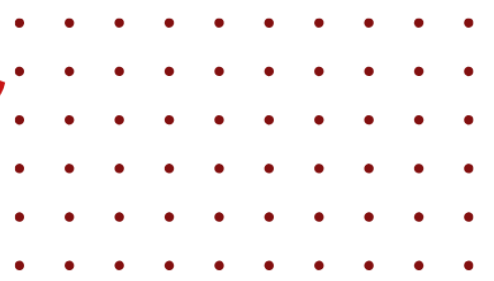




Concept 2025 Note



1001 Stars, Qatar 2025

Harnessing the Private Sector to Build Sustainable Employment and Inclusive Futures in the Middle East



**1001 Stars, Qatar 2025:
Harnessing the Private Sector to Build Sustainable Employment and Inclusive Futures in the Middle East**

“The most effective way to defeat poverty is by creating jobs.” – Ajay Banga, President, World Bank Group, Annual Meetings 2024

Executive Summary

1001 Stars, Qatar 2025, a collaboration between the US-Qatar Business Council (USQBC) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) — a member of the World Bank Group, addresses the challenge of unemployment in the Middle East. With a focus on harnessing private sector efforts to create sustainable job opportunities and foster economic inclusion, the initiative targets vulnerable populations, including women, youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET), people with disabilities (PwD), and forcibly displaced populations (FDP). Envisioned by the IFC, the 1001 Stars Initiative adopts a three-phase approach that guides beneficiaries from skills acquisition to job matching by 2027, creating a comprehensive integrated approach to one of the region's most pressing economic challenges.

The first phase of the 1001 Stars Initiative (2024) successfully vetted innovative private sector programs to create inclusive job opportunities and training for vulnerable populations in fragile states across the Arab region. It also analyzed the root causes of unemployment in the region and established an alliance of companies committed to sustainable job creation.

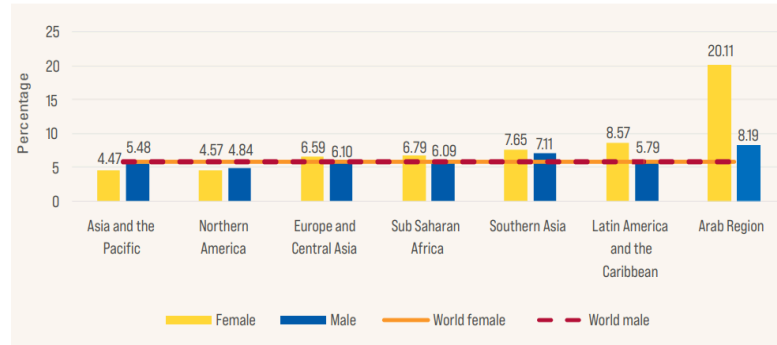
1001 Stars, Qatar 2025, also known as the 1001 Stars Initiative – Phase II (1001S–II), will take place in Doha in spring 2025. Titled '1001 Stars, Qatar 2025: Harnessing the Private Sector to Build Sustainable Employment and Inclusive Futures in the Middle East,' 1001S–II aims to advance job creation through strategic partnerships between the private and public sectors in three ways. First, it will identify and fund scalable private-sector solutions that address unemployment. Second, it will work with key stakeholders to ensure programs align with regional development priorities, particularly Qatar's National Development Strategy (NDS 3). Third, it will showcase successful solutions while building a sustainable employment ecosystem by expanding its alliance of companies and mobilizing necessary resources. The initiative is set to support the creation of over 60,000 jobs, trainings, and financial inclusion opportunities. It will also catalyze a minimum of 70,000 indirect opportunities. 1001 Stars Forum, Qatar 2025 (a high-impact event) will serve as a culmination of these efforts.

