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SHIFT
BY MENA FINTECH ASSOCIATION
PAYMENTS COMMITTEE

THE STATE OF B2B PAYMENTS IN MENA

Roundtable Report on Awareness Gaps and Adoption Barriers

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Foreword

This report is published by the **MENA Fintech Association's B2B and Commercial Payments Sub Committee** as part of its ongoing work to accelerate the digitization of corporate payments across the region. It draws on a roundtable of senior practitioners spanning payment networks, acquiring, banking, and fintech investment, brought together to speak candidly under the Chatham House Rule.

The 2026 market data included alongside the original discussion is intended to give readers an external, sourced reference point against which to test the roundtable's conclusions, not to substitute for them. The Sub Committee's own workplan, outlined in Act Three, remains the primary output of this discussion.

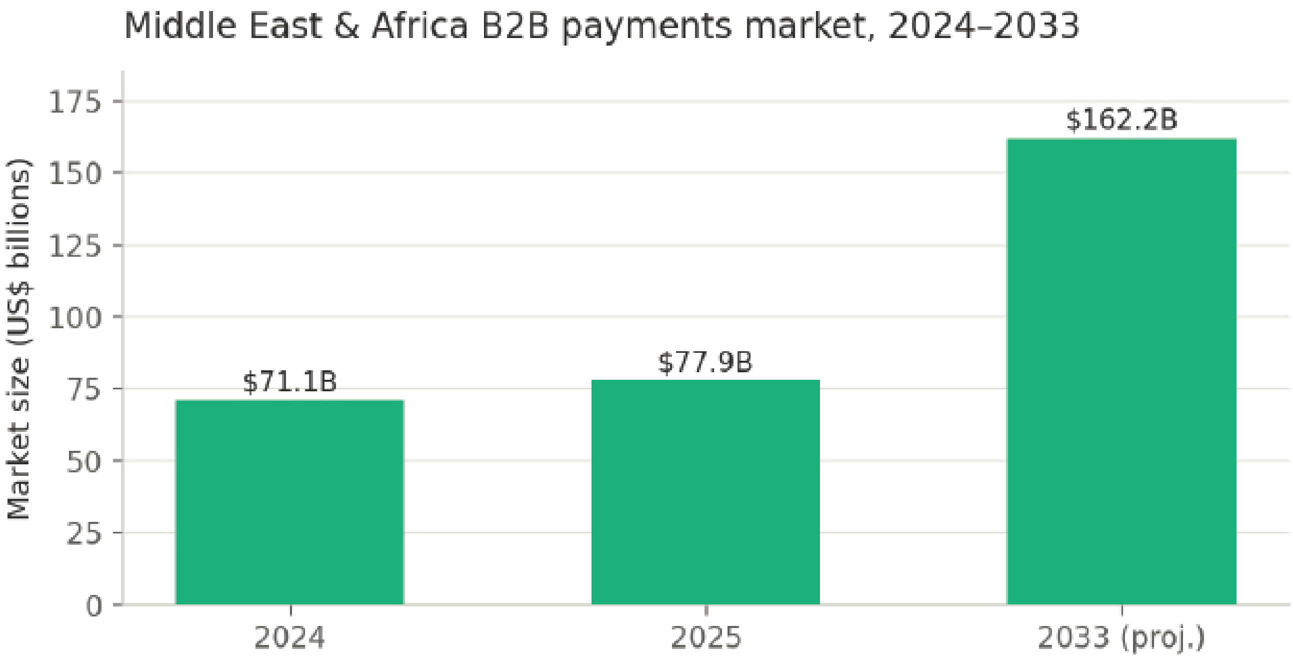
Executive Summary

The discussion centered on accelerating the digitization of corporate payments and expanding adoption of commercial card and virtual card solutions across the region. While card adoption has matured in travel payments, supplier payments across most spend categories continue to rely on ACH, supported by highly manual processes before and after the payment itself.

The group reached a clear conclusion: the primary barrier to commercial payment digitization in MENA is no longer technology or product capability, it is market awareness, education, and ecosystem engagement. Success will depend less on building new products and more on building demand.

