



## Press Release

### 12<sup>th</sup> Annual ASDA' A BCW Arab Youth Survey

## **Frustrated with struggling economies and corruption, nearly half of young Arabs have considered leaving their country**

- *Desire to emigrate highest in the Levantine states of Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Palestinian Territories, while young nationals of oil-rich Gulf states least likely to want to leave*
- *Survey findings shed light on the views of Arab youth on anti-government protests, gender rights, personal identity, jobs, foreign relations and the COVID-19 pandemic*

**Dubai, UAE; October 6, 2020:** Nearly half of 200 million young Arabs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have considered leaving their country, frustrated with struggling economies and widespread government corruption, according to the findings of the [12<sup>th</sup> Annual ASDA' A BCW Arab Youth Survey](#), released today. The survey also reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased young Arabs' desire to emigrate, with one-third of the region's youth more likely to want to leave their country.

Across the region, 42 per cent of young Arabs have considered emigrating to another country. The desire to leave is most prevalent (63 per cent) among youth in the Levantine states of Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Yemen and Palestinian Territories. Meanwhile, young people in the oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are least likely (13 per cent) to consider leaving. The primary drivers of potential emigration are economic reasons (24 per cent) and corruption (16 per cent), with educational opportunities, new experiences and safety and security also playing a significant role.

The findings of MENA's largest independent study on youth conducted for [ASDA' A BCW](#) by [PSB](#), a global strategic research and analytics consultancy, reveals the opinions of young Arabs on a range of subjects including the anti-government protests that raged through parts of the region during the past year, gender rights, personal identity, employment, personal debt, foreign relations and media consumption.

The survey polled 4,000 young Arab nationals aged 18 to 24 from 17 Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa with a 50:50 male female split. The research was conducted in two phases, with the main survey polling between January 19 and March 3, 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the region; and the second, COVID-19 Pulse Survey, between August 18 and 26, 2020, conducted in six Arab states.



“The findings of our Arab Youth Survey highlight the unique complexities – and opportunities – that must be addressed to meet the aspirations of young people in the Arab world,” said Donna Imperato, Global CEO, [BCW](#) (Burson Cohn & Wolfe). “These insights on the region – one of the most diverse in the world and where the under-30s make up two thirds of the population – form the basis of the communications counsel that we provide to our clients, including governments, civil society organisations and the private sector.”

“As an independent study, the ASDA’A BCW Arab Youth Survey has consistently delivered evidence-based insights on the hopes and frustrations of young people in the Arab world,” said Sunil John, President, Middle East, BCW and Founder of ASDA’A BCW. “Set against the backdrop of street protests and a sharp oil price decline that have led to acute government budget deficits, the study demonstrates the link between poor governance and lack of opportunities. The findings underpin the need for many parts of the MENA region to focus on and nurture its youth dividend or risk losing a generation of its brightest young people.”

Following a wave of anti-government protests across the region over the last 12 months, the survey reveals that almost nine in 10 young Arabs in Algeria, Iraq, Sudan and Lebanon supported the protests in their own countries. A majority of the youth in these four countries are optimistic that the protests would lead to real positive change.

Protests resulted in the ousting of Omar Al-Bashir after nearly three decades in power as president in Sudan, and the resignation of Abdelaziz Bouteflika after over two decades as the president of Algeria. Lebanon and Iraq also both saw a change in leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have added to the possibility of more unrest, particularly in Lebanon, where nearly three-quarters of respondents in the COVID-19 Pulse Survey said they believe the pandemic has made protests against the political status quo more likely.

“The link between the protests and corruption can also be inferred from the fact that tackling government corruption is seen as the single largest priority for achieving progress in the Arab world (36 per cent of all respondents), ahead of any other issue, including creating well-paying jobs (32 per cent), and defeating terrorist organisations or resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict,” John added.

With job creation identified as the second most important priority for regional progress, almost nine in 10 young people (87 per cent) are concerned about unemployment, but only half (49 per cent) say they have confidence in their governments’ ability to deal with unemployment. The ongoing economic woes appear to be further compounded by the impact of COVID-19, with 20 per cent saying someone in their family has lost their job due to the pandemic, 30 per cent reporting higher household debt, and 72 per cent saying the pandemic has made it more difficult to find a job.

In a region with the world’s highest youth unemployment ([over 26 per cent according to the International Labour Organisation](#)), a rising number of young Arabs are looking beyond the government or the private sector to provide employment, instead preferring to work for themselves or their families (23 per cent vs. 16 per cent in 2019). Two in five are also considering setting up their own business within the next five years – with youth in the GCC showing the greatest entrepreneurial spirit (55 per cent).



