

**Interpreneur
Report**

2026

**Mapping the route to
interpreneurial success**

Achieving interpreneurial success in a fast-changing world

In a global economy, uncertainty is no longer exceptional, it is the operating environment. For ambitious mid-market businesses expanding internationally, standing still is not an option.

In Kreston Global's latest Interpreneur Report, business leaders deliver their clearest message yet: resilience is not a nice-to-have, it is the key to global success.

Is the greatest risk not the volatility itself, but failing to adapt to it?



Contents

Going global	1
Executive summary	2
Environmental scanning.....	3
Harnessing AI.....	7
The benefit of experience.....	9
The Kreston view.....	13
Country reports:	
Australia	15
Brazil.....	16
India	17
Mexico	18
Nigeria	19
Singapore.....	20
Spain	21
South Africa.....	22
United Arab Emirates.....	23
United Kingdom	24
United States.....	25
Methodology.....	26
About Kreston Global	27

Introduction:

Critical intelligence for going global

What does it take for businesses to expand successfully into new international markets? For ambitious entrepreneurs keen to grow beyond borders — and for policy-makers shaping the environment they operate in — this is a critical, evolving question.

International entrepreneurship (or “interpreneurship”) merits attention because small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play an outsized role in global economic performance, contributing half of the world’s GDP.¹

The 2026 Kreston Global Interpreneur report explores what drives entrepreneurs to expand internationally, the factors that underpin success, and the common challenges they encounter along the way as they contend with rapid economic and market change.

Since our last report in 2024, the operating context has shifted significantly. In 2024, over 90% of respondents felt prepared for the arrival of AI. Artificial intelligence is no longer emergent but is transforming how businesses operate and creating new competitive advantages. Geopolitical tensions are redrawing the map on globalisation, tariff regimes can change almost overnight, while supply chains are being reshaped, and a complex nexus of regulations touches almost every aspect of a business’ operations.

Meanwhile, the economic outlook presents both opportunities and risks, with growth in advanced economies expected to remain positive, although slower than in emerging market and developing economies.²

We surveyed 1,100 leaders around the world in small and medium-sized companies that have expanded internationally, to identify what motivated them to embark on their interpreneurial journey and what lessons they learnt, and to see how attitudes have altered.

The results reveal a consistent story of determination, resilience and pragmatism despite the headwinds. They highlight where the interpreneurial landscape is shifting and what this means for those considering a similar move today.

As we continue to support interpreneurs at every step of the way, this report provides timely insight and practical value.



It is clear from this year’s results that SME leaders are wayfinders. Despite the complexities of the global economy, driving forward is hardwired into their DNA.

Typically, SMEs expanding internationally are subject to the same regulations and external forces as the very largest multinational businesses, but without the benefit of significant financial safety nets, tried-and-tested structures, or years of experience navigating local legislation and governments.

And while the outlook remains broadly positive, the finer details in the data tell a more nuanced story: businesses grappling with the challenges of AI, tariffs, and geopolitical instability, with confidence and ambition often shaped by the geographies in which they operate. In some regions, optimism around international expansion remains high; in others, businesses are more cautious.

It is no surprise to see that cultural challenges include bridging the gap between global expectations and local requirements. It is something our members see play out every day as they work alongside clients, becoming an extension of their teams, helping navigate difficult regulations or unhelpful bureaucracy.



Liza Robbins
Chief Executive

1. World Economic Forum <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/driving-global-growth-through-the-power-of-small-business/>

2. IMF World Economic Outlook Growth Predictions <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/weo/issues/2026/01/19/world-economic-outlook-update-january-2026>

Executive summary:

The view from interpreneurs today

Key findings from the report reveal:

1. Confidence in the current climate is strong

Interpreneurs are confident about prospects for international expansion today: respondents gave the current global expansion climate an average positivity score of 8.2 out of 10. More than half (57%) said it is easy for businesses to expand overseas at the moment.

2. Conditions ahead look positive

The forward outlook is similarly encouraging, despite the headwinds. The vast majority (86%) of interpreneurs expect conditions for international business expansion to become more favourable in the next two to three years.

3. Market growth remains the primary driver

Seeking market growth opportunities remains the number one motivation for expanding internationally: 59% said so, which was up from 52% in our last report in 2024. Almost six in 10 (58%) said accessing new customer markets is the most significant opportunity ahead for their overseas operations.

4. Digitalisation and innovation rise up the agenda

Many more interpreneurs now cite accessing digital technologies and innovation as a primary driver for international expansion (40%, up from 31% two years ago). More than half (52%) see adopting advanced technologies as a major opportunity going forward as they scale abroad.

5. AI readiness has become a reality

Nearly three-quarters (74%) reported that AI is having a significant impact on their organisation's international expansion strategy, with women more likely than men to rate its impact as significant. Just 1% said they don't use AI at all.

6. Tariff turbulence is cause for concern

Looking ahead, geopolitical instability and tariff-related cost increases are the biggest threats to international operations, said 45% and 40% respectively. Over half (57%) said tariffs/trade disputes have had a significant impact on their global strategy over the past one to two years.

7. Trade agreements and tax regimes matter more than ever

When considering where to expand abroad, interpreneurs are more interested in whether favourable trade agreements exist than two years ago (48% versus 42%). The same is true of tax regimes (39% said favourable tax policies make a country attractive, up from 33% in 2024).

8. Sustaining company culture is challenging

Maintaining a cohesive company culture presents numerous challenges when expanding internationally. Balancing global standards with local flexibility is the trickiest aspect (for 42%), followed by managing differing workforce norms and employee expectations (33%).

9. Regulatory and tax complexity presents difficulties

More than a third struggle to navigate regulatory compliance requirements (37%) and global tax rules (34%) in the international expansion process, while for 31%, a lack of familiarity with both global and local tax issues puts compliance at risk and undermines their ability to benefit from tax breaks.

10. Desire grows for policy clarity

As a result, there has been a clear uptick in the perceived importance of a transparent regulatory environment among interpreneurs: 36% cited this as a reason why a country would be attractive as a destination for international expansion, compared to just 28% in 2024.

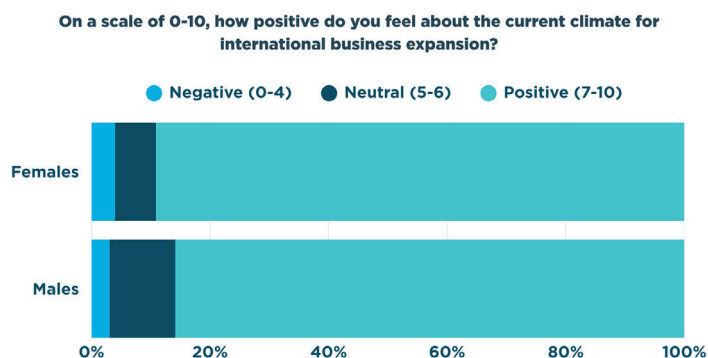
An "interpreneur" is a term we created to describe a business leader who successfully expands their business' presence into markets abroad.

Environment scanning in a turbulent market

So far, the 2020s have been defined by disruption. From the Covid-19 pandemic to the advent of AI to fast-changing tariff rules to geopolitical conflict, business leaders have operated in near-constant uncertainty. Maintaining business-as-usual has become more challenging for many entrepreneurs, but those expanding abroad have had even more reason to draw on all their ingenuity, drive and vision to see their ambitions to go global become a reality.

Against this backdrop, the level of confidence among entrepreneurs revealed in our survey is striking. Despite the volatile geopolitical situation that was unfolding specifically when the survey was conducted (in February 2026), respondents expressed a strong sense of optimism about international expansion prospects.

They rated the current global expansion climate at 8.2 out of 10 on the positivity scale, with women reporting even higher sentiment scores than men (8.5 versus 8.0).



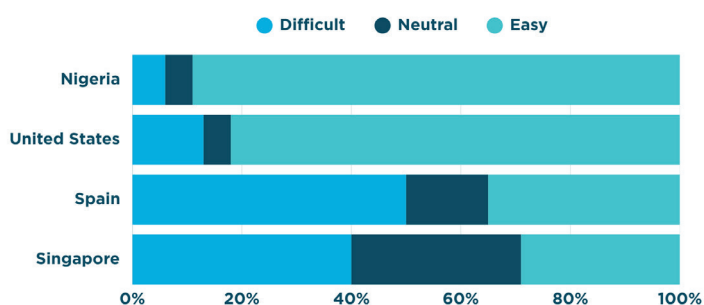
Their optimism is borne out by data from the World Trade Organization showing that global trade saw stronger than expected growth in 2025 of around 4.7%, far outpacing GDP. While growth this year is forecast to slow to 2.7%, it is expected to remain on a par with GDP.³

The prevailing view was that entrepreneurs should not be daunted by the prospect of international expansion. More than half (57%) said it is easy for businesses to expand overseas at the moment, given the current geopolitical and economic climate (with younger entrepreneurs aged 25-44 the most inclined to say so).