The evolution of consumer payments provides a useful parallel. Card adoption accelerated only when both sides of the ecosystem evolved simultaneously: consumers had cards in hand, and merchants understood the operational value of accepting them. Merchant adoption was not driven by marketing campaigns; it was driven by solving real business problems, reducing collections effort, improving cash flow, and simplifying operations. Suppliers across the region face many of those same challenges today. The opportunity is to demonstrate how commercial cards solve those operational pain points rather than positioning them solely as a payment instrument.

For scale, third-party market research now sizes the underlying opportunity as follows:



Source: Straits Research, Middle East and Africa B2B Payments Market, 2025

Three strategic themes emerged:

1. Build market awareness through dedicated sales coverage. Commercial card portfolios are often housed within retail banking, or where they sit within transaction banking, relationship managers are rarely incentivized to sell card products. As a result, many corporates are never exposed to commercial cards as a working capital, automation, and controls solution. The group viewed dedicated, incentive-driven field sales, similar to the agent models used during India's digitization efforts and historic American Express acceptance campaigns, as the single highest-impact lever available to the region.

2. Expand the conversation beyond corporate banks to include acquirers. Industry efforts have largely focused on corporate banks, while acquirers remain under-engaged despite playing a critical role in supplier acceptance. Merchant discount rates are generally outweighed by the working capital, reconciliation, and collections benefits suppliers receive, yet this value proposition is rarely articulated. Acquirers need to take greater ownership of educating suppliers and driving B2B acceptance.

3. Strengthen partnerships with enterprise software providers. Schemes should invest more deeply in ERP and finance technology ecosystems, not only by embedding commercial card capabilities into corporate workflows, but also by leveraging these platforms as scalable distribution channels to educate and reach corporate buyers.

The group agreed to translate these priorities into a structured regional workplan, including role-specific working sessions with corporate banks, acquirers, technology providers and corporates, development of a best-practice playbook, and consideration of a joint "State of B2B Payments" briefing for regional central banks.

Act One: State of the Union

What has genuinely improved

The market has made meaningful progress over the past decade. Banks are now significantly more engaged in commercial payments, with commercial banking teams increasingly involved in corporate deal discussions to ensure card-based solutions form part of broader client relationships. Expense management capabilities have also advanced considerably, with corporate banks offering more sophisticated real-time controls, visibility, and compliance tools for day-to-day corporate spending. SME digital financial inclusion has moved fast, aided by the rise of digital banks.

The real barrier

No single factor commanded full consensus, but the most discussed barrier was structural ownership. Commercial payments often sit under retail banking, are led by generalist teams without deep expertise on corporate challenges on working capital, cost of funding operations, operational inefficiencies. The sales process is nuanced with multiple stakeholders, CFO vs. treasurer vs. procurement, and compete for a small incentive pool. Until commercial payments are owned and incentivized as seriously as consumer or corporate lending, awareness building on both sides of the transaction will remain under resourced.

