

# **Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Stakeholder Involvement in International Business in the Middle East**

**12-14 December 2022**

2022 Academy of International Business (Middle East and North Africa) (AIB MENA) Annual conference, Dubai, UAE

Programme Chairs- Professor Vijay Pereira, NEOMA Business School, France and Dr Yama Temouri, Khalifa University, UAE and Aston Business School, UK

## **Rationale and Introduction:**

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in an international business context is an evolving area. This topic has gained more traction as globalization has increased and spread across the world. Most literature on this topic has originated from developed country contexts, but this topic is also evolving from an emerging country context. It is under this backdrop that this topic within the Middle East, as a context needs to be examined, discussed and debated. The region is unique and rich to explore Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in an international business context for many reasons (see Budhwar and Pereira, 2022 forthcoming), detailed below.

*One*, the economies of the Middle East have historically been involved in international trade and business for centuries (Steph, 2021, Apr 30; Gelderblom & Trivellato, 2019; Aldous, 2019), especially West-East and East-West trade (Pereira and Malik, 2013). Gold and other items were traded from Sub-Saharan Africa in return for textiles, spices and salt from Indian subcontinent (Pereira and Malik, 2015; 2018). Europe imported dates from the Arab region, gold, and ivory from sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, the Levant Company, the English and Dutch East India Companies traded with the MENA region back in the 1600's. The West-East trade was carried out through the 'Silk-Route' which connected Europe with the East, Middle East, South-East Asia, Central Asia, East Africa and Central Africa. In present day and age, as per Giovannetti & Marvasi (2019), Iran, UAE, Israel and Saudi Arabia come up as the highest ranked traders (USD 100bn) and Yemen and Bahrain (USD 10bn) trade at a lower level. The intermediate trade (total of imports & exports) lies at 50% for Qatar, Kuwait and Libya whereas Iran has positive intermediate trade value (net exporter) and Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia have negative intermediate trade value (net importer). Jordan, Oman and Lebanon are top traders for trade within MENA region but Israel, Algeria and Morocco, on the other hand trade mostly with non-MENA regions (Giovannetti & Marvasi, 2019).

*Two*, the economies of this region have matured and this evolution and maturity included sustained foreign direct investment and global movement of several resources. The Middle East region is heavily dependent on FDI, as the income from their oil and gas sector is depleting and becoming less important. Previously though, the MENA region was not open to

foreign ownership when it comes to business within the Middle East geographical borders. In 1946, the first bank in the UAE i.e. the HSBC Middle East bank started to fund investors. Over the next few decades, the six MENA countries (UAE, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain) ascertained the risk of finite resources available in their land and hence created free trade zones (FTZ) to investors (Pereira, et al, 2022). Between 2000 and 2008, UAE saw huge influx of FDI in real estate. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also working towards eliminating the ‘Kafala’ (sponsor) system to attract FDI (Al Jazeera, 2020, Nov 04). A study conducted by Azolibe (2020) across 18 countries in the MENA region shows that not only inward FDI but outward FDI also enhances manufacturing sector in the MENA region. The outward FDI recipients include developed and developing nations. Also, Hamdi & Hakimi (2022), concluded from a study across 13 MENA regions, that in the short run, FDI and domestic investment will aid in human development.

*Three*, the region is probably the most diverse in its population, with dependence on expatriates to work, build and manage their economies. 90% of the UAEs private service sector and 80% of labour sector employs expatriates mainly from South Asia. Cross cultural expatriates with lower cultural distance and less work experience, assigned to international projects in the Middle East are proven to be highly motivated (Setti, Sommovigo & Argentero, 2020). Due to the extreme dependency and influx of expatriates, the Middle East governments have enforced laws for nationalisation (e.g., Emiratisation, Saudization, Omanization, etc.), thereby employing locals in every organization. This move has specially benefitted women, for example, the Emirati women enrolled themselves in higher education and secured top management positions in various sectors (Al Naqbi & Samier, 2020). Another example, this time in favour of the expats, Saudi Arabia has eased restrictions on labour contracts allowing employees to change jobs without permission from current employer (Al Jazeera, 2020, Nov 04).

*Four*, the region is opening up from its traditional culture to adapt and adopt more liberal and globally inclusive ways of doing business. For e.g., during the pandemic, online shopping platforms opened up in UAE for groceries. Digital payments have also been implemented which has eased business transactions. But not all countries in the MENA region have progressed equally. The political, economic, and social integration between the countries in MENA region varies significantly (Göll & Zwiers, 2019). The Arab countries are relatively new to globalization when compared to Israel and Turkey, but have progressed significantly in terms of creating smart cities (Ringel, 2021), amending laws to suit foreigners and creating employment opportunities. When it comes to political integration, Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt are placed better than the other gulf countries. Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Somalia are rated low in all three dimensions of integration.

