

Kearney 2024 Global Cities Report: Dubai and Abu Dhabi rank first globally in ease of entry for global talent

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- Dammam experienced a significant 19-spot increase in the business activity dimension.
- Dubai jumped 10 places in innovation in the Global Cities Outlook, with Makkah climbing by 8 and Muscat by 11, largely driven by gains in the private investments metric.

Dubai, UAE, 21 October 2024 – Dubai retains its leading position in the MENA region on Kearney’s Global Cities Index, ranking 24th globally and claiming a spot in the top 25 for the fourth consecutive year. Neighboring capital Abu Dhabi tied with Dubai to rank first globally for **ease of entry**, a new metric under the human capital dimension, underscoring their success in attracting and retaining foreign talent.

Kearney’s annual Global Cities Report—composed of the Global Cities Index (GCI) and Global Cities Outlook (GCO)—seeks to measure and analyze the connectivity and global character of the world’s most internationally connected and influential metropolitan areas. Overall, Middle Eastern cities were largely stable in their scores this year, with a stronger performance in the global services firms metric under the business activity dimension, reflecting the strong push across the GCC in particular toward increasingly diversified economies.

Global Cities Index

The Global Cities Index (GCI) seeks to quantify the extent to which a city can attract, retain, and generate global flows of capital, people, and ideas. Cities are measured against five key dimensions: human capital, information exchange, cultural experience, political engagement, and business activity.

Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, and Dammam demonstrated adaptability in the face of global economic and geopolitical challenges. Dammam experienced a significant 19-rank increase in the business activity dimension, driven largely by a 71 percent rise in its services sector, with five top global services firms establishing a presence in the city. This underscores the growing importance of services, particularly in the GCC region, where economic diversification is a key priority. Abu Dhabi and Dubai ranked first in the new ease of entry metric, driven by open immigration policies for the specific purpose of attracting talent, while Riyadh saw a substantial bump in the rankings for unicorn companies.

“Our analysis shows a new form of globalization emerging, one that is more distributed and networked, and highly uncertain in the near term. As patterns of global trade and capital flows shift, cities in the Middle East have enormous opportunity to leverage their strategic location, robust economies, attractive immigration policies, and underlying digital infrastructure to not only mitigate risks, but also propel economic growth,” comments Rudolph Lohmeyer, Kearney partner, National Transformations Institute.

Global Cities Outlook

The Global Cities Outlook (GCO) aims to identify cities most likely to achieve global prominence in the future. Those that continue to prioritize security, stability, health, and environment are in a strong position to remain resilient to continued economic shocks.

Despite global trade tensions and a downturn in foreign direct investment (FDI), many cities have managed to sustain innovation, especially in generating patents and attracting private investment. Additionally, those that have maintained moderate costs of capital and advanced digital infrastructure have continued to attract investment and drive economic growth, even amid broader global uncertainty.

In the Middle East, Dubai, Makkah, and Muscat have exemplified these trends. Dubai jumped 10 places in innovation, Makkah climbed by 8, and Muscat rose by 11, largely driven by gains in the private investments metric. These cities have benefited from the ability to maintain low real interest rates and foster private market growth, all while advancing ambitious economic diversification agendas. Their focus on innovation and investment resilience has positioned them as key players in the global economy despite challenging macroeconomic conditions worldwide.

A look ahead: regenerative cities

While global cities have adapted to geoeconomic pressures, they also face growing environmental challenges exacerbated by climate change. Climate disasters have caused significant financial losses, and cities—being major consumers of energy and producers of greenhouse gas emissions—are both victims of and contributors to these issues.

“We see significant efforts from cities to address challenges related to sustainability and climate change, but too often these are piecemeal reactions to individual symptoms. Cities must shift their perspective toward being more systems-oriented and proactive. This is possible through what we call a regenerative approach—one that focuses on building institutional capabilities and readiness to address the challenges of today and tomorrow holistically, and for the benefit of all,” concluded Sascha Treppte, partner, Kearney Middle East and Africa.

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