

Reimagining Special Economic Zones for Strategic FDI

in the MENA Region

MINI WHITE PAPER 1 OF 3

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Executive Summary

This document is the first in a three-part White Paper series on Reimagining SEZs for Strategic FDI in the MENA Region. It introduces the framework on the role of SEZs for FDI, covering global FDI trends and achievements. White Paper 2 explores the MENA landscape, benchmarks, and SWOT analysis. White Paper 3 presents strategic recommendations and a call to action for policymakers and SEZ authorities.

The purpose of the White Paper series is a comprehensive policy review and performance assessment of MENA SEZ frameworks, investor services, and institutional design, informed by primary and secondary research. It synthesizes lessons from global best practices, benchmarking analysis, and regional case studies to highlight actionable pathways for aligning SEZ strategies with investor priorities such as ESG compliance, advanced infrastructure, and sector-specific clustering. This white paper provides policymakers, investment promotion agencies (IPAs), and SEZ authorities with a forward-looking framework to reposition SEZs as engines of high-quality Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) aligned with national development goals.

KEY MESSAGES & FINDINGS

Latent Potential

Only ~25% of designated SEZ land in MENA is developed, signaling significant untapped capacity for FDI.¹

Investor-Centric Evolution

Global trends show a shift toward SEZs emphasizing digital OSS platforms, ESG compliance, and performance-based incentives.

Policy Laboratories

SEZs serve as controlled environments for regulatory reform, sectoral clustering, and regional integration.

Sectoral Anchors

Renewable energy, logistics, digital infrastructure, agritech and healthcare are emerging as priority FDI sectors.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

In a fragmented global economy marked by supply chain reconfiguration and geopolitical uncertainty, SEZs offer governments a controlled environment to attract targeted investments. MENA SEZs are uniquely positioned to serve as regional hubs linking Africa, Asia, and Europe — particularly in sectors such as logistics, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing.

SEZs across the MENA region are being repositioned as policy laboratories and industrial policy instruments designed to advance diversification, digital innovation, sustainability, and UN SDG and ESG-aligned development.

ABOUT THIS WHITE PAPER SERIES

1

Global Trends & Framework: Introduces the overarching framework - global FDI trends, investor priorities, and SEZ fundamentals.

2

MENA Landscape & Benchmarking: Explores the MENA SEZ landscape in detail, along with global benchmarks and a SWOT analysis.

3

Strategic Recommendations: Presents strategic recommendations and a call to action for policymakers and SEZ authorities.

Investor Priorities in 2026

Investor priorities in 2026 are shaped by the interplay of stability, regulatory clarity, ESG alignment and market access, now serving as decisive factors in site selection and investment decisions.

01 STABILITY

Investors rank political and macroeconomic stability as the top determinant of long-term commitments. In MENA, oil price volatility and Red Sea shipping disruptions have heightened risk premiums, but GCC reforms and diversification strategies are helping mitigate uncertainty.²

02 REGULATORY CLARITY


Transparent governance frameworks and streamlined capital market reforms are critical. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have eased equity caps and modernized FDI screening, making their markets more compatible with global standards despite a 10.6% decline in project openings in 2024.³

03 ESG & UN SDGs

Strong sovereign ESG performance now correlates positively with FDI inflows in the Gulf.⁴ SDG 7 (Clean Energy), SDG 9 (Industry & Infrastructure), SDG 8 (Decent Work), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities) dominate capital allocation. SEZs have become the primary ESG transmission mechanism between governments and investors.⁵

04 MARKET ACCESS

Investors focus on SEZs' ability to connect seamlessly to global and regional supply chains. Zones near multimodal transport corridors — ports, airports, rail, and highways — offer reduced costs and faster delivery. Tanger Med (Morocco) and JAFZA (UAE) exemplify how connectivity amplifies investor confidence and FDI flows.

