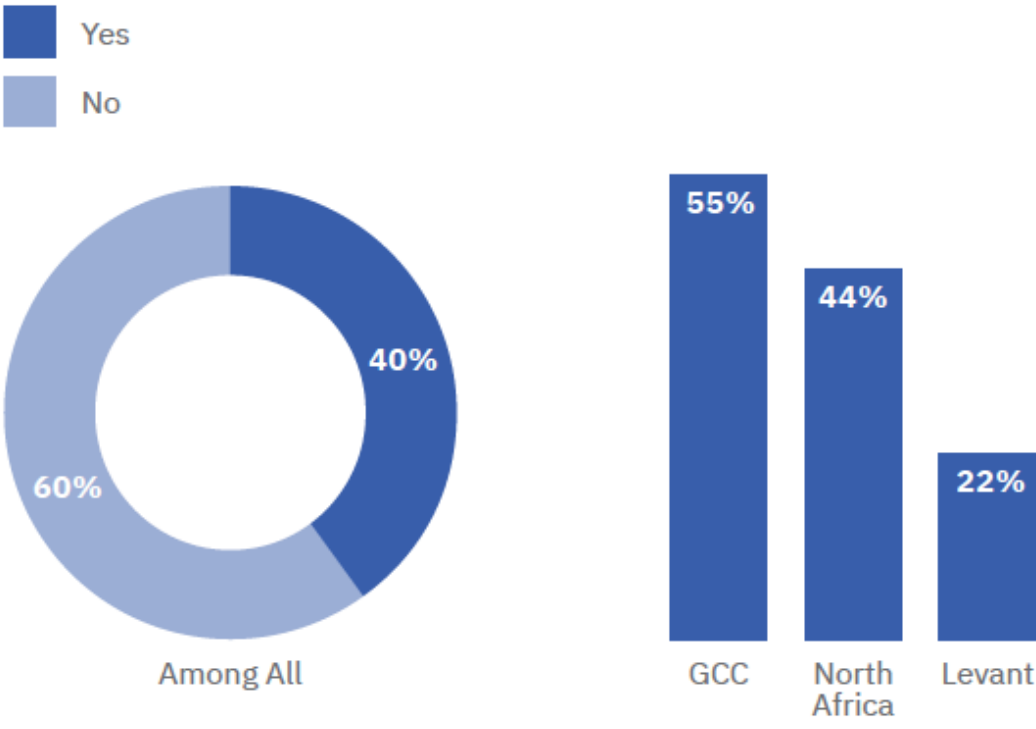
Learn more and apply

Program sponsors



Big Data

Do you intend to start your own business within the next five years?



Source: "[Technology and Youth Drive the Future of Work in MENA](#)," [Middle East Institute](#)

Middle East Entrepreneurship Program Tracker



The empowerME Initiative collaborated with [Imagine Labs](#) to bring you an interactive tracker that maps out networks nurturing innovation in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. It features 312 programs and initiatives offered by 122 organizations that these six governments have founded, funded, or partnered with to support entrepreneurs, startups, and SMEs.

Explore Tracker

Big Question

What is the greatest challenge your country or region faces in developing a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem?



Areije Alshakar
Director & Fund Manager
Al Waha Fund of Funds
Bahrain

"The biggest challenge facing our region is retaining top talent – especially within technology development – to help grow businesses. Each country needs to build ecosystems that attract talent to reside there in order to contribute to knowledge transfer and to help thriving ecosystems grow."

"Egypt's entrepreneurship and venture capital ecosystem has reached a point of inflection over the past 2 years, with dozens of startups reaching impressive growth rates. The challenge is for those startups to start growing into regional players, targeting broader regional markets."



Ayman Ismail
Founding Director
AUC Venture Lab

Past Events



On February 7, the Atlantic Council's [empowerME Initiative](#) held a virtual event on "Developing ecosystems: How Middle East governments drive entrepreneurship."

The event featured the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), **H.E. Ahmad Belhouli Al Falasi**, Jordanian Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, **H.E. Ahmad Al-Hanandeh**, Egyptian Minister of International Cooperation, **H.E. Rania Al-Mashat**, and Bahraini Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism, **H.E. Zayed R. Alzayani**, to shed light on how their governments are nurturing innovation.

Read key takeaways

Big Reads

- [Gulf states plan to phase out below-cost electricity for their citizens](#) (Al-Monitor)
- [Saudi Arabia sees a 770% growth in venture capital investments](#) (Arab News)
- [UAE economic recovery gains momentum on swift action and policies, IMF says](#) (The National)
- [Bahrain to Offer Permanent Residence to Some Foreigners](#) (Bloomberg News)



[Learn about empowerME](#)

empowerME is changing the conversation about the Middle East by focusing on economic prosperity. Watch this video to learn more about empowerME and its unique director, regional venture capital pioneer Amjad Ahmad.

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empowerME shapes solutions to empower entrepreneurs, women, and the private sector and builds influential coalitions to drive regional economic integration, prosperity, and job creation.

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