Atlantic Council
Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East

empowerME Initiative

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Empowering Entrepreneurs Women Private Sector

March 2023

Greetings from Washington,

When we launched the empowerME initiative nearly three years ago, one of our goals was to attempt to change the narrative about the Middle East. We aimed to offer a fresh perspective and go beyond the headlines to provide a better understanding of the economic realities and policies impacting the region's people. Our objective was to help shape policies and programs that would foster long-term economic and human prosperity, an often-under-appreciated part of diplomacy. As part of our mission, we developed the Win Fellowship, a program to support women entrepreneurs through extensive capacity building, mentoring, and networking opportunities tailored to their needs while openly tackling vital policy issues that impact their ability to participate meaningfully in their local economies.

Earlier this month, five dynamic Saudi entrepreneurs were selected from a group of 33 fellows to participate in the finale of the inaugural Win Fellowship, a U.S. roadshow that included leadership and executive training at Georgetown University and Harvard Law School, mentorship opportunities, networking events, and policy experts. We were captivated by their remarkable entrepreneurial stories elaborating on their trials and tribulations as well as the social and economic progress in Saudi Arabia. They patiently addressed misconceptions and misunderstandings about women in the Middle East, explained the advancement of women in Saudi Arabia and discussed the challenges that persist. We watched as they changed the narrative.

Momentum is certainly building up for women entrepreneurs in the Middle East, but critical challenges remain. Instead of focusing on the challenges, which they believe are manageable and solvable, Moyca Alaudden, Rawan Al-Khashoogh, Rimaal Al-Jafri, Sumayah Alzamil, Sara Belsaden, and the other Win fellows articulated several essential areas to advance women within the economy:

1. Networking: These entrepreneurs are keen to build support networks for themselves and their businesses. They believe local, regional, and global networks are critical for their future success. Providing access to a broad and diverse set of leaders and executives in multiple disciplines and markets is imperative to their growth as business leaders and individuals.

2. Role modeling: They are committed to investing their time and effort in improving the conditions for women entrepreneurs and sharing their knowledge and experiences with young women to drive more entrepreneurship. Sharing stories of successful women entrepreneurs leaves a significant impression on younger generations and helps inspire a pipeline of new entrepreneurs.

3. Mentoring: They seek mentors that can enhance their decision-making, elevate their knowledge, and question their choices. They want a small, trusted circle of high-caliber individuals with a track record to help them along their journey. Structuring mentorship opportunities that provide access to global and local mentors who can invest time and effort is a significant career accelerator.

As gender equality policies progress throughout the Middle East, networking, role modeling, and mentoring are crucial accelerators to build a sustainable network of successful women entrepreneurs.

Sincerely,
Amjad Ahmad
Chairman, empowerME
Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East
Atlantic Council

Highlights from the 2023 Win Fellowship Roadshow

The Win Fellowship is designed to empower women entrepreneurs from the MENA region, enabling them to scale their businesses and enhance their skills. Participants benefit from a comprehensive suite of resources including executive education, mentorship, networking opportunities, and workshops. A key highlight of the program is a weeklong roadshow in the U.S., which offers fellows unique experiences and valuable connections to help accelerate their entrepreneurial journeys.

Watch Video

The Fellows have successfully completed the Win Fellowship program, culminating in an inspiring journey as part of the Win Fellowship Roadshow to the United States. The graduation ceremony, hosted by the Atlantic Council, recognized the achievements of all the Win Fellows, including the top performers who took part in the roadshow. At the event, each Fellow received their well-deserved certification, marking the end of an incredible experience and the beginning of new opportunities for these outstanding women entrepreneurs.

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On Thursday, March 2, the Atlantic Council hosted a Twitter Space conversation featuring the empowerME team's Win Fellows. The five fellows, Moyca Alaudden, Rawan Al-Khashoogh, Rimaal Al-Jafri, Sumayah Alzamil, and Sara Belsaden, shared insights into their experiences as women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia and reflected on their time as Win Fellows. The discussion was moderated by Amjad Ahmad, Chairman of the empowerME Initiative.

Listen Here

On Thursday, March 2, the Atlantic Council's empowerME Initiative hosted a hybrid panel discussion featuring five Saudi Win Fellows. The event, titled "Saudi Arabia's New Economic Force: Women Entrepreneurs," aimed to provide a platform for the Roadshow participants to share their experiences in overcoming entrepreneurial stories and discuss their impact as an economic force in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East region. By highlighting their experiences and achievements, the event showcased the vital role these women entrepreneurs play in driving economic growth and fostering innovation in the region.

Watch Event

Program sponsors

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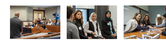
Win Fellowship 2023 Applications are Open!



Saudi Arabia

Women Innovators (Win) Fellowship Application – KSA Cohort

Apply Here

Bahrain

Women Innovators (Win) Fellowship Application – Bahrain Cohort

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UAE

Women Innovators (Win) Fellowship Application – UAE Cohort

Apply Here

Big Data

Big Question

What can the private sector do to accelerate the attraction and retention of women employees?

Dana Alajlani
Head of Public Affairs for the GCC
Sanofi

"Having had the privilege of being mentored by exceptional leaders, I am a firm believer in the transformative power of mentorship. Both formal and non-formal corporate mentorship programs can help senior leaders transfer their skills, empower the next generation, and bridge the gap with future women leaders."

"The private sector plays a vital role in accelerating the attraction and retention of women employees. By creating a culture of inclusion and ensuring that there is gender balance at the top of an organization, companies will see the benefits of a diverse workforce. Programs focused on mentorship can support women as they look to advance within a company, retaining talent and promoting more women to leadership positions. Those organizations that look to adopt a pipeline of the next generation of leaders will be the private sector leading change within the private sector."

Alifia Dorlwala
Co-Chief Investment Officer
RizoOwa

"Private companies should adopt the principle of 'what's best for women is best for everyone' because it ultimately benefits the company's overall success. Companies with more gender diversity at all levels tend to have better financial performance, greater innovation, and higher employee satisfaction."

Reem Goussous
Chief Growth Officer
Village Capital

"The private sector can accelerate the attraction and retention of women employees by showcasing fair and equitable systems in place that identify, recognize, and promote talented, capable women, and by embracing the diversity they bring. It takes strong open-minded leadership to be mindful of the fact that women may not be as front footed as their male counterparts in self-promotion, and to actively open and hold the door to capable women to take on senior roles. Additionally, recognizing and allowing for an open discussion around work/family balance and embracing it can result in better retention and loyalty amongst women, ultimately attracting more women to the workforce."

May Nasrallah
Founder & Executive Chairman
Jarfovo Partners

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Women on a mission: MENA female entrepreneurs are making waves in the region

By Lynn Monzer

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I was once denied an education in Iraq. This is why the Taliban's prohibition on female education matters.

By Nibras Basiskey

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Win Fellowship Roadshow Recap: a promising start for the inaugural fellows

By Amira Atta and Lynn Monzer

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The Win fellowship 'helped and empowered me'

By Moyca Alaudden

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Big Read

- Saudi Arabia looks at tax relief for multinationals relocating HQs (Financial Times)
- Middle East on 'radar' of global investors as it enjoys IPO boom (Financial Times)
- Equal Makes Jumbo Rate Hike to Tackle Prices Hit by Devaluation (Bloomberg)
- Mena startups raised $750 million in February 2023 (Wamda)

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 chairman, regional venture capital pioneer Amjad Ahmad.

WATCH VIDEO

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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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