



2022 - 2023

Model Arab League BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council of Economic Affairs Ministers

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**National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations**



Original draft by Angela Brobson, Chair of the Council of Economic Affairs Ministers at the 2023 National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Honorable Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022-2023 Council of Economic Affairs Ministers. My name is Angela Brobson, and I am a senior at Converse University studying Mathematics and German Studies. This will be my third year participating in Model Arab League, where I have had the pleasure of being in the ECON committee either as a delegate or chair for all three years. This program will give you what you put into it, and what I've been fortunate to receive so far are connections, research skills, and negotiating skills that I would not have found anywhere else. I'm so excited to spend my last year in the program as an undergrad student as your chair.

This background guide is to only serve as a foundation for your research. In order to get the most out of this model, you need to make sure you conduct enough policy and country research in order to stay in character for debate. No two countries are identical in their stance, so it is important to stay diplomatic when working on solutions, and separate the person from the country when disagreements arise.

I wish you luck as you prepare your research in the time leading up to NUMAL! Do not hesitate to contact me at albrobson001@converse.edu with any questions that arise during your research.

Best,
Angela Brobson

Topic I: Looking to the future by forming a strong, digital economy in the region.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is a term created in 2016 to represent the growing use of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, and advanced wireless technologies.¹ This impacts the economy by providing more ways to connect businesses with consumers, connect businesses to businesses, increase opportunities for sustainability, and generally increase the amount of data available to analyze in order to boost job performance. COVID-19 has sped up technological growth due to the sudden need to increase the prevalence of hybrid jobs, virtual education programs, and online shopping opportunities with the closing of in-person industries. The overall shift towards digitization on an industry level was slow before the pandemic due to it not being a top business priority, and the growth continues to be slow after the pandemic due to a fear of the customers' reaction to change and technology implementation issues.²

An example of how the digital economy is taking root is through Fintech services. Fintech, short for financial technology, challenges traditional financial services by focusing on populations that usually don't have access to those services, or by providing more efficient services than what is traditionally available.³ It has four broad categories, which include financial institutions, the clients of financial institutions, small businesses, and consumers. Some examples are cryptocurrency, open banking, payment apps (like PayPal and Venmo), and investment apps. These allow consumers to get better offers than what they would have at the bank if they have low credit scores or poor financial history.

With an insurgence of all the data now being collected at every transaction comes the question on how it all should be regulated and stored. There is no global standard, but putting protection laws in place can increase confidence for companies at every point of investment, increase trust and credibility for markets and consumers, and improve data management and control.⁴ 137 out of

1

<https://iap.unido.org/articles/what-fourth-industrial-revolution#:~:text=Newsletter&text=The%20Fourth%20Industrial%20Revolution%20>

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-and-digitization-will-transform-africa-in-to-a-global-powerhouse/>

²<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-covid-19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever>. Accessed 30 July 2022.

³ [ps://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/fintech.asp](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/fintech.asp)

⁴<https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/markets/digital-identity-and-security/government/magazine/beyond-gdpr-data-protection-around-world>

194 countries have legislation that protects this data, with Africa and Asia having 61% and 57% of their countries, respectively, having legislation in this field⁵.

A digital economy can also allow workers to have a more flexible schedule, create data that can help with financial decisions, lower barriers to entry, and change the way businesses are run today. In order to have as many people as possible reap these benefits, there needs to be a strong infrastructure in place. 13% of people don't have a connection in the developed world, while 81% of people lack access in the least developed countries, leading to a total of 3.7 billion people across the world without internet access.⁶ In addition to not having the infrastructure to get online is the structure needed to make secure online payments. COVID-19 increased the use for online payments. The percentage of adults in developing economies making a digital merchant payment for the first time after the pandemic was 40%.⁷

B. History in the Arab World

The digital economy of the Arab world consists of 4% of their GDP compared to the global average of 22%.⁸ The Arab Digital Economy Vision is hoping to change this by focusing on sustainability, inclusiveness, and security. The vision was created in 2018 through the Arab Economic Unity Council, and is based on a framework consisting of five-dimensions.⁹ The five dimensions in the framework include digital foundation, digital innovation, digital government, digital business, and digital citizen. Creating a solid digital foundation includes improving “infrastructure, policies and regulations, digital skills, funding, and governance”.¹⁰ The digital business dimension has a focus on supporting SMEs that increase their digitization efforts while widening the customer base by entering new markets.¹¹ Acquiring digital skills to empower a digital citizen will require cheap, secure, accessible and affordable digital services regardless of their financial stability to participate in community development.¹² Some member states of the Arab League have been vocal on this change by publishing their own National Digital Strategies. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's goal is to become the leader of the digital economy through the full deployment of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, Big Data, and Machine Learning across public and private sectors.¹³