This compares to just over a quarter (27%) who felt it is a difficult move to make right now. However, it's worth noting some significant regional disparities in sentiment here: 89% say it is easy in Nigeria and 82% in the US, falling to just 35% in Spain and 29% in Singapore.

The vast majority felt positive about the future: 86% expect conditions for international business expansion to become more favourable in the next two to three years.

Given the current geopolitical and economic climate, how easy or difficult do you think it is for businesses to expand overseas?



Do you expect the overall environment for international business expansion to become more or less favourable over the next 2-3 years?

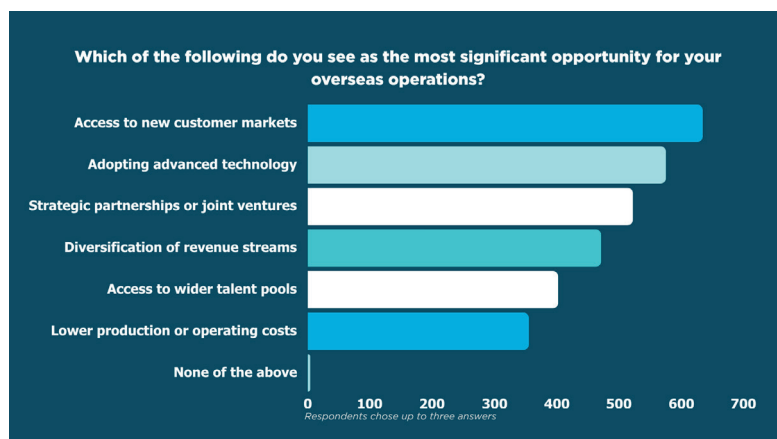


Global results

3. World Trade Organization, Global Trade Outlook and Statistics March 2026 https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/gtos0326_e.pdf

Looking ahead, gaining access to new customer markets is viewed as the most significant opportunity for overseas operations, but access to technology, talent, strategic partnerships, broader revenue streams and lower costs also feature prominently.

All this suggests that a positive attitude, an ability to spot opportunity whatever the weather and a determination to overcome hurdles are characteristic of the interpreneurial mindset, and these traits should stand them in good stead whether the outlook ahead is benign or not.



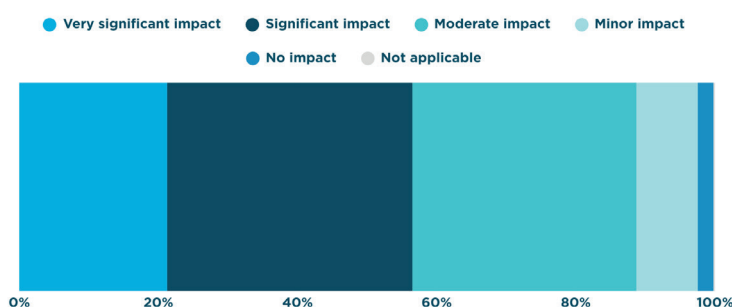
The impact of tariffs on global strategy

Unpredictable tariff regimes represent one of the main challenges interpreneurs have faced in recent times. The speed and scale of changes in the past year or so has been unprecedented, yet staying on course for global growth amid the turbulence is clearly mission-critical.

Businesses operating in or entering multiple markets around the world have had to be both agile and tactical, for example by restructuring supply chains, optimising inventory or harnessing AI to help them analyse data, map risk and plan ahead. Almost all our survey respondents (98%) said that tariffs or trade disputes have had an impact on their organisation's global strategy over the past one to two years, with 57% describing it as significant.

With no guarantees that the uncertainty around tariffs is over, interpreneurial businesses will need to remain adaptable to mitigate risk and keep costs under control. Indeed, interpreneurs recognise geopolitical instability and tariff-related cost increases as the most significant threats to their international operations as they look ahead (according to 45% and 40% respectively), while almost a third (31%) are concerned about supply chain disruption.

To what extent have tariffs or trade disputes impacted your organisation's global strategy over the past 1-2 years?



Looking ahead, which of the following, if any, do you see as the most significant potential threats to your overseas enterprise?



Geopolitical instability
45%



Tariff-related cost increases
45%



Regulatory or compliance changes
37%

Recent tariff volatility driven primarily by the US administration and geopolitical tensions, has had a significant impact on interpreneurs around the world. The impact on different countries can be disproportionate by directly altering cost bases and sourcing decisions. In markets like India, the US, and Nigeria, clients are actively restructuring supply chains, renegotiating contracts, and reassessing transfer pricing to manage duty exposure. By contrast, the UAE's role as a low-tariff trading hub dampens the effect. Overall, tariffs are now a key driver of operational change, not just a tax cost.



Mark Taylor

Kreston Global Group Tax Chair and Head of International Services, Kreston Duncan & Toplis

Harnessing AI:

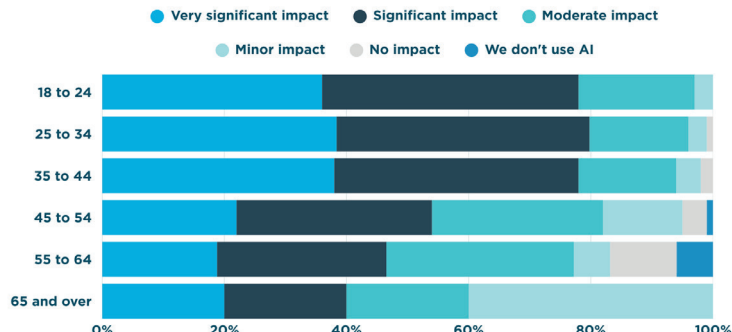
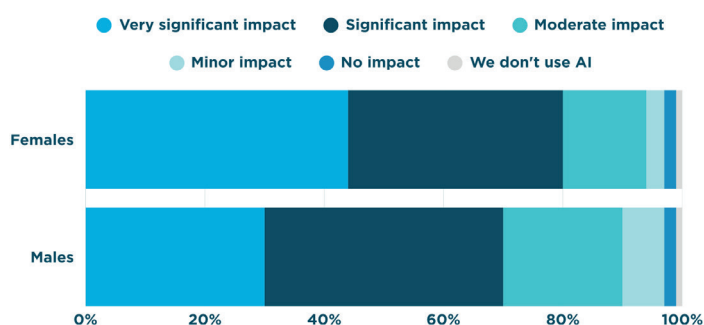
The rise of tech-enabled growth

Artificial intelligence is fast becoming a core component of business operations. Adoption rates continue to rise as business leaders recognise its potential to create efficiency gains, handle both simple and complex tasks and to inform decision-making. According to a survey by McKinsey, 88% of respondents say their organisations are now using AI for at least one business function.⁴

As momentum gathers and businesses move from experimentation towards embedding AI into everyday processes, the impetus to stay ahead of the competition by harnessing AI is strong. Particularly so for entrepreneurs who are on the one hand often innovative by nature, and on the other could benefit from sophisticated tech tools to help them navigate the complexity inherent in running multi-jurisdictional operations and implementing a global growth strategy.

Two years ago, just as AI was entering mainstream consciousness, 90% of respondents to our entrepreneurship survey agreed that they were prepared to harness AI. Now, that readiness has translated into reality: today nearly three-quarters (74%) reported that AI is having a significant impact on their organisation's international expansion strategy. Women are more likely than men to rate its impact as significant (80% versus 70%), as are younger entrepreneurs, and those in Nigeria (94%) and the US (89%). Just 1% said they don't use AI at all.

To what extent has AI impacted your organisation's international expansion strategy?