 **Is your SEZ proposition aligned with the top four investor priorities in 2026?**

This shift underscores a broader investor mindset: capital is flowing toward resilience and responsibility, not just cost efficiency. For MENA SEZs, the ability to combine geographic connectivity with policy stability and ESG-aligned infrastructure will be critical in sustaining competitiveness and capturing diversified FDI inflows.⁶

Importance of SEZs in Economic Growth

Special Economic Zones have historically played a pivotal role in attracting FDI, creating jobs, and accelerating industrial development, particularly in emerging economies where they serve as catalysts for structural transformation. In the MENA context, SEZs are increasingly embedded within national transformation agendas

Saudi Arabia

National Industrial Development and Logistics Program (NIDLP)

Positions the Kingdom as a global logistics hub, diversifying into mining, energy, and advanced manufacturing with SEZs as anchor industrial platforms.^{7 8}

UAE

Operation 300bn

Targets growth in industrial sector GDP from AED 133bn to AED 300bn by 2031. Zones KIZAD and JAFZA provide clean energy and industrial innovation backbone.⁹

Egypt

Industrial Modernisation

Emphasizes manufacturing, agritech, and logistics with EU and Chinese investment flows. The Suez Canal Economic Zone serves as a gateway for regional integration.¹⁰

These zones collectively offer strategic advantages, including geographic connectivity across Africa, Asia, and Europe, infrastructure readiness through world-class ports and logistics corridors, and reform momentum driven by national visions and policy innovation.¹¹

STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES OF MENA SEZs

Geographic Connectivity

Central crossroads linking Africa, Asia and Europe through world-class ports and multimodal logistics corridors.

Infrastructure Readiness

World-class ports, industrial zones, free trade areas, and digital infrastructure ready for deployment.

Reform Momentum

National visions (Vision 2030, Operation 300bn) driving unprecedented regulatory and policy innovation.

FDI Facilitation

SEZs provide predictable regulatory environments, fiscal incentives, and integrated infrastructure that reduce transaction costs.

Globally, SEZs provide predictable regulatory environments, fiscal incentives, and integrated infrastructure that reduce transaction costs and mitigate investment risks, making them attractive to multinational corporations seeking stability and efficiency.¹²

Consider how your SEZ contributes to national development goals. Is it positioned as a logistics hub, a tech cluster, or a green industrial zone?

Importance of SEZs in Economic Growth

THE IMPACT OF SEZs ON GDP, TRADE AND JOBS

GLOBAL BENCHMARKS



GDP Contribution

SEZs account for over 20% of GDP in countries like China and 10-15% in emerging economies where zones are central to industrial policy (Source: Investopia-SEZ White Paper28).



Trade Impact

Globally, SEZs generate more than 40% of exports in some economies (e.gi. China, Vietnam, UAE free zones) (Source: Investopia-SEZ White Paper28)



Employment

SEZs worldwide provide over 70 million jobs, with strong spillovers into skills transfer and local supply chains (Source: U.O. World Employment Outlook and Social Impact, 202829)

MENA REGION HIGHLIGHTS



UAE Free Zones (JAFZA, KIZAD, DMCC)

Contribute over 30% of Dubai's GDP and handle nearly half of the emirate's trade flows, employing hundreds of thousands of workers across logistics, manufacturing, and services (Source: Investopia-SEZ White Paper28)



Morocco's Tanger Med SEZ

Accounts for 80% of Morocco's exports, particularly in automotive and renewable energy clusters (Source: Investopia-SEZ White Paper28)



Egypt's Suez Canal Economic Zone

Positioned as a gateway for regional integration, supporting tens of thousands of jobs and expanding trade with the EU and China (Source: Investopia-SEZ White Paper28)

SEZ Contributions to National Economies

SEZs act as engines of growth by attracting FDI, creating employment, and fostering industrial diversification. They serve as policy laboratories enabling governments to pilot regulatory reforms, and in many countries account for a substantial share of manufacturing output and trade — positioning them as critical instruments for competitiveness and integration into global value chains.