⁵ <https://unctad.org/page/data-protection-and-privacy-legislation-worldwide>

⁶ <https://institute.global/policy/progressive-case-universal-internet-access-how-close-digital-divide-2030>

⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/globalindex>

⁸ <https://www.arab-digital-economy.org/2020/17.pdf>

⁹ <https://dubaipolicyreview.ae/building-the-arab-digital-economy-a-strategy-blueprint/>

¹⁰ <https://www.arab-digital-economy.org/2020/17.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.arab-digital-economy.org/2020/17.pdf>

¹² <https://www.arab-digital-economy.org/2020/17.pdf>

¹³ https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/aboutksa/digitaltransformation!/ut/p/z/0/04_Sj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfljo8zivQIsTAWdDQz9LUxNnA0Cg11DXEydAowCHQ31g1Pz9AuyHRUB1eTRhg!!/#:~:text=The%20Kingdom%20of%20Saudi%20Arabia%20is%20set%20to%20become%20the,across%20public%20and%20private%20sectors

The use of digital payments was growing even before the pandemic. In the United Arab Emirates, digital payments grew at an annual rate of over 9% between 2014 and 2019, compared with Europe's average annual growth of 4% to 5%¹⁴. In addition to that growth was a 70% increase of credit card usage between February 2019 and January 2020.¹⁵ The United Arab Emirates adopted an electronic wage protection system (WPS) in 2009 to address frequent reports of non-payment of wages by ensuring workers are paid their salaries on time and in full.¹⁶ This allows the Ministry of Labor to monitor the system more closely and receive complaints of employers withholding payments and late payments. However, digital payments are still generally low in the MENA region. 66% of the region uses the internet, but digital payments' use in non GCC countries is 32%.¹⁷ Some of the reasons for not having an account is a lack of trust in the government and institutions as well as regulation that discourages digital transformations.¹⁸ While the e-commerce opportunities are growing for the citizens that have the access to contribute to it in the first place, regional businesses are losing customers to foreign suppliers due to the businesses not having the infrastructure they need to participate.¹⁹ This is also tied to traditionally using cash payments instead of online-friendly alternatives, as well as a lack of street addresses.²⁰

Data is collected in order for businesses to predict trends, secure payments, and make products efficiently. With all this data, there is a need to protect the consumers from businesses using their information in ways they don't agree to, and a need to protect businesses from data breaches. For example, Saudi Arabia has implemented a new data protection law in 2022. Its stance on personal data is similar to the General Data Protection Regulation in the European Union, and has stricter penalties for data breaches.²¹ Digital innovation also changes the way people pay for goods and services. For example, Jordan was the first country to implement iris scan technology in refugee camps, allowing refugees to link their irises to their bank accounts and use them when purchasing goods and services.²² This brought up questions on how this biometric data is stored, and what cyber security measures were in place to protect that sensitive data. Even though protecting online data is important, some national legislators are passing laws that attempt to criminalize the freedom of expression online as a digital citizen, rather than the protection of citizens' data like biometric e-passports, digital IDs, and e-government services.²³

¹⁴<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/the-future-of-payments-in-the-middle-east>

¹⁵<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/the-future-of-payments-in-the-middle-east>

¹⁶ https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/other_migrant_crisis.pdf

¹⁷<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/16/digital-economy-could-reap-huge-benefits-for-middle-east-and-north-africa>

¹⁸<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/16/digital-economy-could-reap-huge-benefits-for-middle-east-and-north-africa>

¹⁹ <https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2022/03/13/isnt-e-commerce-benefiting-arab-world/>

²⁰ <https://www.wearmaze.com/the-future-of-ecommerce-in-the-mena-region/>

²¹<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/global-hr/pages/saudi-arabia-data-protection-law.aspx>

²² <https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/01/Access-Now-MENA-data-protection-report.pdf>

²³ <https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/01/Access-Now-MENA-data-protection-report.pdf>

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

The Arab Digital Economy Vision states that sustainability, inclusiveness, and security are the major values to follow when creating a digital economy. This will require solutions that allow consumers and businesses to work off of each other. Businesses will have a hard time promoting their products online if the consumers' way of payment is not digital. Alternatively, businesses will miss out on the broader market if they stay solely brick-and-mortar. Analyzing how to strengthen this connection through infrastructure that will provide fast and affordable internet for both parties could be a starting point, as well as looking at how to improve Fintech opportunities in the region.