4. McKinsey, "The state of AI in 2025: Agents, innovation, and transformation" <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai>

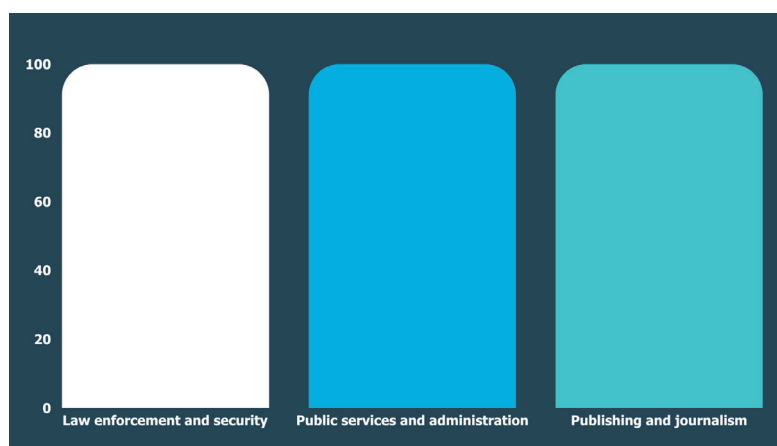
The impact of AI on interpreneurial strategy

Gaining access to digital technologies and innovation has grown strongly as a reason for going global in the first place, with 40% citing this as a primary factor behind the push for international expansion in 2026, up from 31% in 2024. At the same time, more than half (52%) of interpreneurs see adopting advanced technologies as a major opportunity for their organisations' overseas operations as they look ahead. Unsurprisingly perhaps, this was highest among those in the IT sector (where 62% said so).

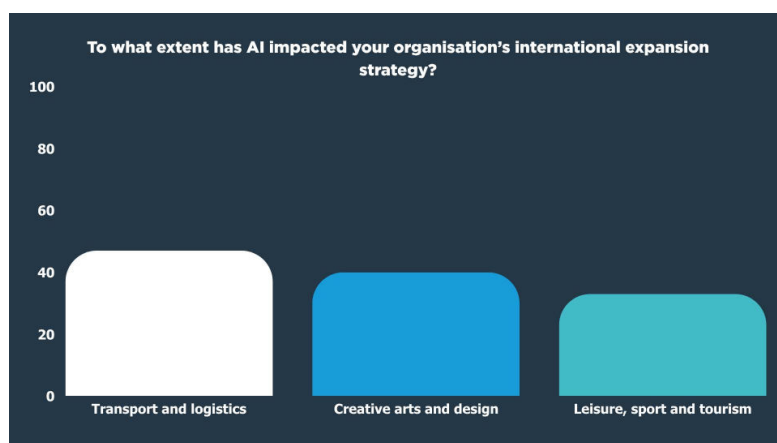
This matters because early adopters and fast followers are likely to find that AI turbocharges their capabilities, making it harder for laggards to catch up. Experimenting with and embedding AI early should empower users to get to grips with these advanced tools as they develop rapidly, and enable SMEs to seize a competitive advantage by gleaning real-time business insights and intelligence from data analytics, simplifying complex processes, increasing efficiencies, accelerating outcomes and cutting costs.

To what extent has AI impacted your organisation's international expansion strategy?

Top three industries affected by AI



Bottom three industries affected by AI



The benefit of experience:

What the next cohort can learn from interpreneurs

To understand what makes interpreneurship successful, it's important to know what prompted entrepreneurs to take such a bold step, what they were looking for in their target location(s), what helped them along the way, and what obstacles they confronted. Learning from others and sharing interpreneurs' perspectives on the future provides powerful insights to those planning to take a similar path now.

Seeking market growth opportunities — including accessing new customer segments — remains the primary and growing motivation for expanding internationally (59% said so — up from 52% in 2024). Meanwhile, seizing competitive advantage by gaining a foothold before rivals ranks alongside an increasing desire to access digital technologies and innovation (as noted above). There is also a noticeable push for greater diversification by reducing dependence on any single market.

What were the primary motivators for your business expanding internationally?

<i>Respondents chose up to three answers</i>	2026	2024	% change
Market growth opportunities: Accessing new customer segments	59%	52%	+13%
Access to digital technologies and innovation	40%	31%	+29%
Competitive advantage: Gaining a foothold in new markets before rivals	40%	36%	+11%
Diversification: Reducing dependence on any single market	35%	27%	+29%



Many companies operating nationally and internationally today face the challenge of how to cope with ever-increasing competitive and profit pressures. There are essentially two approaches: companies can increase their market power by entering new markets, or they can reduce their costs in order to offer more competitive prices. Since cost reduction has its limits and, while it may yield short-term success, ultimately hinders corporate growth, most companies opt to tap into new markets as the more promising and sustainable growth strategy. When it comes to implementing an internationalisation strategy, we at Kreston Global can support and guide companies thanks to our global network.



Hanns-Georg Schell

Managing Partner, Kreston Bansbach

Around a quarter cited resourcing opportunities in the manufacturing process, supply chain or other aspect of their operations (26%), talent acquisition (24%) or cost optimisation (22%) as key drivers to expand internationally.

A common theme emerges here: interpreneurs want more. More scope to adapt, to digitise, to disrupt, to extend their reach, to broaden their customer, talent and supplier bases, and ultimately to strengthen and develop their businesses. Interpreneurship is, in essence, about taking advantage of all that the world has to offer.

When it comes to the specifics of what makes a country attractive as an international expansion target, interpreneurs are most interested in whether favourable trade agreements such as free trade zones, diplomatic partnerships or preferential tariff treatment exist (48%) — much more so than two years ago (when 42% said so). The location's future economic growth prospects (46%), alignment with the company's long-term growth strategy (e.g. regional investment into specific industries) and the availability of skills and talent are next on the list (43% respectively).

However, policy clarity and digital capacity are becoming increasingly important differentiators between markets too: there has been a clear uptick in the perceived importance of a transparent regulatory environment, favourable tax policies, and the country's technology infrastructure.

These growing priorities reflect some of the key challenges interpreneurs have faced. While coping with economic volatility, including currency fluctuations, inflation and/or low growth was the number one hurdle during the international expansion process (38%), navigating both global and local systems and rules also proved problematic for many.

Which of the following would make a country most attractive for international expansion?

<i>Respondents chose up to three answers</i>	2026	2024	% change
Favourable trade agreements	48%	42%	+14%
Technology infrastructure and digitalisation	40%	34%	+17%
Favourable tax policies	39%	33%	+18%
Transparent regulatory environment	36%	28%	+28%

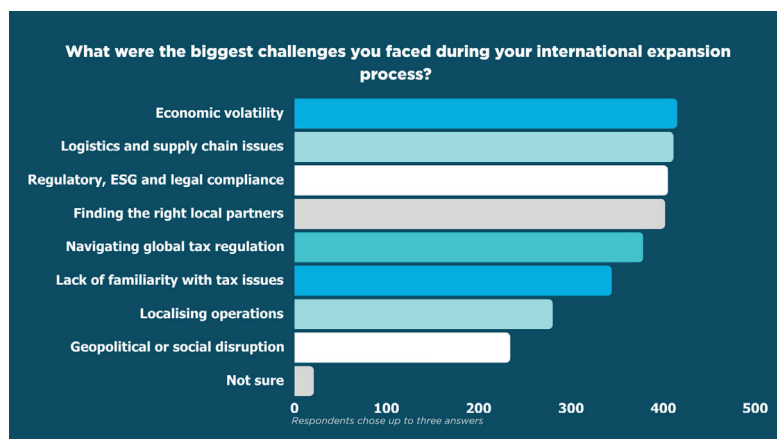
Grappling with regulatory and tax regime complexity

Regulatory and tax complexity remain a persistent barrier. More than a third said they struggled with regulatory, ESG and legal compliance requirements (37%) and global tax rules such as transfer pricing and double taxation (34%). New reforms, notably the OECD's Pillar One and Two tax frameworks, are exacerbating compliance challenges. Designed to curb profit-shifting by multinational enterprises, the regime is challenging to interpret and implement, especially for SMEs with fewer resources than their large corporate counterparts.

Meanwhile, for 31% a lack of familiarity with both global and local tax issues put compliance at risk and undermined their ability to benefit from tax breaks. Moreover, difficulties in localising operations to establish a compliant back-end infrastructure have increased — today, 25% said this is a challenge, up from 19% two years ago.

This underscores the importance of local knowledge and support from business advisers who can partner with entrepreneurs and guide them and their leadership teams through the complexities of the various legal regulations, tax regimes, and trade rules that apply in specific or multiple jurisdictions. Policy direction and regulatory requirements can differ significantly from country to country (the recent divergence between ESG standards in the United States and the European Union being a prime example⁵) and are often subject to rapid change. So, it's clearly vital to ensure companies are well-positioned to maintain regulatory compliance on the one hand, and seize whatever advantages tax and trade regimes make available on the other.

However, entrepreneurs do not always find it easy to identify the right local partners with whom to build reliable and trustworthy relationships. Just over a third (37%) said this presented a challenge during the international expansion process.