Jafza
المنطقة الحرة لجبل علي
Jebel Ali Free Zone

Global FDI Trends - 2024/2025



*Major conduit economies include Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. These countries are frequently used in Europe to route FDI and profits due to their favorable tax regimes and extensive network of tax treaties

Global FDI Dynamics

Global foreign direct investment flows reached an estimated \$1.4 trillion in 2024, a headline increase of 11%, reflecting resilience in strategic sectors such as renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, digital infrastructure, and healthcare biotechnology.^{13 14} However, this figure conceals significant underlying fragilities — driven largely by volatile financial flows passing through European conduit economies. Excluding these, global FDI actually declined by 8%, with developing countries experiencing a second consecutive annual contraction. Investments in SDG-related sectors such as agrifood, infrastructure, and water fell by 11% compared to 2015 levels, raising serious concerns about sustainable development financing.¹⁵

SECTORS ATTRACTING MOST FDI GLOBALLY



MENA / GCC REGIONAL CONTEXT

The MENA region remains strategically positioned at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Near-term dynamics are mixed: growth and FDI attraction continue, while geopolitical tensions, Red Sea shipping disruptions, and oil production cuts temper momentum. Countries are doubling down on structural reforms, logistics integration, and industrial diversification to seize global opportunities.^{16 17}

In 2024, GCC FDI projects reached a record 1,973 projects (+2%). Renewables, logistics, petrochemicals, and digital hubs attracted \$70bn (+13% YoY).¹⁸

The UAE stood out as the world's second-largest recipient of greenfield projects after the US, attracting USD 30.7 billion in 2023 (+35%), improving its global ranking from 21st to 11th. Saudi Arabia posted strong gains with project announcements rising 62%, values more than doubling to USD 28.3 billion.¹⁹

Notably, the UK became the largest single source country for GCC projects in 2024, followed by India — which increased investments by nearly 400% since 2019. US investment dropped to third, signalling a structural shift toward Asia-MENA partnerships.²⁰

GCC FDI Scorecard & Sectoral Drivers

We developed a GCC FDI Attractiveness Index and Ranking based on normalized scores for GDP growth, non-oil GDP growth, fiscal balance, FDI stock and flows, and diversification focus indicators. Only the UAE maintains a fiscal surplus indicating greater government revenue, or less public spending/investment. Greenfield FDI Performance Index shows that the UAE attracted the most FDI, relative to its GDP, of the 105 countries assessed in the FDI Intelligence database.

TABLE 1.1: GCC FDI ATTRACTIVENESS INDEX

Rank	Country	FDI Attractiveness Index	FDI Confidence Index Rank (Kearney, 2025)	Greenfield FDI Performance (FDI Intelligence)
1	UAE	0.919	9 th	1 st
2	Saudi Arabia	0.780	13 th	47 th
3	Qatar	0.567	>25 th	12 th
4	Oman	0.561	>25 th	36 th
5	Bahrain	0.470	>25 th	5 th
6	Kuwait	0.050	>25 th	88 th

Source: Kearney FDI Confidence Index 2025 - FDI Intelligence Greenfield FDI Performance Index

The GCC thus has a contrasting picture - robust expansion in priority sectors alongside persistent geopolitical and macroeconomic headwinds - highlights the role of SEZs as stabilising mechanisms for investment. By structuring policies around investor-focused incentives, embedding ESG principles into infrastructure, and fostering specialised industrial clusters, MENA zones are well-positioned to attract and sustain FDI, even amid a fragmented global landscape.

Globally, announced greenfield projects rose from 18,810 in 2023 to 19,356 in 2024, reflecting a modest 3% increase.²¹ Total MENA/GCC project activity is roughly 1,813–1,830 projects (~+1%), signaling resilience and broad-based diversification into renewables, logistics, petrochemicals, digital hubs worth \$70 bn in 2024 (+13% YoY).²²

Country lens

- UAE leads the MENA region by project count (~1,323 in 2023 with a slight uptick in 2024) and job numbers, anchored by ICT, logistics, clean energy, industrial innovation and HQ/business services.
- Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a strong industrial and energy hub (~390 projects in 2023), with growing manufacturing, mining, petrochemicals, and renewables, and a strategic push into EVs/mobility under Vision 2030³⁰. Manufacturing accounted for ~31.7 bn FDI inflows in 2024 (+24% YoY) around 29% of total inflows.
- Egypt shows momentum in agritech, pharma, construction, and ICT led by Suez Canal Economic Zone and supported by EU & Chinese inflows.
- Oman and Qatar maintain steady pipelines, notably SEZ-led (Sohar, Duqm, Ras Bufontas) initiatives in petrochemicals, logistics, green energy, ICT, and finance.
- SEZs in country are acting as stabilizers and cluster catalysts, aligning sector offerings to global investor priorities (digital, clean energy, logistics, and advanced manufacturing).