For members who already have a strong infrastructure in place, an avenue to work towards is increasing trust for people to put their money in digital venues. A focus on security and regulation could help in that direction. An increase in informed digital citizens that have access to what growing digital economies are able to provide are also essential when online businesses reach out to them, eager for profits.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Has your country published their own National Digital Strategies? If so, are they on track to meet the deadlines set out?
- What infrastructure is missing in order for businesses to compete in a digital economy? Furthermore, what infrastructure is needed for consumers to access the digital economy?
- What Fintech services are thriving in your state? Are there any Fintech services that are more regulated than others, or banned altogether?
- Should businesses be encouraged to have as big of a digital imprint as possible? If so, what timeline would be in place and what would be the initial focus when making them more digital?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can people have better access to their savings in order to take advantage of a digital economy?
- What infrastructure needs to be put in place to ensure people have access to reliable and inexpensive internet?
- Should there be a League wide standard for data protection laws?
- How can the League ensure that people are confident digital citizens?
- What regulations, if any, should be put on Fintech companies?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Arab Digital Economy Vision](#)

- Lists out the framework, strategy development, and vision the League of Arab States has towards building a digital economy.
- [2021 Digital Economy Report from the United Nations](#)
 - Provides information on a global scale of the digital divide, data use, and cross-border data flows.
- [Fintech Growth during COVID-19 in MENA Region: Current Challenges and Future Prospects](#)
 - Provides an overview of the rise of Fintech companies in the MENA region.
- [The Progressive Case for Universal Internet Access: How to Close the Digital Divide by 2030](#)
 - Provides estimations on the investment needed to close the digital divide by 2030, as well as ideas on how to get there through policies.
- [E-commerce in MENA](#)
 - This article from 2019 analyzes e-commerce trends and developments in the MENA region.
- [Building the Arab Digital Economy - A Strategy Blueprint](#)
 - Provides comparisons of global digital transformations to the MENA region, as well as summarizes the foundational dimensions explained in the Arab Digital Economy Strategy.

Topic II: Connecting and assessing advancements in the MENA space sector to the diversification of the economy and sustainable practice opportunities of the region.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Since the first artificial satellite to orbit Earth was launched by the Soviet Union in 1957, space exploration has served as a political and economic tool in situations such as the competition during the Cold War and the cooperation needed for the International Space Station. The 2022 Space Report from the Space Foundation in Colorado Springs reported that 90 countries are now operating in space, with global spending reaching \$469 billion, and predicts that spending will reach \$634 billion in the next four years.²⁴ This includes opportunities for advancement in the commercial, as well as military, sector. There two main types of economies when it comes to space: space-for-earth and space-for-space. Space-for-earth economies are where most of the revenues come from, and they include telecommunications and satellites. Space-for-space is not as focused on, and it deals with goods produced in space for space use. This includes mining the Moon or asteroids for fuel. There has been a shift in recent years on where investment is being placed. In 2019, 95% of the estimated \$366 billion in revenue was from the space-for-earth economy, but it started to shift after SpaceX became the first private company to send humans into space in 2020.²⁵

Those involved in the space economy are more than just what you see on the liftoff platform. They include administrative positions, manufacturing, telecommunications, researchers, and university research. The global space sector had around 1 million employees around the world in 2017, with around 200,000 active employees in the Russian Federation and 60,000 in Europe²⁶. This number also includes highly qualified workers with university degrees and research experience.

Investing in the space sector both can help as well as hurt a variety of sustainability goals. Military weapons that are tested in space cause debris that can stay in orbit along with any and all satellites that are sent into space. This debris can then damage devices sent into space later on. The space sector can help with sustainability through satellite technology that can track environmental data to help agriculture by providing weather information and supporting

²⁴<https://www.koaa.com/news/covering-colorado/global-space-economy-spending-reaches-469-billion#:~:text=COLORADO%20SPRINGS%20%E2%80%94%20The%20Space%20Foundation,are%20now%20operating%20in%20space>.

²⁵<https://hbr.org/2021/02/the-commercial-space-age-is-here#:~:text=In%202019%2C%2095%25%20of%20the,space%20for%20use%20on%20earth>.

²⁶https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c5996201-en/1/2/3/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c5996201-en&mimeType=text/html&_csp_=ffe5a6bbc1382ae4f0ead9dd2da73ff4&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book

predictive models for increasing the sustainability of the food supply²⁷. It can also help the sustainability of countries by diversifying investments typically spent in the oil sector.