5. European American Chamber of Commerce, 6 August 2025 Barnes & Thornburg | The Transatlantic Divide Widens: U.S. vs EU 2025 Sustainability Policy <https://eaccny.com/news/member-news/barnes-thornburg-the-transatlantic-divide-widens-u-s-vs-eu-2025-sustainability-policy/>

Major hurdles to international expansion

While macro forces shape the global landscape, entrepreneurial success is just as much about managing specific local realities. Interpreneurs must focus on internal organisational dynamics if they are to create and maintain a cohesive company culture that serves all stakeholders, wherever they are based. Everyone — on a corporate and individual level — has to adapt. This is a significant task when established ways of doing things may differ, language barriers can impede clear communications, and cultural nuances must be taken into account.

For 42% of our survey respondents, balancing global standards with local flexibility was the biggest challenge in maintaining their organisation's culture when expanding abroad. A third (33%) cited managing differing workforce norms and employee expectations, while issues such as adapting company values to local customs, sustaining cross-border team cohesion, and hiring and retaining employees who fit the company culture are also front-of-mind (for 30%).

Successfully integrating different teams across locations is hard enough when expansion is purely domestic: when the international aspect is added, getting it right becomes even more complex — and important. Due to the nature of going global, rules and regulations may apply to corporate operations that are unfamiliar — or even contradictory — to the norms and expectations of people on the ground in a particular geography. Working practices or management techniques may differ significantly and aligning them must be handled sensitively.

Creating a cohesive culture capable of being sustained over time requires interpreneurs to think carefully about how to redesign organisational frameworks and policies to allow for differences of opinion, experience and outlook in new territories, while remaining true to their overall corporate identity and ethos.



In the UAE, adapting quickly is part of the business culture. Processes are digitised, government services are accessible, and decision-making can be fast. In other markets, businesses encountered rigid systems and slower response times. Making even small operational changes required approvals and waiting periods that they were not accustomed to.

None of this means international expansion isn't worth it. It absolutely is. But it forced businesses to rethink their assumptions. The efficiency and support they experienced in the UAE are not universal. What felt normal in the UAE — speed, clarity, and ease of doing business — is, in many parts of the world, the exception rather than the rule.



Eyad Farsakh

Managing Partner, Kreston Awni Farsakh

The Kreston view

Interpreneurs operate at the sharp edge of global commerce. We coined the term “interpreneur” to recognise the extra dimension taking a business onto the international stage brings to what it means to be entrepreneurial and to celebrate the critical role SMEs play in driving global economic growth.

Interpreneurialism is not for the faint-hearted — they must be resourceful and adaptable. What we see time and again from the interpreneurs we work with is a “adapt or die” mentality: responding proactively to risk, finding a route around roadblocks and making decisions quickly. Then they incorporate lessons learnt into their operating playbooks.

For most of these trail-blazers, the risk of missing out on a good opportunity matters more than secondary issues such as what tariffs apply in a particular jurisdiction. Even so, ease and cost of doing business are still important considerations. More can — and must — be done to support interpreneurial success both globally and locally, for example:

- Providing greater certainty over tax and trade policy direction and reducing the complexity of fragmented legal regulations and tax regimes that pile pressure on cross-border management and operational logistics, and frequently ramp up costs. Navigating diverse (and sometimes contradictory) regulatory reporting standards, sudden tariff changes or the demands of the OECD’s new Pillar One and Two tax requirements is extremely challenging, often requiring significant expert resources
- Making it easier to understand the benefits and incentives that apply to companies moving into new markets (as well as their legal and tax obligations) to help them mitigate risk, hit the ground running and seize every opportunity that exists
- Supporting cultural integration by enabling SMEs to create robust, yet flexible organisational frameworks that allow for a nuanced approach to aligning local norms and expectations with global corporate regulatory requirements.

What our research reveals resoundingly is a strong sense of purpose among interpreneurs, and real confidence that, with the right strategy and support, and by creating a positive working environment for all, going global can yield the desired results. By improving access to critical contacts and providing practical guidance from seasoned experts on the ground on commercial opportunities, compliance and culture, that’s exactly what Kreston Global’s network of international business, tax and accountancy advisers was set up to do.



We’re seeing a shift to greater precision, stronger focus on fundamentals, trusted local partnerships and resilience. The ambition to grow internationally is as strong as ever — but success increasingly depends on navigating complexity, not just entering new markets. Businesses can draw on the experience, knowledge and connections of their advisers and global networks.



Andrew Griggs

Kreston Global Board Chair and Senior Partner and Head of Global, Kreston Reeves

Conclusion

Small and medium-sized enterprises are often described as the engine powering economic growth, and this is just as true on the international stage as it is at a national level. That global trade is flourishing and GDP remains strong⁶ despite the impact of ongoing geopolitical tensions, is due — in no small part — to the boldness and resilience of a generation of interpreneurs.

While interpreneurs recognise the challenges that exist, they remain focused on seizing opportunity: to penetrate new markets, drive operational improvements, harness innovation, and sharpen their competitive edge as they go global.

Success demands all the drive and vision that entrepreneurs typically possess, along with pragmatism and a willingness to seek support where needed. Going global will take them into unfamiliar terrain, so the intelligence and practical advice of experts who know the market, regulatory, tax and cultural dynamics of the target country in detail, and who can also see the bigger, global picture, are essential.

The insights provided in this report should help would-be interpreneurs as they plan and prepare for international expansion, but as they embark on this journey, they will need targeted guidance from partners on the ground to help them navigate global and local rules, requirements, norms and expectations.

For more information about taking your business international or for advice about particular issues in specific jurisdictions around the world, contact one of our specialists directly, here:

www.kreston.com/find-a-member



6. IMF World Economic Outlook Growth Predictions <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/weo/issues/2026/01/19/world-economic-outlook-update-january-2026>

Market insights:

The view from Australia

Sentiment about the prospects for international expansion among Australian interpreneurs is optimistic. A slightly higher proportion than the global average (63% versus 57%) felt such a move is easy to achieve in today's geopolitical and economic climate.

Most (88%) believe the environment for international expansion will become more favourable in the coming years, while 8% believe it will worsen. Looking ahead, the key opportunities are expected to lie in accessing new customer markets (63%) and adopting advanced technology (57%) — both of which ranked higher than the global average.

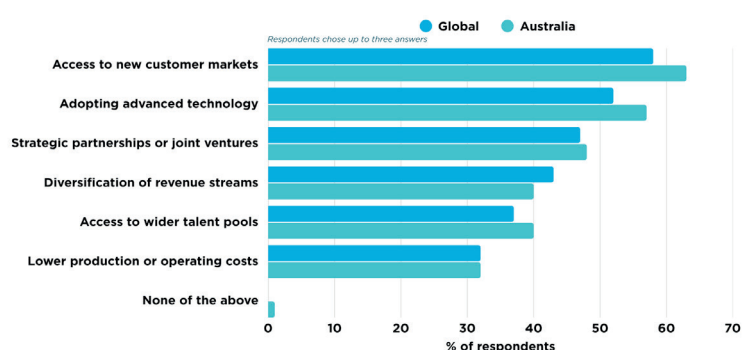
Gaining access to digital technologies and innovation was a primary motivator for international expansion for 41%, coming third after seizing market growth opportunities (59% said so) and market diversification (42%).

Meanwhile, AI is significantly impacting international expansion strategies for 72%. Just one in 10 (10%) reported only a minor or no impact. This is encouraging, given that research by Cisco and the Governance Institute of Australia has revealed that adoption of AI by Australian businesses has so far been slower than their regional peers.⁷

Asked what makes a country most attractive for international expansion, Australians' top answers differed slightly from the global view. Almost six in 10 (57%) pointed to its future economic growth prospects and the same (57%) said alignment with long term growth strategy. Skills and talent came next at 53%, followed by a transparent regulatory environment (48%).

As elsewhere, geopolitical instability is viewed as the top future threat (by 42%). This is followed by regulatory or compliance changes (39%), tariff-related cost increases (39%), and supply chain disruption (36%).

What do you see as the most significant opportunity for your overseas operations?



Australian leaders are confident, but they're not complacent. There's a clear understanding that while the opportunity for international expansion is strong, the environment is more complex and volatile than it has been in the past.

Unlike some higher-growth markets, Australian firms are very attuned to geopolitical risk, supply chain fragility and regulatory complexity. That's shaping more considered and strategic expansion decisions.

The Australian story is one of measured confidence. Businesses are expanding not because conditions are perfect, but because they're prepared — and that's what will ultimately differentiate those who succeed internationally.