*Five*, Middle Eastern culture is by nature tolerant and inclusive as it is the birthplace of the three monolithic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (95% of the total population) (Budhwar et al., 2019). The economic growth of the regions is influenced by the traditional monarchies. However, the UAE government is at the forefront of globalisation. For e.g., UAE has changed the age-old practice of having Sunday to Thursday work week to Monday to Friday (Procter, 2022, Mar 14). The UAE followed by Saudi Arabia have liberalised laws towards non-Islamic expats. But this inclusive culture is widespread across the MENA region. According to the Expat Insider (2022), Bahrain is a preferred destination of expats due to ease

in local bureaucracy and ease in settling down. The locals are also known to be very friendly towards expats. Another key development is the opening up of relations between Israel and the UAE, as a starting point of peace between the Arab nations and Israel, which is welcome across all boards (Budhwar and Pereira, 2022, forthcoming).

These five reasons are not exhaustive, but indicative of why this region is important to study, research, discuss and debate the key topics of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in an international business context.

Theoretically, we couch this discussion and debate on this topic on the stakeholder lens (Freeman, 2001). Put simply, we seek to see if there is evidence of stakeholder involvement by businesses through equality, diversity and inclusion. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has proven how several key stakeholders were significantly involved in keeping businesses afloat, which also included many examples from the Middle East (see Pereira, Temouri and Vaz, 2022).

Based on the above discussion and literature, we formulate the following tracks and call for papers targeting the following broad areas. More specifically, the focus of this conference is to offer new insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that the MENA presents for MNEs. More specifically, it seeks to bring forward insights about Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Stakeholder Involvement in International Business practices in the MENA region. We welcome conceptual and empirical abstracts/papers that employ quantitative, qualitative, and/ or mixed-methods approaches to address one of the following topics or other related themes, within the four broad tracks (not exhaustive, but indicative):

#### **TRACKS:**

**Track 1: *International Management*** involving Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Stakeholder Involvement in International Business in the Middle East (Track Chair: Dr. Yama Temouri, Khalifa University, Abu Dhabi, UAE)

1. FDI, mode of entry choice, and internationalisation in MENA
2. International Marketing and creating global brands in MENA
3. International relations between MENA countries
4. International/Islamic Finance and Banking
5. International entrepreneurship and family business in the MENA region
6. Crisis management (including climate change, refugees, pandemics etc.)

**Track 2: *International Human Resources and Human Capital Management*** involving Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Stakeholder Involvement in International Business in the Middle East (Track Chair: Professor Beverley Dawn Metcalfe, ESA Business School, Lebanon)

1. HRM in the MENA region
2. Cross/intra cultural management in a MENA context

3. Expatriate and international mobility and careers in MENA
4. Knowledge management in the MENA region
5. Employment, employability, and entrepreneurship in the MENA region
6. Indigenous management practices in MENA
7. Women studies (including diversity and inclusion) in the MENA region and beyond.

**Track 3: *International Policy Relations and Historical Studies*** involving Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Stakeholder Involvement in International Business in the Middle East (Track Chair: Professor Vijay Pereira, NEOMA Business School, France, and AIB MENA Vice President)

1. Regional policies, NGOs, and governance in MENA
2. Government Policy and national competitiveness in MENA
3. MENA-Africa relations: past and present trends
4. Research methods in international business in the MENA context
5. Enhancing learning ecosystem in MENA
6. MENA Business history

**Track 4: *International Sustainability and Responsibility*** involving Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Stakeholder Involvement in International Business in the Middle East (Track Chair, Dr. Vikash Ramiah, University of Wollongong, Dubai Campus, UAE)

1. Corporate social responsibility in MENA
2. Building Cities of the Future: Sustainability, security, and migration in MENA
3. Creating and enabling ecosystems and policies for Born Global/Health/Education/Social in the MENA region
4. Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainability in MENA
5. Social media and digital divide in MENA
6. The changing landscape of energy sector in the MENA region

**Abstract\* Submission link:** 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022

\*full papers request once accepted prior to the start of the conference.

### **Important Dates**

Abstract & Panel Submission system opens: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Abstract & Panel Submission system closes: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022

Decision Notification: Latest by 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2022

Registration opens 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2022

Early Bird Registration ends 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022

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