Sector lens

- Digital-first growth:** The UAE's 400+ ICT projects consolidate its role as the region's digital hub—benefiting cloud, AI, cybersecurity, fintech, and platform plays.
- Energy transition in motion:** While Energy & Gas Supply declined in value overall, clean energy in UAE and Oman is offsetting pressure, indicating capital rotation from hydrocarbons to renewables and grid upgrades.
- Saudi's mobility pivot:** KSA's EV and mobility zones (localizing manufacturing and charging infrastructure) position it as the automotive frontier in MENA under Vision 2030, aimed at localizing electric vehicle manufacturing and charging infrastructure.
- Chemicals remain investable:** Oman and KSA sustain strong petrochemical pipelines, supported by feedstock availability, SEZ infrastructure, and long-term demand for materials.
- Construction revival:** Egypt and KSA show an uptick led by industrial real estate and mega-projects linked to national transformation agendas.
- Services concentration:** The UAE dominates HQ and business services, reinforcing a command-and-control gateway model for regional corporates and MNCs.
- Logistics advantage:** UAE and Oman continue expanding transport/storage and free zone logistics, enhancing multimodal connectivity and trade facilitation.

Source: EY-Strategic Influence of the GCC, 2025, Sources: PwC, Re-Birth SEZs, GlobalData, FDI Trends in the Middle East, 2025, S&P Global, FDI Trends in MENA, 2025, Enterprise-FDI growth, 2025, General Authority for Statistics, Gov SA, 2024, Emirates NBD Research, 2030, Saudi Mobility Consulting, Roadmap to EV Infrastructure, 2024



GCC FDI & Sectoral Drivers

Rather than competing on cost alone, MENA economies are positioning their SEZs to capture value in strategic niches. Renewable energy projects are framed as part of national climate commitments, logistics corridors are designed to mitigate global supply chain risks, digital investments are tied to smart-city and AI strategies, and healthcare clusters are emerging as responses to post-pandemic vulnerabilities. This is not incremental change; it is a structural pivot toward sectors that combine economic competitiveness with social relevance.

Equally important is the geographic layering of specialization (Table 1.2). The Gulf states are leveraging scale and capital to dominate in renewables and advanced manufacturing. This distribution of sectoral strengths suggests that MENA's competitiveness will rest on a portfolio approach: each country building depth in a few sectors, while collectively offering investors a diversified regional ecosystem.

The sectoral evolution of FDI in MENA reflects a deeper reorientation of capital driven by three converging forces: investor demand for resilience, government diversification agendas, and SEZs acting as institutional anchors for sector specialization. Rather than competing on cost alone, MENA economies are positioning their zones to capture value in strategic niches.

TABLE 1.2: STRATEGIC SECTORAL DRIVERS OF FDI IN MENA

<p>Renewable Energy</p> <p>UAE green hydrogen & Saudi solar clusters</p>	<p>Attracting large-scale inflows supported by national diversification strategies. UAE's KIZAD Green Hydrogen Hub and Saudi Arabia's NEOM solar projects frame the Gulf as a global clean energy leader. SEZs are embedding renewable energy mandates and green building codes as standard investor requirements.</p>
<p>Logistics & Ports</p> <p>Sohar (Oman) & Tanger Med (Morocco)</p>	<p>Evolving into multimodal gateways integrating maritime, rail, and industrial corridors. Red Sea disruptions have accelerated investment in alternative routing and bonded logistics. Zones with FTAs and seamless customs — such as JAFZA (UAE) — are gaining strategic importance as supply chain resilience hubs.</p>
<p>Digital & AI</p> <p>UAE smart SEZs & Egypt tech parks</p>	<p>Leading regional digital transformation — attracting FDI in AI, cloud, and data centres. UAE regulatory sandboxes and smart-city strategies draw ICT multinationals, while Egypt's tech zones leverage cost advantages and young talent pipelines. Digital OSS platforms and e-governance are now baseline investor expectations.</p>
<p>Healthcare & Biotech</p> <p>Egypt & Saudi Arabia pharma clusters</p>	<p>Post-COVID pharma investments expanding biotech clusters and clinical research capacity. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 healthcare targets and Egypt's industrial zones attract multinational pharma firms through dedicated clusters offering streamlined regulatory approvals, R&D incentives, and workforce upskilling pipelines.</p>