Jack Delmo
CEO Bentleys Victoria

7. Computer Weekly, 17 November 2025 Australia lags regional peers in AI adoption <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/366634594/Australia-lags-regional-peers-in-AI-adoption#:~:text=He%20also%20pointed%20to%20a,two%20million%20conversations%20a%20year.>

Market insights:

The view from Brazil

Brazilian interpreneurs rated the current climate for international expansion at 8.6 out of 10 on the positivity scale (higher than the global average), and 89% expect the overall environment for international business expansion to become more favourable over the next few years.

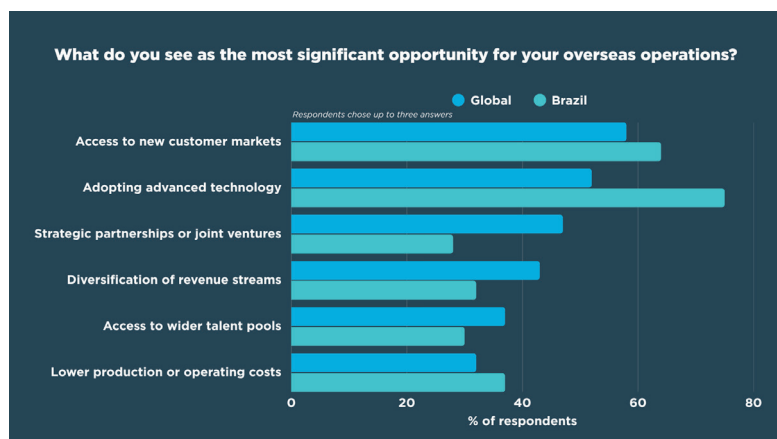
However, at the same time they were more inclined than the global average to think it is difficult for businesses to expand abroad today, with four in 10 (40%) saying so (versus 27% globally).

Access to digital technologies and innovation is a much bigger motivator for interpreneurialism here than elsewhere: 56% said this was a primary reason (compared to 40% globally), putting it second behind accessing market growth opportunities (64%).

Adopting advanced technology is seen as by far the most significant opportunity for overseas operations looking ahead, according to three quarters (75%) of respondents in Brazil. Meanwhile, they view forming strategic partnerships or joint ventures as much less important than elsewhere in the world.

Finding the right local partners was the biggest challenge Brazilian interpreneurs faced during the international expansion process (40% said so), followed by dealing with economic volatility (38%) and navigating global tax regulation (35%).

Once they had made the move, adapting company values to local norms and customs was the biggest hurdle to maintaining their organisation's culture (according to 40%, compared to 30% globally).



The research confirms a reality I observe in the Brazilian market: there is growing confidence in international expansion, but also greater awareness of the complexity involved in execution. Optimism is strong, with 90% expecting a more favourable environment and 78% recognising the significant impact of AI. Even so, companies must not underestimate cultural adaptation, regulation, taxation, and the choice of local partners. For clients, the main expectation is to grow safely; the main concern is starting operations with an insufficient understanding of the market. In Brazil, internationalisation requires strategy, technology, and a real ability to adapt locally.



Tatiana Andrade
Partner, Kreston KBW Auditores

Market insights:

The view from India

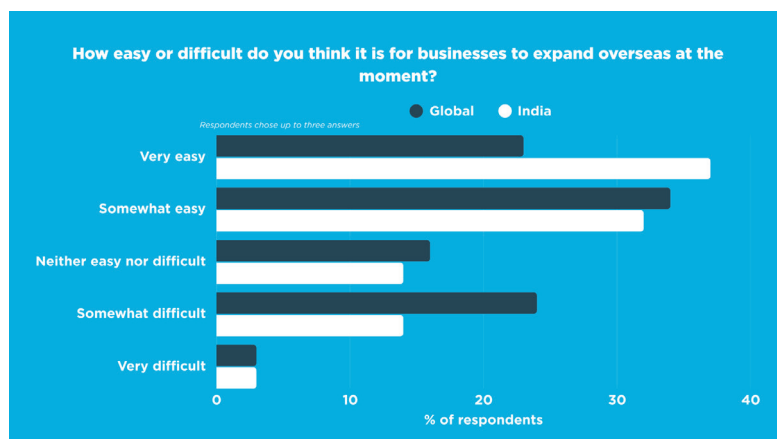
Confidence is high among entrepreneurs in India, which is expected to be the world's fastest growing major economy this year, expanding 6.9% to overtake Japan in GDP output.⁸

They rated the current global expansion climate at 8.7 out of 10 on the positivity scale, and 93% think the outlook will become even more favourable in the coming years. Seven in 10 (69%) said expanding abroad is easy today, despite the geopolitical and economic situation. Just 17% felt it is difficult.

Accessing skills and talent (e.g. availability of local talent and openness to skilled talent immigration) is the main factor that would make a country an attractive prospect for international expansion: 58% say so, versus 43% globally. This is much higher than in 2024 when 46% said so.

A further seven in 10 (71%) reported that tariffs or trade disputes have significantly impacted their organisation's global strategy over the past one to two years (compared to 57% global average), as US tariffs imposed on the country bite. Tariff-related cost increases are seen as the biggest threat to their overseas enterprise going forward, with almost half (48%) saying so.

Meanwhile, 86% said the impact of AI on global strategy is also significant (versus 74% in the rest of the world). This chimes with the finding that the strongest future opportunities lie in adopting advanced technology (61%), which is followed by accessing new customer markets (54%), and forming strategic partnerships or joint ventures (51%).



I see that confidence among Indian entrepreneurs has clearly improved over the last few years, especially in mid-market and large businesses across multiple sectors.

Where I would differ slightly is on the “ease of expansion.” In practice, expanding beyond one’s home jurisdiction is still quite complex with regulatory, banking and tax matters often taking longer than expected. So while the intent is strong, execution capability and understanding local constraints still varies widely, particularly among first-time global businesses.

Global expansion is increasingly becoming part of growth strategy of many Indian businesses. The ambition is clearly there; the key differentiator will be how effectively that ambition is executed on the ground.



Manoj Sharma

Senior Partner, Kreston SNR Advisors

8. Euromonitor International, January 2026 Top Five Fastest Growing Economies in 2026 <https://www.euromonitor.com/article/top-five-fastest-growing-economies-in-2026#:~:text=India%2C%20Vietnam%2C%20Indonesia%2C%20Egypt,and%20Egypt's%20improved%20economic%20environment.>

Market insights:

The view from Mexico

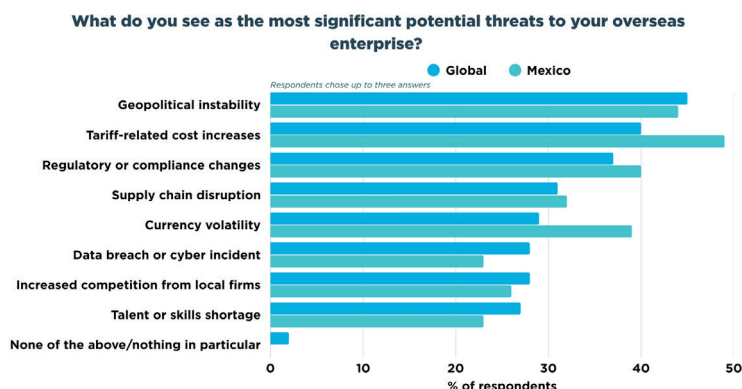
Despite rating the current climate for international business expansion positively, at 8.3 out of 10, just 40% of Mexican entrepreneurs said they thought it is easy to achieve today (compared to 57% globally), while 36% thought it is difficult. Regulatory, ESG and legal compliance was the biggest challenge they faced when scaling abroad (43% said so), followed by economic volatility (41%).

Tariffs have loomed large for Mexican businesses ever since they were among the first countries to be targeted by raised US tariffs early in 2025.⁹ While it has managed to maintain a resilient export market with the US, and imposed significant tariffs of its own — notably on China,¹⁰ almost half (49%) view tariff-related cost increases as a significant threat to their overseas operations looking ahead (versus a global average of 40%).

Six in 10 (61%) said tariffs or trade disputes had impacted global strategy in the past couple of years. Favourable trade agreements and tax policies were viewed as key factors that would make a target country most attractive as a destination for international expansion (55% and 45% apiece).

Accessing skills and talent is less of a driver for international expansion among Mexican entrepreneurs than for those in most other countries — 17% cited this as a primary motivator, compared to 24% globally. Just a quarter (25%) said the availability of local talent and openness to skilled talent immigration would make a country particularly attractive for international expansion (versus 43% globally).