Act Two: Where Is the Real Friction

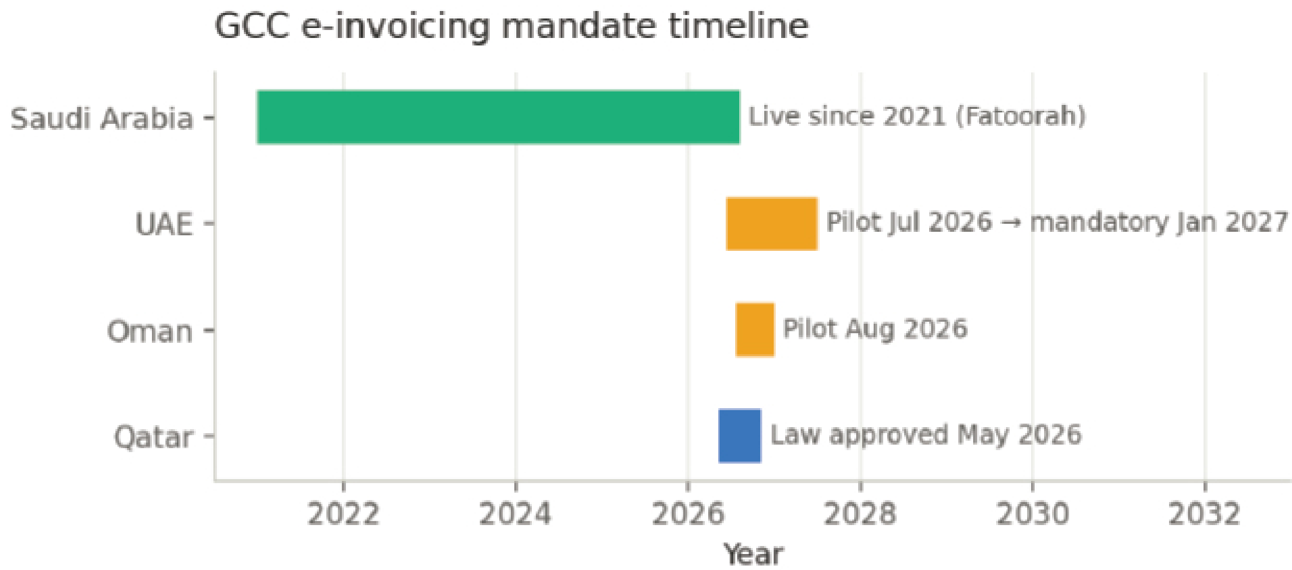
The adoption question

The discussion concluded that the next phase of commercial payment adoption will be driven less by advances in technology and more by ecosystem engagement, education, and commercial execution. Many treasury and accounts payable teams are still early in their understanding of how commercial card solutions can be integrated into existing procure-to-pay and treasury workflows. This presents an opportunity for corporate banks and corporate banking teams to take a more consultative approach, helping clients redesign payment processes, unlock working capital benefits, and improve operational efficiency through greater use of commercial payments.

There is an equally significant opportunity on the acceptance side. While the industry's focus has naturally been on expanding consumer acceptance, applying similar levels of investment to B2B acceptance could accelerate supplier adoption. Helping suppliers better understand the commercial benefits of card acceptance, including faster cash flow, simplified reconciliation, and reduced administrative effort, has the potential to unlock meaningful growth across the ecosystem.

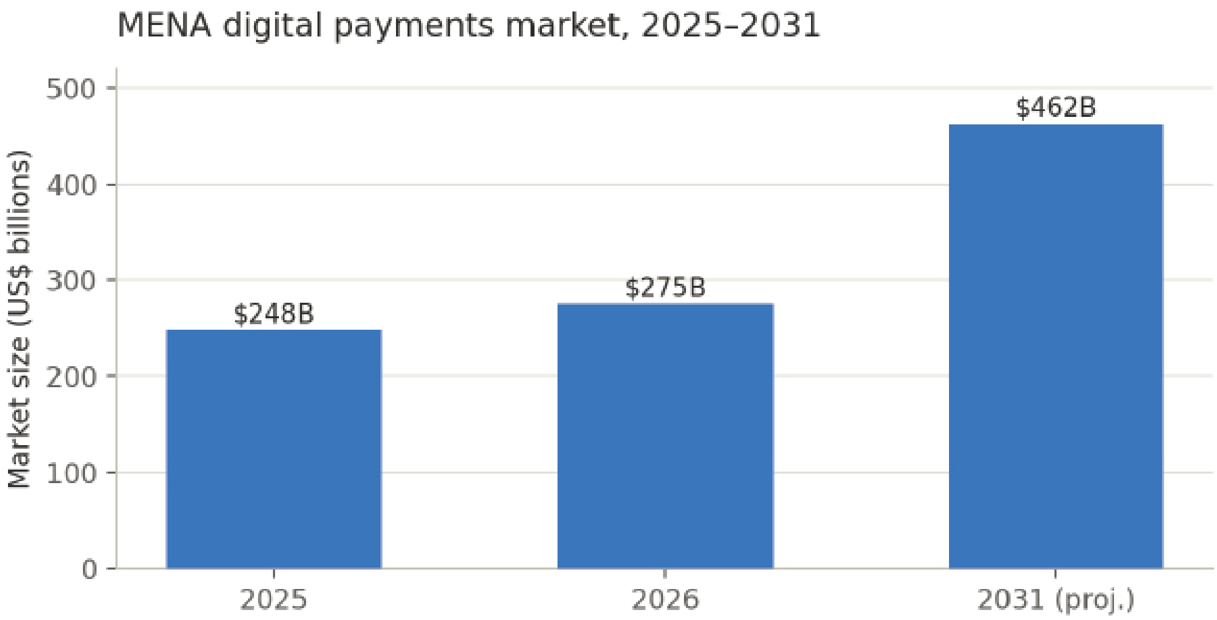
The group viewed this as a highly addressable market opportunity. With electronic invoicing mandates and broader digitization initiatives gaining momentum across the region, the regulatory environment is becoming increasingly supportive. The opportunity now is to bring corporate banks, acquirers, technology providers, and corporate banking teams together around a coordinated market development agenda that builds awareness, strengthens ecosystem collaboration, and accelerates commercial payment adoption.