Which sector aligns best with your SEZ's long-term strategy? Map the above trends to your zone's capabilities.

Across developing Asia, FDI flows contracted overall, with South Asia down 37% and Central Asia down 27%. Southeast Asia was the exception, recording a modest +1% increase to USD 226 billion. This contrast underscores the relative resilience of West Asia, where the UAE and Saudi Arabia emerged as regional leaders.²³

Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE recorded rises in deal numbers. A notable regional trend was the decline in renewable energy and industrial project finance, offset by higher petrochemical investments. This divergence - weakening project finance but rising greenfield announcements, suggests better medium-term prospects for manufacturing-led FDI in MENA, with SEZs acting as stabilizing platforms for sectoral diversification.

The MENA region's FDI story is one of contrasts and convergence. On one hand, headline flows remain resilient, anchored by the UAE and Saudi Arabia. On the other, smaller economies like Egypt, Oman, and Qatar are carving out sectoral niches that diversify the regional portfolio. SEZs emerge as the common denominator, acting as stabilizers, policy laboratories, and magnets for sector-specific investment.

Strategic Implications for SEZs

SEZs are no longer passive recipients of investment — they are now active instruments of industrial policy, shaping national competitiveness, employment, and sectoral transformation. In the MENA region, this evolution demands a shift from static infrastructure to dynamic, investor-responsive ecosystems.

MENA's competitiveness will hinge less on replicating global SEZ models and more on specialization and integration: UAE in ICT and clean energy, Saudi Arabia in advanced manufacturing and petrochemicals, Egypt in agritech and pharma, Oman in logistics, and Qatar in consumer markets. Together, these niches form a diversified portfolio that can sustain FDI resilience even amid global fragmentation.

To remain globally competitive, and attract FDI, SEZs must offer:

Digital OSS Platforms

1

Seamless investor onboarding, licensing, and compliance. Zones integrating e-governance, AI-enabled dashboards, and real-time service tracking are outperforming legacy models.²⁴

Sector-Specific Clustering

2

Drive synergies, scale, and supply chain resilience. SEZs that specialise — whether in renewables, agritech, or digital — attract deeper FDI commitments and ecosystem development.²⁵

ESG-Compliant Infrastructure

3




Meet global standards for sustainability, inclusion and transparency. Zones embedding green building codes, renewable energy, and workforce upskilling become preferred destinations for multinationals.²⁶

Investor-Centric Models

4

Cost-to-Serve (CTS) analysis optimizes service delivery and aligns incentives with investor value creation. CTS frameworks help SEZs tailor infrastructure, logistics, and policy support to sector-specific needs.²⁷

MENA SEZs ARE EVOLVING INTO:

-  Shock absorbers against geopolitical and macroeconomic turbulence
-  Policy laboratories for ESG, digital governance, and performance-based incentives
-  Connectors linking Africa, Asia, and Europe through logistics corridors and industrial clusters

Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1 · Sohar Free Zone, Oman

Oman's Sohar Free Zone, established in 2002 adjacent to the deep-water Sohar Port, has become a flagship example of how SEZs can attract high-quality FDI while supporting national diversification goals.²⁸ Strategically located on the Strait of Hormuz, it connects Asian, African, and European trade routes.²⁹

Key Sectors:

Logistics, chemicals, petrochemicals, manufacturing, automotive & textiles

Key Incentives:

- 100% foreign ownership
- 0% import/re-export duties
- Corporate tax holiday up to 25 years
- 0% personal income tax
- 0% VAT
- FTAs with US & Singapore

Performance-based incentives tied to Omanisation targets extend corporate tax exemptions from 10 to 25 years — demonstrating how SEZs can align national employment goals with investor value.³⁰

More than 45 multinational companies across petrochemicals, metals, logistics, and food processing — including Vale's iron pelletizing plant and Jindal Shaded's steel complex, collectively contribute billions to Oman's GDP.³¹ Sohar has prompted Oman to replicate similar SEZ models in Duqm and Salalah.