Seizing competitive advantage by gaining a foothold in new markets before rivals has risen up the priority list as a reason to expand abroad in the past two years. Half (50%) now rate this as a primary motivator (putting it second behind market growth opportunities at 51%), compared to 30% in 2024.



The Mexican economy is currently experiencing low growth, which pushes entrepreneurs to look for expansion opportunities in new markets, particularly the U.S. There are also opportunities in Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and Spain; however, their purchasing power is generally lower compared to the U.S. market.

Not properly weighing the risks of regulatory non-compliance can lead to significant consequences, such as penalties, logistical delays, and additional administrative burdens.

Medium-sized businesses can lack the internal capabilities to anticipate the regulatory framework of international expansion, as well as the market analysis required to avoid complications when expanding abroad.



Francisco Bracamonte
Tax Partner, Kreston BSG

9. BBC News 3 February 2025 What tariffs has Trump introduced and why? <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn93e12rypgo>

10. MexicoNow News, 6 April 2026, Despite tariffs, Mexico's exports grow <https://mexico-now.com/despite-tariffs-mexicos-exports-grow/>

Market insights:

The view from Nigeria

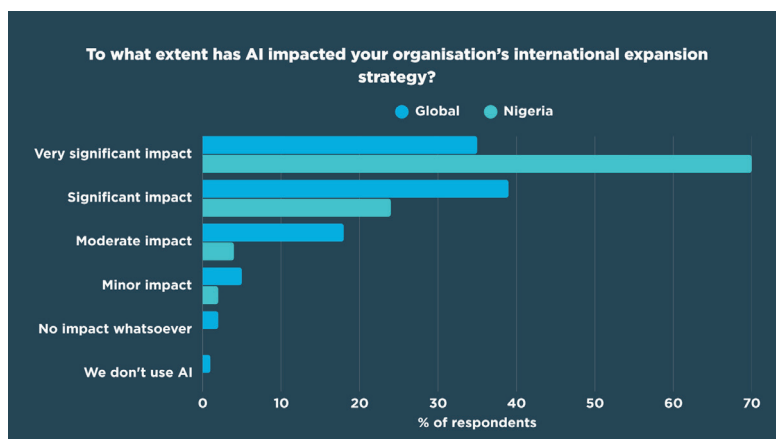
Nigerian entrepreneurs are extremely confident. They scored the current climate for international business expansion most positively of those in any country — at 9.2 out of 10, and almost all (99%) expect the environment to become more favourable in the coming years. Nearly nine in 10 (89%) think it is easy to expand overseas right now, while just 6% think such a move would be difficult.

That's despite tariffs and trade disputes having had a major effect in recent years: 81% said they have had a significant impact on their organisation's global strategy, but just 21% see tariff-related cost increases as a major threat to their overseas enterprise going forward (compared to 40% globally).

Talent acquisition is now a major motivator behind international expansion — 34% said so this year, putting it in the top 3 reasons (behind market growth opportunities and access to digital technologies and innovation), up from 21% in 2024.

AI looks set to be particularly transformative for entrepreneurship in the country. The vast majority (94%) said AI has had a significant impact on international expansion strategy. Half (50%) said gaining access to digital technologies and innovation was a primary motivator for international expansion (compared to 40% globally).

The top potential threats to overseas operations looking ahead are: geopolitical instability (47%), and regulatory or compliance changes, and increased competition from local firms (37% apiece). Gaining access to new customer markets (60%) and forming strategic partnerships or joint ventures (57%) are viewed as the most significant opportunities going forward.



“ In our experience, international expansion is no longer viewed as a long-term ambition, but increasingly as a strategic necessity for businesses seeking resilience and sustained growth.

This shift is being driven by persistent macroeconomic pressures, including currency volatility and inflation, which continue to impact cost structures and profitability. At the same time, increased digital adoption and greater access to regional markets, particularly within Africa, are enabling businesses to explore cross-border opportunities with more confidence. However, this ambition is often accompanied by an underestimation of the operational and regulatory complexities involved.

From our recent client engagements, there is a clear sense of cautious optimism. Businesses are actively exploring expansion opportunities, but with a more measured and strategic lens.



Ajibade Fashina
Managing Partner, Kreston Pedabo

Market insights:

The view from Singapore

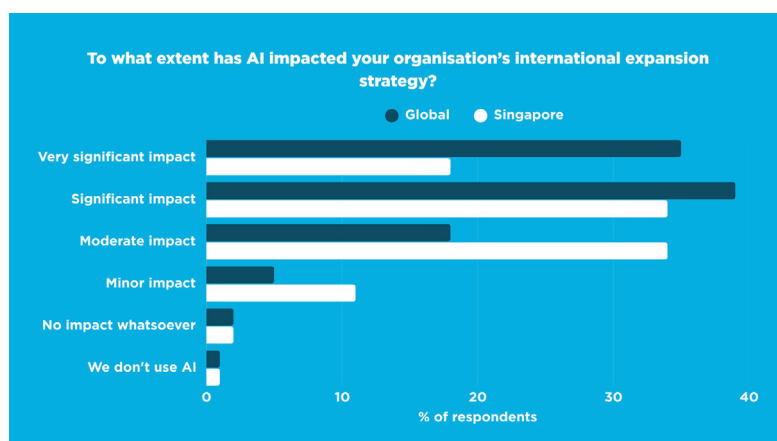
Of all the countries surveyed, entrepreneurs in Singapore are the least confident about the current climate for international expansion — but even so they gave it a positivity score of 7.2 out of 10. More respondents think it is difficult for businesses to expand overseas today (40%) than think it is easy (29%). Two-thirds (66%) believe the overall environment for international business expansion will become more favourable over the next two to three years.

Economic volatility has posed the biggest challenge to international expansion (for 46%), followed by localising operations, including establishing a compliant back-end structure (42%, compared to just 25% globally).

AI has had a much more modest effect on international expansion strategy than the global average: just over half (52%) categorised its impact as significant, while a third (34%) said it was moderate. Just 37% said that adopting advanced technology presented a significant opportunity for overseas operations looking ahead, compared with a global average of 52%.

Instead, the biggest future opportunities are believed to lie in accessing new customer markets (52%), forming strategic partnerships or joint ventures (51%) and achieving lower production or operating costs (43%).

In terms of future threats, entrepreneurs in Singapore are most concerned about geopolitical instability (52%), supply chain disruption (43%) — and tariff-related cost increases (42%) — all higher than the global average. Interestingly, they rated the risk of data breaches or cyber incidents to their overseas operations lower than elsewhere (21% versus 28% globally).



Singapore is one of the world's most open economies, with a GDP-to-trade ratio consistently exceeding 300%, based on the recent reports generated by the World Bank.

As a city that heavily relies on trade, headwinds in the global system, be it geopolitical tensions or supply chain disruptions, have a direct and profound impact on the economy and business confidence. Hence, it is no surprise that sentiments are less optimistic for global expansion from Singapore entrepreneurs, compared to other economies.

In the interim, businesses should prioritise internal readiness. This is a timely approach to strengthen governance, refine processes, and establish robust operating frameworks. Too often, businesses underestimate the importance of internal alignment, which is the key strength that places one in a better position to take advantage of the opportunities when conditions stabilise, and global expansion opportunities regain momentum.



Helmi Talib

Managing Partner, Kreston Helmi Talib

Market insights: The view from Spain

Spanish entrepreneurs are noticeably less confident than many of their peers around the world. Yet they still gave the current climate for international business expansion a positivity score of 7.3 out of 10, and 60% said they expect the overall environment to become more favourable looking ahead. Just over a third (35%) said it is easy for businesses to expand overseas today, but half (50%) think it is difficult.

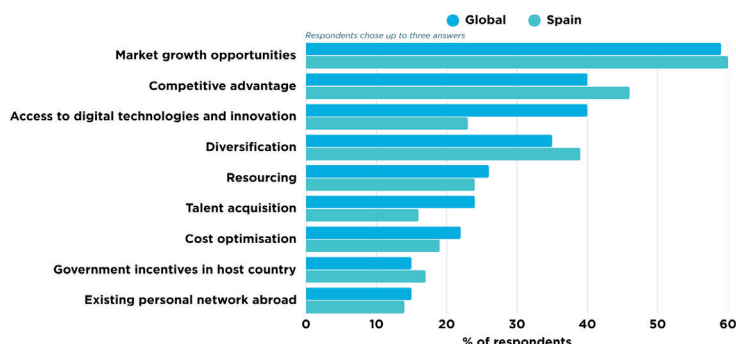
Despite the challenges, respondents in Spain noted that there are strong reasons to go global. Today, 60% said market growth opportunities were a primary motivator (up from 48% in 2024), and 46% cited gaining competitive advantage as a major driver (up from 37% two years ago).