The survey also debunks stereotypical notions of the region, particularly on gender rights. A strong majority of young Arab women (75 per cent) say they have the same or more rights as men in their country. Young Arab women (76 per cent) and men (70 per cent) agree that a woman can benefit her family more by working than staying at home.

Voicing their view on the changing dynamics of foreign affairs, Arab youth see Saudi Arabia and the UAE as the two rising Arab powers that have most influence on the geo-political environment of the region (39 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively). Among non-Arab states, the United States is seen having increased its influence in the region the most over the past five years. This year, the US is also seen more favourably (56 per cent) by Arab youth than in 2019 (41 per cent) or any point since 2016.

For the ninth consecutive year, the UAE continues to prevail as the preferred nation for young Arabs to live in (46 per cent) and for their own nation to emulate (52 per cent). The United States is the next most popular country among Arab youth to live in (33 per cent) and emulate (30 per cent).

**Other key findings from the survey include:**

- More young Arabs say they are being saddled with personal debt. Nearly one-third of young Arabs (35 per cent) say they are in debt now, a significant increase from earlier years (21 per cent in 2019).
- Religion is seen as the most important aspect of the personal identity of young Arabs (40 per cent), more so than their family, nationality, gender and other factors.
- Arab youth are increasingly embracing the digital revolution: In 2015, just 25 per cent young Arabs cited social media as their source of news, this year, 79 per cent say they get their news from social media. Since 2018, e-commerce has also experienced exponential growth among Arab youth and a large majority (80 per cent) now shop online.

With two-thirds of the Arab population under the age of 30, the survey presents evidence-based insights into the attitudes of Arab youth, providing public and private sector organisations with data and analysis to inform their decision-making and policy creation. Download for free, the full findings and a White Paper on this year's ASDA' A BCW Arab Youth Survey at [arabyouthsurvey.com](http://arabyouthsurvey.com)

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**Note to Editors:**

**About the ASDA' A BCW Arab Youth Survey**

Now in its 12th year, the annual ASDA' A BCW Arab Youth Survey is one of the most important pieces of research produced in the Middle East and offers unique insight into the attitudes and aspirations of the region's biggest demographic. With 65 per cent of the Arab population under the age of 30, the survey presents evidence-based insights into the attitudes of Arab youth, providing public and private sector organisations with data and analysis to inform their decision-making and policy creation.

The survey is the largest of its kind of the region's largest demographic, its youth. This year, the Survey, covering 4,000 young Arabs aged 18 to 24, was conducted in two parts: The first Main Survey, before the coronavirus outbreak, and the second COVID-19 Pulse Survey, following the crisis.



The Main Survey was conducted in 17 Arab states between January 19 and March 3, 2020, before the COVID-19 crisis impacted the region. 3,400 face-to-face interviews were conducted by professional interviewers. The interviews were completed in Arabic and English with young Arab men and women. The sample split was 50:50 male/female. The survey covered exclusively young nationals in each state.

The 17 Arab states and territories covered by the Main Survey included five of the Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE), North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia) and the Levant (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Syria and Yemen).

For the COVID-19 Pulse Survey, 600 face-to-face and online interviews were conducted between August 18 and 26, 2020 among young Arab nationals of six countries in the region - Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The geographic location of the respondents included country capitals and other cities. The additional interviews were conducted to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Arab youth and to validate the findings of the Main Survey.

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#### **About ASDA'A BCW**

ASDA'A was founded in 2000 as an independent agency by Sunil John, who leads the agency in its 20th year. In 2008, WPP acquired a majority stake in the firm and ASDA'A became a part of the Burson-Marsteller global network. After the merger of Burson-Marsteller and Cohn & Wolfe in 2018 to create BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe), the firm is now ASDA'A BCW. The agency employs more than 160 professionals across seven wholly-owned offices and nine affiliates in 15 Middle East & North Africa (MENA) countries. The agency serves over 100 retained clients and is the leading PR consultancy in MENA.

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#### **About BCW**

BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe), one of the world's largest full-service global communications agencies, is in the business of moving people on behalf of clients. BCW delivers digitally and data-driven creative content and integrated communications programs grounded in earned media and scaled across all channels for clients in the B2B, consumer, corporate, crisis management, healthcare, public affairs, purpose and technology sectors. BCW is a part of WPP (NYSE: WPP), a creative transformation company

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#### **About PSB**

PSB is a global insights and analytics consultancy. For more than 40 years, PSB has provided actionable insights and guidance for corporate, government and public sector clients in over 100 countries. With deep expertise across qualitative and quantitative research and social and predictive analytics, PSB brings an integrative approach to helping clients solve their most complex challenges and win in highly competitive situations. PSB is a member of the BCW Group of companies, which is part of WPP (NYSE:WPP), a creative transformation company.

[www.psbinsights.com](http://www.psbinsights.com)

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