The Problem: Unemployment in the Middle East

Tackling joblessness and fostering economic inclusion across the Arab region has never been more urgent. The region registers the world's highest unemployment rate, at 8.2% for males and a staggering 20.1% for females in 2023.¹ The same year, ILO figures showed that 17.5 million individuals in the Arab States wanted to work but did not have a job, translating into a jobs gap rate of 23.7%.² Meanwhile, the female labor force participation rate in the Arab region continues to be the lowest worldwide, estimated at 19.9% in 2022, well below the world's average of 46.6%. The region's polycrises are only likely to worsen the situation. Job creation alone will not suffice; proactive support to help disadvantaged job seekers connect to opportunities is required.

¹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2022-2023*, (Beirut: United Nations, 2023), 6, https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/survey-economic-social-developments-arab-region-2022-2023-english_0.pdf.

² International Labor Organization (ILO), *Arab States Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2024*, (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024), 9, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40arabstates/%40ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_912980.pdf.



Source: Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2022-2023, ESCWA

Our Solution: The 1001 Stars Initiative

To help address joblessness—particularly among vulnerable populations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Yemen, and West Bank & Gaza—IFC has joined forces with private sector companies and partners to launch the 1001 Stars Initiative.

In most countries, private enterprises create a larger share of jobs. This is especially true in developing countries, where over 90% of jobs are in the private sector.³ Thus, partnering with the private sector is critical to ensure lasting impact.

The objective of the 1001 Stars initiative is to enable innovative and scalable private sector mechanisms to generate jobs and training opportunities for the most vulnerable segments of the population, namely women, people with disabilities (PwD), forcibly displaced people (FDP), and youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET). It aims at demonstrating that it is possible to proactively connect economically disadvantaged groups in the region to jobs and training. The first phase of the initiative took place in 2024, and **the second phase is scheduled to take place in Doha, powered by a collaboration between IFC and USQBC in 2025.**

- **1001 Stars Initiative – Phase I (2024): Impact Report**

The first 1001 Stars Forum, held in June 2024 in Amman, Jordan, successfully gathered 85 participants representing companies, banks, training centers, international organizations, academia, etc., from across 7 countries in the region, and beyond to explore ways to build inclusive economies. It had the following key successes:

- Highlighted key challenges tied to joblessness including low data availability in the region; structural issues hindering women’s labor market participation; and lack of market contestability impeding growth and job creation. Other challenges highlighted were financial and legal illiteracy; the dearth of opportunities for disabled people; and the need for economic inclusion of refugees.
- Identification and vetting of innovative private sector interventions to counter joblessness and skills gaps in the region. Dependent on raising necessary funding, these companies have committed to generating a minimum of 60,000 direct jobs, trainings, and financial inclusion opportunities, and an additional, minimum of 70,000 indirect opportunities.

³ International Labour Organization, "The ILO, the Private Sector, and Employment Promotion," [ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org/partnering-development/private-sector-and-non-state-partners/ilo-private-sector-and-employment-promotion), accessed December 15, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/partnering-development/private-sector-and-non-state-partners/ilo-private-sector-and-employment-promotion>.

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- o The first Forum is evolving into an ecosystem where companies, policymakers, donors, partners, enablers, NGOs, and skills training centers can share expertise and support across a range of needs.

 - o Regional media have given this Forum and its key messages high visibility. Examples include [Jordan Times](#), [Al Rai](#), [Al Ghad](#), [Roya TV](#), and [The National](#) in Dubai. These efforts substituted action by the IFC to promote the initiative across its social media with hundreds of thousands of followers.
- **1001 Stars Initiative – Phase II (1001S–II) (2025): 1001 Stars, Qatar 2025**

Recognizing the tremendous potential of the pilot, USQBC and IFC are partnering to further the initiative and foster an ecosystem to support the private sector in generating sustainable jobs and training opportunities in the Middle East. Building on the success of the first edition, 1001S–II will focus on how technology and entrepreneurship programs can contribute to jobs and skills development in the region. It will also examine how to bridge the gaps between education and employment to ensure that the workforce is prepared with the skills necessary for current and future marketplaces.