This SEZ model aligns investor value with national priorities, ensuring that FDI contributes to employment, skills transfer, and ESG compliance.³² The success of Sohar has prompted Oman to replicate similar SEZ models in Duqm and Salalah, reinforcing SEZs as central pillars of the country's Vision 2040 strategy.³³

CASE STUDY 2 · KIZAD Green Hydrogen Hub, UAE

Located in Khalifa Industrial Zone Abu Dhabi (KIZAD), the Green Hydrogen Hub³⁴ is the first industrial-scale green hydrogen and ammonia facility in the MENA region. It aligns with the UAE's Operation 300bn strategy and Net Zero 2050 commitment. This project demonstrates how SEZs act as stabilizers and policy laboratories, attracting ESG-aligned FDI while driving diversification away from oil and gas into next-generation industries. It exemplifies MENA's shift from hydrocarbons to clean energy clusters as a foundation for long-term resilience.

\$1B+

Estimated Investment

200K

Tonnes green ammonia/year

**Net Zero
2050**

UAE climate commitment

- Strengthens Abu Dhabi's role as a hub for renewables and industrial innovation.
- Developed by Helios Industry in partnership with AD Ports Group
- Supported by international investors from Europe and Asia
- Anchored in KIZAD's SEZ framework: tax incentives, logistics integration & proximity to Khalifa Port
- Demonstrates how SEZs act as policy laboratories attracting ESG-aligned FDI



Summary of Recommendations

In a fragmented global economy marked by supply chain reconfiguration and shifting investment geographies, SEZs offer governments structured mechanisms to attract targeted investments. MENA SEZs are uniquely positioned to act as regional hubs linking Africa, Asia, and Europe. For policymakers, the implication is clear: sectoral shifts are not just about attracting projects, but about curating clusters that align with long-term national visions and global investor priorities. SEZs, when designed as adaptive platforms, become the mechanism through which these clusters can be scaled, integrated, and sustained.

POLICY MAKERS

Deepen Sector Stacks

Expand plug-and-play infrastructure (clean power, data center-ready plots, bonded warehouses) and standardize fast-track permitting in strategic sectors such as logistics, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, agritech, and healthcare biotech

Talent & Visas

Scale specialist visas, STEM pipelines, and mutual recognition of qualifications to alleviate skills bottlenecks in ICT and renewables.

Finance Instruments

Offer on-park green financing, carbon credit facilitation, and outcomes-based incentives tied to jobs, export intensity, and R&D.

SME Integration

Embed supplier development programs to localize inputs in auto, chemicals, and construction — improving resilience and value capture.

INVESTORS & CORPORATES

Digital & Platforms

Target cloud/AI, cybersecurity, fintech, and IoT within UAE; use regulatory sandboxes and tech zones for speed and incentives.

Green Energy & Grid

In UAE/Oman, pursue utility-scale solar/wind, green hydrogen & ammonia, BESS, and CBAM-aligned supply chains.

Advanced Manufacturing

In KSA/Oman, back downstream conversion (specialty chemicals, performance materials) for higher margins and export growth.

HQ & Services Hub

Leverage UAE for regional command centers, shared services, and treasury ops; pair with KSA/Egypt for operational scale.

ECOSYSTEM BUILDERS

Blended Finance

Support clean energy and industrial decarbonization through blended finance and guarantee schemes for cross-border working capital.

Standards & Data

Promote ESG disclosure templates and sector benchmarks to reduce diligence friction and speed up FDI decisions.