On some fronts, Spanish businesses expanding abroad have fared reasonably well amid global turbulence. Just one in six (17%) said that dealing with economic volatility, including currency fluctuations, inflation and or low growth, was a challenge during the international expansion process (which was the top issue for entrepreneurs globally at 38%). Less than half (46%) reported that tariffs or trade disputes significantly impacted their global strategy in the past one to two years (compared to 57% globally).

However, their resilience against (or inclination to harness) disruption in other forms is not so clear: it's worth noting that AI is also having less of an effect on strategy than the global average, with 58% categorising its impact as significant (versus 74% globally). In a related finding, gaining access to digital technologies and innovation is less of a driver for international expansion than it is in other countries — just 23% said so (compared to 40% globally).

Sustaining cross-border team cohesion and hiring and retaining employees who fit the company culture are the biggest challenges when it comes to maintaining organisational culture amid international expansion (at 37% apiece). However, respondents were much less concerned about issues such as differences in management or leadership expectations, and communicating culture consistently across countries (20% apiece).

What were the primary motivators for your business expanding internationally?



Spain has a business sector with a strong focus on exports and a growing presence in international markets. The impact of tariffs and trade disputes has become structural. Market selection is no longer just a business decision, but also a risk management decision with direct tax implications — ranging from transfer pricing reviews to the analysis of double taxation treaties.

It is not surprising that 37% identify international taxation as their main operational challenge, and that the tax policies of the destination country are now the second most important factor when choosing a market.

The implementation of OECD Pillar 2 and the widespread tightening of the BEPS framework are forcing Spanish companies to adopt a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to international tax planning.

Companies that strengthen their international tax and legal architecture will be best positioned to capitalise on momentum when it arrives.



Elena Ramírez Marín
Partner, Kreston Iberaudit

Market insights:

The view from South Africa

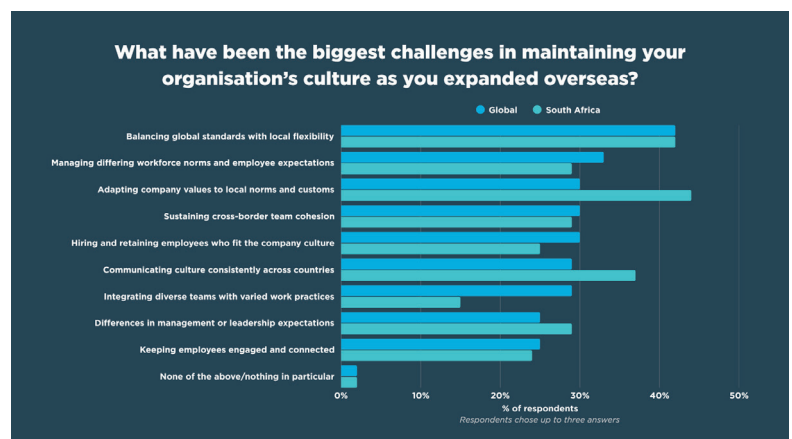
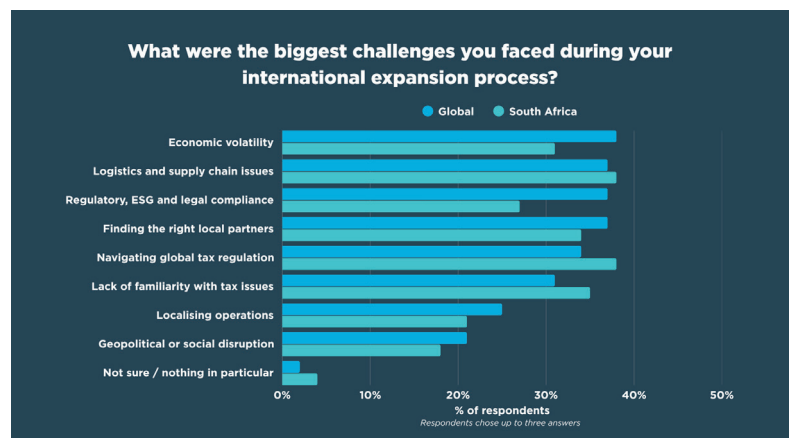
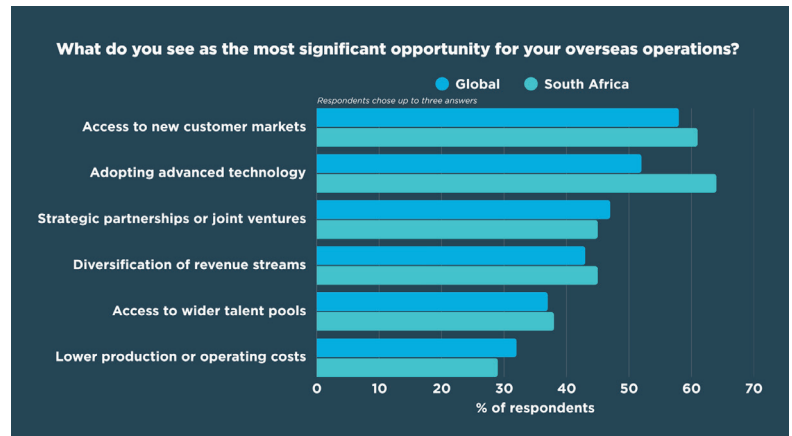
Almost all interpreneurs in South Africa are optimistic about the future: 98% expect the overall environment for international expansion to become more favourable in the next few years. Just under two-thirds (63%) said this is an easy move to make in the current geopolitical and economic climate.

More than half (51%) were primarily seeking access to digital technologies and innovation by going global (a significant jump from 41% in 2024), just behind market growth opportunities (which remains the number one reason at 54%, despite falling from 67% two years ago). Looking ahead, adopting advanced technology is the number one biggest opportunity for their overseas operations (said 64%), while AI has had a significant impact on the international expansion strategy of 77%.

As they expanded internationally, the biggest challenges interpreneurs faced were logistics and supply chain issues (38%) and navigating global tax regulation (also 38%).

Going forward, currency volatility is viewed as the most significant threat to overseas operations (40%), followed by tariff-related cost increases (37%), increased competition from local firms (35%) and supply chain disruption (35%).

For interpreneurs here, the biggest challenge in maintaining organisational culture while expanding overseas is in adapting company values to local norms and customs (44% said so — higher than the global average of 30%). Balancing global standards with local flexibility and communicating culture consistently across countries came next (at 42% and 37% respectively).



Market insights:

The view from the United Arab Emirates

Nine in 10 interpreneurs in the UAE (90%) expect the environment for international expansion will become more favourable in the next two to three years, while just 5% expect it to worsen.

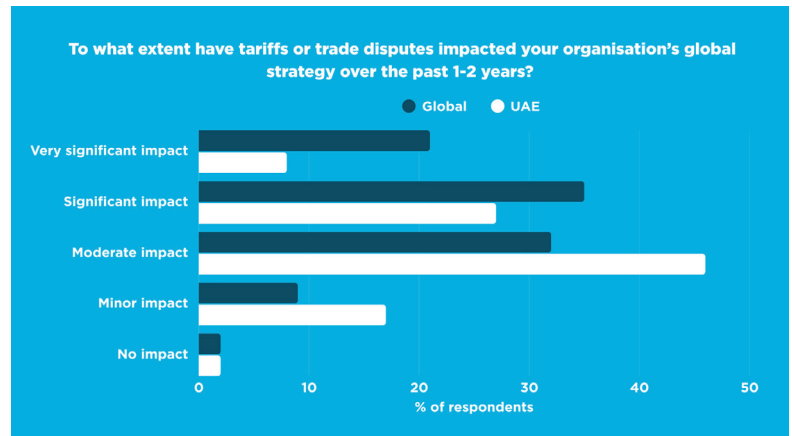
Like their global peers, accessing market growth opportunities was the primary motivator for international expansion — cited by 55% of interpreneurs in the UAE. However, pursuing diversification to reduce dependence on any single market was the next most important priority (cited by 43% — much higher than the global average of 35%). It's notable that this is an increase from just 29% who said so in 2024.

When it comes to what makes a target destination attractive, locations which offer favourable trade agreements were in higher demand than the global average (55% compared to 48%), as were those with suitable tech infrastructure and digitalisation opportunities (47% compared to 40%).