1001 Stars, Qatar 2025 will manifest through two main activities:

- o **Funding for Innovative Private Sector Interventions:** 1001S–II aims to secure funding for innovative, scalable solutions that have been vetted for feasibility by the IFC. Funding will enable these companies and programs to generate a minimum of **60,000 direct jobs, trainings, and financial inclusion opportunities**. They will also create a minimum of **70,000 indirect opportunities**. The program’s impact will be substantive and measurable with direct improvements in life outcomes amongst the most vulnerable.

- o **1001 Stars Forum, Qatar 2025:** Scheduled to take place in Doha in spring 2025, the event will draw high-level actors and regional stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector, and renowned international organizations. The 2nd Forum is titled “*1001 Stars Forum, Qatar 2025: Harnessing the Private Sector to Build Sustainable Employment and Inclusive Futures in the Middle East.*”

The purpose of the 2025 Forum is as follows:

- Policy Alignment: Align stakeholder practices and programs with best practices in inclusive employment creation and regional development priorities, including Qatar’s NDS 2030
 - Forum Showcase: Highlight impactful solutions, interventions, and case studies to create jobs and fill skill gaps among vulnerable populations
 - Ecosystem Expansion: Engage private and public sector leaders in an IFC-powered network of companies dedicated to tackling the region’s unemployment challenge, supporting initiatives to foster jobs and create training opportunities
- **1001 Stars Initiative – Phase III (2025-2027): Facilitating Access to Digitally Enabled Contracting Opportunities**

Following 1001S–II, the IFC will partner with online marketplace platforms and other stakeholders to equip trained job seekers with essential skills for success in the digital economy. It aims to match these individuals with digital contracting opportunities, resulting in individuals from disadvantaged groups having access to contracting opportunities by 2027.

1001 Stars, Qatar 2025 will capture strategies to address identified barriers such as mobility, lack of skills, and social inclusion for marginalized groups through dedicated workshops. Leveraging research from the World Bank Group, it will identify systemic reforms needed to better match workforce supply with demand; provide

an assessment of current job creation policies; and identify potential regulatory changes and incentive mechanisms that could attract more private sector investment.

By closely working with private sector leaders as well as leading research centers such as MIT's Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), it will emphasize measurable impacts and lessons learned, including relying on specific success stories or case studies from the first edition to build credibility. As the initiative expands, it will explore avenues for collaboration with other frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 1001 Stars Forum, Qatar 2025 will seek to provide an overview of how the private sector can further contribute through innovation, mentorship, and funding. Over time, the 1001 Stars initiative will gather leaders who wish to speak as one unified voice to tackle the challenge of joblessness by generating inclusive growth.

Strategic Alignment with Qatar's Third National Development Strategy (NDS 3)

Qatar's National Development Strategy (NDS) aligns with 1001S-II's focus on job creation for vulnerable groups through its emphasis on human development and social development.

Specifically, the human development pillar a. focuses on equipping individuals with education, training, and skills to meet labor market demand and b. aligns with initiatives that target youth, women, and marginalized populations by prioritizing workforce readiness and capacity building.

The social development pillar a. aims to foster an inclusive society with opportunities for all by addressing disparities in employment and social participation; and b. encourages efforts to reduce unemployment among groups such as women, people with disabilities, and displaced populations.

1001S-II's objective of bridging gaps between education and employment for vulnerable groups supports these NDS goals by a. creating jobs and offering training programs and capacity-building efforts tailored to marginalized populations and b. fostering inclusive policies and private sector participation to integrate underrepresented groups into the workforce.