As of mid-2026, that regulatory momentum is now dated and confirmed across the GCC:



Source: TaxINME, Banqup, ClearTax UAE e-invoicing guides, June–July 2026

The broader digital payments backdrop this sits within is also growing quickly:



Source: Mordor Intelligence, MENA Digital Payments Market, 2026

The corporate's untapped leverage

Large buyers could mandate card payment from suppliers to unlock working capital benefits, but rarely do. The benefit is often seen as incremental relative to a treasury team's other priorities, and the case is not being made in quantified terms. It works best where sellers face inventory pressure and need to convert stock to cash quickly. A suggested model is to link card payments to a broader supply chain or trade finance proposition rather than selling payments alone.

The missing player

Acquirers were identified as the most consistently absent participant in this conversation. Comparatively little structured work has gone into educating and incentivizing acquirers to build B2B acceptance, reconciliation tooling, and tiered pricing for larger suppliers. The result is strong issuing intent without matching acceptance infrastructure.

Naming the myth

The most damaging myth is that a cost of acceptance near two percent is prohibitively expensive for suppliers. In practice this cost is often lower than a supplier's underlying cost of capital on receivables outstanding sixty days or more, once financing cost and manual reconciliation burden are included. Schemes and banks can flex pricing down for larger suppliers on a bilateral basis. A second myth is that new verticals require bespoke products, when in many cases basic card enablement has simply not been rolled out yet.

Corporate Bank readiness to commercialize

Readiness correlates with sophistication. More advanced corporate banks understand the fee business logic and pursue it as part of broader cash management relationships. Many corporate banks remain focused on the traditional model of lending credit and gathering deposits, treating B2B fee income as secondary. The clearest structural gap is that commercial card portfolios often report into retail banking rather than transaction or corporate banking, disconnecting the product from the teams that own corporate treasury conversations.

The uncomfortable truth

The group's strongest area of agreement is that this is predominantly an awareness and go to market problem, not a technology or business model problem. The rails, pricing flexibility, and product already exist. What is missing is structured education of buyer and supplier finance teams and dedicated, incentivized sales capacity. The implication is that the industry can channel energy into education, distribution, and fixing internal bank ownership of commercial payments and of course product innovation needs to follow suit.

Act Three: Convergence on Committee Mandate

The group converged on three workstreams for the sub committee's upcoming programming, each intended to produce a discrete and usable output.

Ecosystem specific working sessions

Dedicated sessions with participants who were discussed but not present this time, starting with acquirers, followed by corporate banks, large corporate buyers and treasurers, and fintech lenders, to pressure test the awareness gaps and myths identified above.

Best practice playbook

A living reference document covering how commercial payments should be structured within a bank, how schemes and acquirers should price and support supplier acceptance, and how a corporate should evaluate and mandate supplier card acceptance. Framing this around SME financial inclusion keeps it credible with regulators.

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