SEZs as Engines of Strategic FDI

SEZs in the MENA region are evolving beyond static enclaves into dynamic policy instruments, capable of driving diversification, digital transformation, and ESG-aligned growth. Despite their latent potential, many remain underutilized. Yet, when aligned with investor priorities of stability, regulatory clarity, and sustainability, SEZs can become powerful magnets for resilient FDI. SEZs can simultaneously deliver investor value and national development outcomes, proving that SEZs can be both competitive and socially transformative.

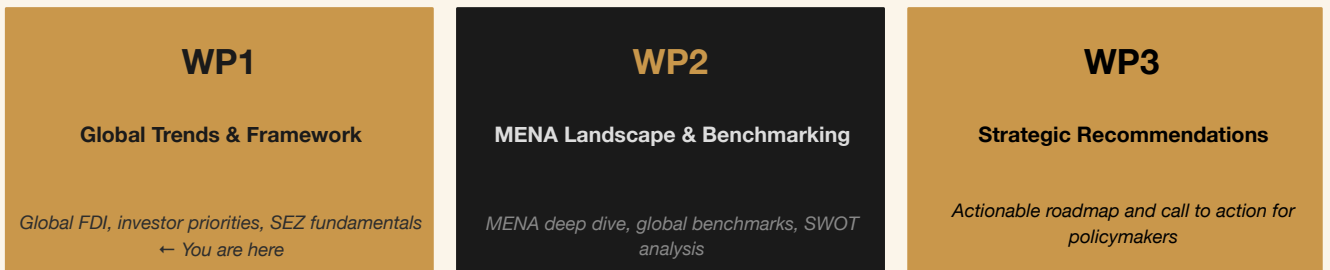
THIS WHITE PAPER HAS ESTABLISHED:

- SEZs reframed as policy laboratories for reform and diversification
- Global and regional FDI trends contextualizing MENA's risks and opportunities
- Investor priorities and sectoral anchors shaping capital flows
- Strategic levers SEZs must adopt to remain globally competitive

“ SEZs must evolve from survival mechanisms into strategic hubs that connect Africa, Asia, and Europe — anchoring sustainable and investor-centric growth in a volatile global economy.

WHAT COMES NEXT — THE SERIES ROADMAP

But this is only the beginning. The story of SEZs in MENA unfolds across three mini white papers, forming a comprehensive roadmap for reimagining SEZs as engines of strategic FDI. The imperative is clear: SEZs must evolve from survival mechanisms into strategic hubs that connect Africa, Asia, and Europe, anchoring sustainable and investor-centric growth in a volatile global economy.



Contact NurZen to explore how your SEZ can be repositioned for strategic FDI attractiveness.

Glossary & Acronyms

FDI	Foreign Direct Investment — cross-border investment where an individual, company, or government acquires a lasting interest (10%+ voting stock) in a business in another country. Includes M&A, new facilities, reinvested profits, and intra-company loans.
SEZ	Special Economic Zone — designated areas where business and trade laws differ from the rest of the economy. Aim to attract investment, boost exports, and create jobs by offering incentives such as tax holidays, simplified customs, and relaxed regulations.
IPA	Investment Promotion Agency — government or quasi-government bodies tasked with attracting and facilitating FDI. They provide information, streamline approvals, and market the country or region as an investment destination.
Nearshoring	A business strategy where companies relocate operations to nearby or neighbouring countries rather than distant offshore locations. Reduces costs, shortens supply chains, improves communication, and leverages cultural and time-zone proximity.
Friendshoring	A supply chain strategy that relocates production and sourcing to countries considered political or economic allies. Emphasizes resilience and shared values over pure cost efficiency to reduce geopolitical risk.
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance — framework for assessing corporate behavior across sustainability, ethical, and governance dimensions. Increasingly a decisive factor in FDI site selection decisions.
OSS	One-Stop Shop — a single integrated platform or office providing all administrative services required by investors, from licensing and permitting to compliance and business support.
CTS	Cost-to-Serve — analytical framework assessing the total cost to serve a specific customer or sector from the investor's perspective, covering logistics, utilities, labor, and regulatory costs end-to-end.



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