UK-MENA

CONNECTING MARKETS. CREATING VALUE.

GULF · DIVERSIFICATION · CAPITAL

# Beyond Oil

The Gulf's diversification decade is reshaping where global capital flows. A practical map of the opportunity — and how to enter it well.

Foreword

*The story of the Gulf is being rewritten in real time. The question for any board is no longer whether the region is diversifying, but whether your organisation will participate in the building of the new economy — or merely watch it from the outside.*

At UK-MENA we have watched several waves of Gulf ambition arrive and recede. This one is different in scale and in seriousness. Below we set out where the diversification is real, where the capital is moving, and how a UK organisation can engage with credibility rather than as a passing visitor.

The macro picture

## Non-oil is now the engine

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, launched in 2016, has moved from rhetoric to measurable structural change. Non-oil activity now accounts for more than half of GDP, growing close to 5% in the first half of 2025, with the Ministry of Finance projecting overall growth of around 4.4% in 2025 and 4.6% in 2026 — led primarily by non-oil expansion.

| 55%+ | ~$1tn | 150m |
|---|---|---|
| Share of Saudi GDP now from non-oil activity | Assets held by the Public Investment Fund | Saudi annual visitor target for 2030 |

The capital behind this shift is concentrated and patient. The Public Investment Fund has grown to almost a trillion dollars in assets, deploying hundreds of billions domestically while also taking stakes in major multinationals abroad. For UK firms, the PIF and its peers are not only potential investors but anchor customers for entire new sectors.

Where the opportunity is

## Four sectors worth a board's attention

— **Tourism and giga-projects.** Saudi Arabia welcomed roughly 122–123 million visitors in 2025, hitting its original 100 million target seven years early and revising the goal upward to 150 million by 2030 — pulling hospitality, construction, design and services demand with it.

— **Mining and minerals.** Confirmed Saudi mineral reserves have been revalued at around $2.5 trillion, and Ma'aden unveiled a $110 billion plan across gold, phosphate, aluminium, copper, lithium and rare earths at the January 2026 Future Minerals Forum.

— **Clean energy and smart cities.** In the UAE, the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park's target has been lifted beyond 7,260 MW by 2030, while smart-city technology spending could approach $100 billion by the end of the decade.

— **Trade and logistics.** The UAE is on course to reach its roughly $1.09 trillion non-oil foreign-trade target ahead of its original 2031 schedule.

> *This is the structural decoupling of an economy from the oil-price cycle. Every giga-project and reform points the same way — and that direction is now investable.*

The discipline required

## Why entry quality decides returns

Opportunity at this scale attracts crowds, and crowds attract mistakes. Localisation requirements such as Saudi Arabia’s workforce-nationalisation programmes, evolving procurement rules, and the premium placed on genuine, long-term presence all reward organisations that arrive prepared and penalise those that treat the region transactionally. The diversification is real; so is the gap between firms that build relationships and those that chase announcements.

How UK-MENA helps

## Entering the new economy well

UK-MENA helps boards and investors separate durable opportunity from noise, structure a credible regional presence, and reach the institutions — sovereign funds, ministries and family enterprises — whose participation defines success. Our counsel is built on four decades at the centre of UK–Arab business and on relationships that cannot be bought at speed.

— **Opportunity mapping** — sector and counterparty prioritisation against your capabilities and risk appetite.

— **Presence design** — how to localise credibly, from partner selection to regulatory and procurement positioning.

— **Senior introductions** — access to the funds, officials and enterprises that move first.

Sources

1. Saudi non-oil growth and Ministry of Finance projections: Oxford Business Group, Saudi Arabia 2025 report (2026).
2. PIF assets and diversification assessment: CSIS, "Saudi Arabia’s Strategic Vision" (2026).
3. Tourism, mining and Ma’aden figures: vision2030.ai diversification analysis (May 2026); Future Minerals Forum coverage (Jan 2026).
4. UAE non-oil trade and solar/smart-city targets: Al Arabiya, "Saudi Arabia leads $2trln Vision 2030 drive" (2025).