IFC Core Strengths in the Context of 1001 Stars, Qatar 2025

IFC is strongly positioned to deploy tools to help the private sector in the Arab world gain awareness of inclusive jobs; overcome the challenge of inadequate workplace infrastructure; reverse the trend of limited access to digitally enabled contracting opportunities; and address the lack of investment pipeline with inclusion focus. In particular:

- IFC has expertise in capacity building for employers, providing them with workplace solutions that advance gender-inclusive hiring and support practices. This expertise can benefit employers in the project who want to attract and support job seekers from disadvantaged groups.
- IFC's track record in promoting inclusive job creation, particularly in fragile states, positions them well to address the barriers faced by disadvantaged groups in these contexts.
- IFC's vast network in the Middle East, consisting of companies, clients, training organizations, investors, and stakeholders enables them to leverage partnerships to support the project's objectives.
- Workshops on 'the jobs of the future', 'developing human capital', etc., will be organized before and after the Forum. IFC may also invite representatives from the World Bank Group President's High Council on Job Creation to share preliminary insights and research on job creation.

- IFC has relationships with companies that have successfully piloted freelance marketplaces (Gaza Sky Geeks and Corvit). These companies have effectively connected freelancers with global opportunities and provided a robust framework for skill development and job placement. IFC can draw on insights from these relationships, amongst other research, to support the development of an online marketplace for digitally enabled contracting opportunities for disadvantaged groups.
- IFC's experienced network with clients in manufacturing, agriculture, and services as well as incentives-based financing will position IFC to support the growth of selected companies proffering solutions to the unemployment challenge. IFC can meet each company at the stage of expansion and development at which they are. IFC will also establish ambitious incentives to deepen and reward the companies' social impact.

USQBC Core Strengths in the Context of 1001 Stars, Qatar 2025

The USQBC is a particularly well-suited partner to host the 2025 edition of the 1001 Stars Forum. It will bring significant value to 1001 Stars, Qatar 2025 by leveraging its extensive network of US and Qatari businesses, fostering cross-sector partnerships, and advocating for inclusive economic development. Its expertise in regional economic challenges and focus on technology and innovation align seamlessly with the initiative's objectives to bridge education and employment gaps. USQBC enhances Qatar's leadership in job creation by hosting the Forum and showcasing Qatar's entrepreneurial potential, while also promoting bilateral collaboration between Qatar and the US. By facilitating policy dialogue, attracting investments, and sharing best practices, USQBC ensures the initiative's scalability, sustainability, and impact in addressing job creation and skills development for vulnerable groups in the region.

As a business association that provides a platform for discussion of key economic, commercial, and other issues of interest to companies doing or planning to do business in Qatar, USQBC is also knowledgeable of the constraints faced by businesses in creating jobs in the region and beyond. As such, it stands to further increase expertise on the matter for co-organizing the Forum with the IFC. In addition, the Forum would attract companies, banks, training centers, international organizations, academia, and more, from around the region to Doha, where they could share their expertise and networks with Qatari stakeholders and discover opportunities offered by the Qatari economy. For instance, the presence of Qatari businesses and foundations at the Forum would help deepen ties between Qatar and the 7 countries involved in this initiative and further increase its impact.

Cutting-edge Impact Evaluation with MIT's J-PAL

1001 Stars, Qatar 2025 will seek to establish a partnership with MIT's J-PAL for the use of rigorous evidence from randomized evaluations to test and apply effective solutions for job creation and workforce development for the initiative's target vulnerable populations. This collaboration aims to advance research and evidence-based practices through multiple channels. It will support research project development, deliver evidence-focused webinars, and provide funding for early pilot studies. Through policy outreach, the collaboration will raise awareness and foster connections among global and regional stakeholders. Ultimately, it seeks to promote rigorous impact evaluation, enable evidence-informed decision-making within participating organizations, and share emerging insights with the broader policy community.

Designated Contacts

For partnership or sponsorship inquiries, please contact the organizers through the information below.

US-Qatar Business Council (USQBC)
Sheikha Mayes Al Thani
Managing Director
Email: dohaoffice@usqbc.org



International Finance Corporation (IFC) — a member of the World Bank Group
Niels Planel
Adviser to the IFC Regional Vice-President for the Middle East and Central Asia
Email: nplanel@ifc.org