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Amid Geopolitical Instability, the Middle East and North Africa Continues Regulatory Reform, Yet Challenges Persist

Washington, D.C., October 29, 2014—A new World Bank Group report finds that amid unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, local entrepreneurs faced challenging circumstances in the past year. While several economies improved the business environment for local firms—such as the United Arab Emirates, among this year’s 10 top global improvers—the pace of regulatory reform in the region was comparatively slow.

Released today, *Doing Business 2015: Going Beyond Efficiency* finds that 11 economies in the Middle East and North Africa reformed in at least one area tracked by the report in 2013/14: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Malta, Morocco, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and West Bank and Gaza. With 55 percent of the region’s economies reforming business regulations—compared with 60 percent in East Asia and the Pacific and 74 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa—the scope of business regulatory reforms remained narrow. The reforms did not span all areas measured by *Doing Business*, such as enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.

In the past year, economies in the region implemented the most regulatory reforms in the area of trade. Algeria and Jordan improved port infrastructure, thereby reducing port and terminal handling time, while Morocco reduced the number of documents required for exporting. Such reforms are leading to tangible benefits for entrepreneurs. A decade ago, it took a Moroccan entrepreneur 17 days to export goods from her country; today, it takes her only 10 days—the same as it would in Austria.

“While regional unrest continues to roil the Middle East and North Africa, several economies in the region have made notable efforts to improve their business environment,” said Rita Ramalho, *Doing Business* report lead author, World Bank Group. *“In the past year, the United Arab Emirates improved its business environment the most in the region across multiple areas captured by the report, making it one of the 10 top global improvers. It enhanced the administrative efficiency of its land registry, improved access to credit information, and strengthened minority investor protections.”*

The report this year expands the data for three of the 10 topics covered, and there are plans to do so for five more topics next year. In addition, the ease of doing business ranking is now based on the distance to frontier score. This measure shows how close each economy is to global best practices in business regulation. A higher score indicates a more efficient business environment and stronger legal institutions.

The report finds that Singapore tops the global ranking on the ease of doing business. Joining it on the list of the top 10 economies with the most business-friendly regulatory environments are New Zealand; Hong Kong SAR, China; Denmark; the Republic of Korea; Norway; the United States; the United Kingdom; Finland; and Australia.

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About the Doing Business report series

The annual World Bank Group flagship *Doing Business* report analyzes regulations that apply to an economy’s businesses during their life cycle, including start-up and operations, trading across borders,

paying taxes, and resolving insolvency. The aggregate ease of doing business rankings are based on the distance to frontier scores for 10 topics and cover 189 economies. *Doing Business* does not measure all aspects of the business environment that matter to firms and investors. For example, it does not measure the quality of fiscal management, other aspects of macroeconomic stability, the level of skills in the labor force, or the resilience of financial systems. Its findings have stimulated policy debates worldwide and enabled a growing body of research on how firm-level regulation relates to economic outcomes across economies. Each year the report team works to improve the methodology and to enhance their data collection, analysis and output. The project has benefited from feedback from many stakeholders over the years. With a key goal to provide an objective basis for understanding and improving the local regulatory environment for business around the world, the project goes through rigorous reviews to ensure its quality and effectiveness. This year's report marks the 12th edition of the global *Doing Business* report series. For more information about the *Doing Business* reports, please visit doingbusiness.org and join us on [doingbusiness.org/Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/doingbusiness.org).

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