Tariffs have had less of an impact on organisations' global strategy than in other countries surveyed: a third (35%) said tariffs or trade disputes have had a significant impact, while 63% categorised their impact as moderate or minor.

AI is also having less of an impact on international expansion than the global average, with 66% saying its effect has been significant, compared to 74% globally.

As organisations strive to maintain organisational culture as they integrate new operations abroad, more than half of interpreneurs from the UAE (52%) reported that the biggest challenge was balancing global standards with local flexibility — a full ten percentage points higher than the global average. Hiring and retaining employees who fit the company culture was also particularly difficult (36% said so compared to 30% globally).



The Report gives the current reality of the UAE market. The UAE government has approved initiatives which will reinforce a more resilient and sustainable national industrial model to overcome the global issues and mitigate risks facing global supply chains, guaranteeing sustainable access to vital commodities. Industry is placed among the most important drivers of the UAE's next phase of growth. International businesses must look at the quick plans and measures taken by the UAE and must get updated on the changes and the amendments/updates in legal, regulatory and compliance requirements happening across markets. Geopolitical instability remains a key threat for international expansion, but entrepreneurs are learning ways to navigate this by starting expansion and do business with minimum impact to them. This will take them to the emerging opportunities of the future.



Sudhir Kumar

Senior Partner & Head - Corporate Communications,
Kreston Menon

Market insights:

The view from the United Kingdom

Sentiment among UK interpreneurs about the current climate for international expansion is lagging the global average, but is still positive at 7.7 out of 10, and 83% expect the environment to become more favourable in the years ahead.

Market diversification was a much bigger motivator to expand internationally here than in any other country studied (48% said so, compared to 35% globally), and the proportion has increased from 31% in 2024. This desire to reduce dependence on any one market may indicate that, a decade on from the Brexit vote, British businesses are still dealing with the implications of no longer being in the EU.

They are also more likely than their peers elsewhere in the world to say they struggled to find the right local partners with whom to build reliable and trustworthy relationships as they went global — in fact this was their number one challenge (for 47%).

Tariffs are reported to have had a lower impact on global organisational strategy than the average (49% said significant, compared to 57% globally), perhaps because the UK was spared some of the severity of US tariffs imposed on many other countries in 2025. However favourable trade agreements are now a number one priority when considering target countries — 49% said so, up from 36% in 2024.

As elsewhere, British interpreneurs reported struggling to balance global standards with local flexibility as the main challenge in maintaining organisational culture while expanding overseas (42%). However, the second biggest issue was communicating culture consistently across countries (higher than the global average at 36% versus 29%).

What were the biggest challenges you faced during your international expansion process?



These findings broadly reflect what we're seeing in the UK. There's a cautious but genuine optimism about international expansion.

This mindset is being driven by pressure on domestic markets, alongside better access to technology, AI and global networks that make expansion feel more achievable.

From recent client conversations, the main concerns are unexpected costs, regulatory change and finding the right people on the ground. Equally, there's real enthusiasm about reaching new customers, using technology to scale faster and building partnerships that accelerate growth.

The key takeaway for international businesses is that success hinges on getting local insight right. Firms often underestimate the complexity of regulation, culture and talent in new markets, and the value of trusted local advisers and partners in navigating that.



Alex Peal

Chair of Kreston UK and Ireland and Managing Partner at James Cowper Kreston

Market insights:

The view from the United States

As the world's largest economy, entrepreneurial — and interpreneurial — drive has historically been extremely strong among business leaders in the US. So, it's encouraging to see how confident respondents are feeling today, giving the current climate for international expansion an 8.6 out of 10 positivity score. Eight in 10 (82%) said it is easy to expand overseas in the current geopolitical and economic environment, while 90% expect the international business expansion environment to improve looking ahead.

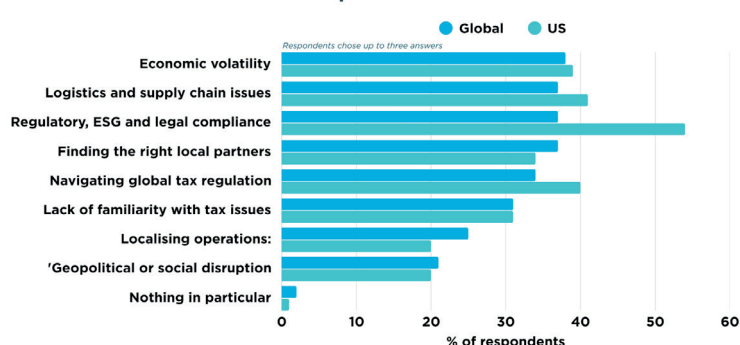
Seizing market growth opportunities and gaining competitive advantage were the primary motivators for expanding abroad (at 65% and 47% respectively). The former represents a significant increase from 2024 where 40% cited market growth as a primary motivator to expand. However, American interpreneurs struggled more than their peers elsewhere in the world with regulatory, ESG and legal compliance. Given the heightened uncertainty around policy direction following the change of administration in 2025, this is perhaps unsurprising.

Balancing global standards with local flexibility was the number one challenge US interpreneurs faced when maintaining organisational culture while expanding overseas (50% said so, versus a global average of 42%).

In the birthplace of AI,¹¹ as you might expect, most (89%) US interpreneurs said AI has had a significant impact on expansion strategy. But human skills and talent remain an important factor behind going global too — in fact, availability of local talent and openness to skilled talent immigration is the main reason why a country would be an attractive location for international expansion (said 58%, compared to 43% globally).

Tariff wars and trade disputes have taken their toll on interpreneurial businesses in the US as elsewhere in the world — 69% said they have had a significant impact on global strategy in the past one to two years. But US interpreneurs reported feeling more concerned about geopolitical instability (43%), supply chain disruption (39%) and data breaches/cyber incidents (36%) than tariff-related cost increases (35%) in the future.

What were the biggest challenges you faced during your international expansion process?



For many middle market companies in the United States, international expansion is becoming an increasingly important part of the growth agenda. As such, it's not surprising that nearly two-thirds of respondents identified access to new market growth opportunities as the leading motivator of international expansion.

Cross-border opportunities are emerging amid continued private equity-driven consolidation across the U.S. middle market. As businesses scale from local operators to regional and national platforms, international growth can offer the next avenue for expansion. But as the report further notes, overseas activity brings greater regulatory, compliance, and ESG complexity that must be managed with discipline.

Success depends on having the right capabilities, structures, and advice in place. With disciplined planning and coordinated support, we're seeing middle market companies pursuing international growth with greater confidence.



Daniel Johnson
Managing Director, CBIZ Advisors, LLC

11. Dartmouth <https://home.dartmouth.edu/about/artificial-intelligence-ai-coined-dartmouth>

Methodology

The Kreston Interpreneur Report is a biennial study, with previous research taking place in 2024 and 2022.

The 2026 survey was conducted with 100 business leaders in each of the following 11 countries (1,100 in total): Australia, Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, the UAE, the UK, and the US between 26th Feb – 12th March 2026. Survey respondents were C-suite executives, owners, chairs, partners, managing directors, directors or senior managers in private sector companies earning between £10m to £300m a year that have expanded internationally. All percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

About Kreston Global

Kreston Global is one of the world's largest accounting networks with 155+ firms across 800+ offices in more than 110 countries worldwide. Kreston firms advise both businesses and individuals on the full spectrum of accountancy and advisory needs, wherever in the world they happen to do business. With more than 30,000 dedicated professionals and influential community-based culture, founded over 50 years ago, our aim remains to help businesses and people succeed internationally.



Visit us at
www.kreston.com



7 BELL YARD, LONDON, WC2A 2JR, UNITED KINGDOM ©2026 KRESTON GLOBAL

Disclaimer: Kreston Global is a global network of accounting firms, each of which is a separate and independent legal entity, and as such has no liability for the acts or omissions of any other member firm. Kreston Global is a company registered in England (No:03453194) and limited by guarantee. Kreston Global provides no services to clients and has no liability for the acts or omissions of any member firm.

Registered office: 7 Bell Yard, London, WC2A 2JR. Where the term Kreston is used, this refers to the individual member firms of Kreston Global. Kreston member firms are separate, independent firms and are responsible for the professional services they provide.

Kreston operates a globally directed quality review programme covering member firms. Member firms have access to Kreston Global's training and seminars and can apply to use the Kreston name.

Kreston does not provide professional services in any territory and is not responsible for the services provided by any member firm. No member firm is responsible for the services or activities of any other member firm. Member firms of Kreston may consist of more than one legal entity. For the purposes of the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA) Code of Ethics, only member firms are considered to be part of the Kreston Global Network.