

UAE as a Center of Innovation: Towards Attracting Global Talent



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Executive Summary

Recent years have witnessed a deployment of fast-forward policies aimed at making the UAE a hub of innovation on a global scale. In order to accelerate this transformation, the UAE has opened its doors to global talent incentivizing the relocation of innovators, scientists, and entrepreneurs thanks to the changes in its residence policies and the establishment of an innovation/startup ecosystem. These developments have already resulted in the UAE's rise in global innovation rankings. Nonetheless, future decades may bring about a competition in this regard, as other GCC countries also strive to achieve a transformation towards a knowledge-based economy. Consequently, the retention of top talent is critical to maintain a competitive edge in the future.

The Gulf Cooperation Council countries have committed themselves to the creation of a knowledge-based economy that would secure the region's economic growth and competitiveness beyond fossil fuel energy. By investing their oil-related wealth in education and facilitation of the innovation ecosystem, the GCC countries seek to spur innovation and entrepreneurship as the basis of the economy among citizens and residents alike, reducing the dependency of the former on state resources and promoting the economic participation of foreigners that would benefit overall economic growth. The UAE has had an early start in this area redefining its strategic priorities through the National Innovation Strategy announced in October 2014 (UAE Cabinet, n.d.). The strategy is composed of three pillars, namely, an innovation-enabling environment, innovative champions (i.e. entities that promote innovation), and innovative government. Implementing this new paradigm, the UAE spearheaded the drive towards economic transformation and has become the leader of innovation in the Arab World, ranking third in the North African and West Asian regions as per the Global Innovation Index of 2022. This high score that the UAE has maintained for a number of consecutive years, was obtained thanks to policies facilitating the relocation of skilled workers to the UAE, upskilling and training programs, establishing centers for innovation and supporting startups through, among other things, publicly funded research and development programs. Within the scope of application, the national strategy prioritizes the areas of innovation in renewable and clean energy, transportation, water, health, space, technology, and education. The commitment to innovation was reiterated in the Vision 2021 that aimed to achieve a knowledge-based, highly productive and competitive economy, founded on innovation, research, science, and technology and driven by entrepreneurs in a business-friendly environment where public and private sectors form effective partnerships (Vision 2021, n.d.). The subsequent national plan titled "We the UAE 2031" stressed the importance of consolidating the country's position as an innovation hub in sustainability, science and technology (Narayanan, 23 November, 2022). These decennial plans directly