

Kearney survey spotlights climate priorities for regional business leaders

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Dubai and London, 11 December 2023 — Global consultancy Kearney has today announced the results of *Bridging the regional divide: views from the C-suite on sustainability in action*, which surveyed C-suite business leaders across the globe. The report reveals global unanimity among businesses when it comes to most critical topics such as regulation and emissions reduction. Other priorities vary across regions, but the adage of a Global North–South divide is increasingly out of sync with reality. Today, challenges present at a more granular, regional level.

“Climate risk management and business resilience” emerged as a top-three driver of sustainability actions globally, with 42 percent of C-suite leaders considering it a priority. “Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions” and “air and water pollution” were cited as top challenges today by 47 percent and 40 percent of respondents, respectively. This is equally true looking 5 to 10 years in the future.

Zooming in on the Middle East, the survey revealed that 40 percent of companies prioritize compliance with public policy and regulations or industry mandates as a key sustainability driver. This is compared to 33 percent globally, underscoring the commitment of businesses in the region to align with national regulatory frameworks. Water scarcity emerges as a significant concern, with 35 percent highlighting it as a top sustainability challenge—well above the global average of 26 percent. This emphasizes the vital role of water management in the region's sustainability agenda.

The survey results also indicate a notable future shift in prioritization of sustainability issues pertaining to the social component of ESG in the Middle East. Twenty-three percent of respondents in the Middle East expect lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion to be a more prioritized challenge in their organizations 5 to 10 years from now compared to 17 percent currently. This signals a growing awareness and emphasis on diversity and inclusion within the regional business landscape.

In terms of business areas where companies are most challenged in addressing sustainability issues, storage and logistics take the lead in the Middle East, with 35 percent of respondents identifying it as the most significant challenge. This is followed by waste management with 23 percent, above the global average of 13 percent. In contrast to other regions, regional companies attribute equal importance to technical barriers as they do to governance barriers, with technology/knowledge transfer being the primary concern for 37 percent of respondents, compared to 34 percent globally.

Mauricio Zuazua, partner at Kearney Middle East and Africa and sustainability, mobility, and infrastructure lead, said: “The Middle East-specific findings reflect that regional business leaders are ready to lean in and invest in the triple challenge of growth, social equity, and a net positive planet. What’s encouraging is that they see regulation as a good thing, creating clarity and a level playing field for all, and that they see sustainability as a business risk, creating a strong impetus for action. To effectively mitigate this risk, Middle East companies should take a regenerative approach to their business strategies rather than only developing separate sustainability strategies—and this requires a profound transformation of their organizations. And as the UAE hosts COP28, Middle East businesses are poised to lead in shaping a resilient and sustainable future.”

The full report can be viewed on the Kearney website [here](#).

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