B. History in the Arab World

Investments in space programs within the MENA region are mainly by wealthier member states. These initial investments have been focused on educational systems that have not been at the level they needed to be in order to create a scientific-industrial base for a knowledge economy.²⁸ The main outcomes of current research in this field are to provide satellites that report more on domestic than celestial information, such as climate risks, communications, and navigation. The UAE's motivation to invest in these educational systems is to create a "build it, not buy it" system to prevent outsourcing skills to other countries, and support skilled workers already in the region.²⁹

One of the goals the UAE has is to establish a human settlement on Mars by 2117.³⁰ This will create more jobs within the STEM field through the research and training leading up to the settlement's implementation, as well as support the growing knowledge economy. Another League member, Bahrain, has been in talks with Russia to send candidates for training with the goal of working together on a mission to the International Space Station.³¹ Saudi Arabia is another member state in the League to establish a space agency, the Saudi Space Agency, in 2018 to promote their space policy and strategy across multiple sectors.

The Arab Space Cooperation Group is an example of collaboration within the League in relation to space. It was launched in 2019 and is chaired by the UAE's Space Agency.³² However, there are cases where advancements are led with a more militaristic and political mindset. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Saudi Arabia have both launched satellites of their own with military observation capabilities, with Saudi Arabia sending theirs off the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in China, aboard a Chinese Long March 2D rocket.³³ These are just two examples of where investing in space exploration as a way to diversify the economy can be seen as, and lead to, militaristic space uses.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

²⁷ <https://www.morganstanley.com/ideas/space-earth-sustainability>

²⁸ <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/arab-space-programs-level-up/>

²⁹ <https://risingtidefoundation.net/2021/10/06/beyond-oil-how-the-uaes-hope-mars-mission-is-breaking-the-arab-world-out-of-the-crisis-of-scarcity/>

³⁰ <https://spacewatch.global/2017/02/uae-aims-establish-human-settlement-mars-2117/#:~:text=In%202015%2C%20the%20UAE%20announced,land%20on%20planet%20in%202021.>

³¹ <https://spacewatch.global/2018/09/bahrain-and-russia-in-talks-to-send-astronauts-into-orbit-rosocosmos-mulling-regional-office-in-manama/>

³² <https://africanews.space/egypt-signs-arab-space-cooperation-groups-basic-charter/>

³³ <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/arab-space-programs-level-up/>

Finding a solution will look differently depending on the goals and resources of each member state. Education and employment could be an avenue for countries who don't have space exploration as big of an importance as a way of diversifying the economy through more STEM research and opportunities. This could keep any skill that needs to come out within the MENA region, and prevent outsourcing jobs in the future. It can also be used as a basis to grow a stronger knowledge economy.

Another focus could be analyzing how much, if any, funding should go toward these programs, especially if debate goes towards the funding of space technology that will be used for militaristic purposes. Finding ways to get public investments and incentivizing commercial businesses to work on their own programs is another avenue. With this comes deciding whether or not the commercial businesses would have to follow the same regulations as the government funded space sector. A third focus is analyzing how much countries are willing to invest for the political impact of being seen as a country capable of something as impressive as space innovation, tied with opportunities in creating partnerships outside the League.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What education and training is available in your country in relation to STEM? How would an increase of academic researchers and scientists improve the economy outside of just the space sector?
- Does your country already have a space program? Did a fear of military advancement happen with other countries?
- Is space exploration a priority for your country?
- Are there opportunities for commercial businesses willing to get into the field, or are there extra restrictions for them to overcome?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Will there be different rules in place for commercial space endeavors?
- How can the Arab League make sure that they don't need to outsource skills for growth in this sector, whether that's researchers, scientists, or engineers?
- What funds, if any, should be put aside to help countries bolster and create programs relating to space?
- What plan can be in place to encourage investments to go from oil to space?
- How else can the knowledge economy grow alongside the search for technological advancements through education, job placements, and infrastructure?

IV. Additional Resources

- [The Commercial Space Age is Here](#)

- Provides ideas on what private companies could do to continue space research that governmental entities might not be comfortable funding themselves.
- [Arab Space Programs Level Up](#)
 - Gives descriptions of different space advancements from League members.
- [Is there a Space Race in the Middle East?](#)
 - Describes different breakthroughs and goals of space innovations in the MENA region, along with providing some explanations on why the region would be competitive in relation to space advancements.

Topic III: Finding short-term and long-term economic solutions for food insecurity caused by internal and external conflicts.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Food insecurity is when someone lacks regular access to the food they need for normal growth and development.³⁴ Nearly 1/3 of the world's population did not have access to adequate food in 2020, even though there is enough food on the planet to feed everyone on it.³⁵ Economic disparity is one reason for the unbalanced and unequal access to the food readily available for consumption.³⁶ Not getting a sufficient amount of nutrients at any stage of life can negatively impact health, education, and economic development.³⁷ Poverty, climate change, and conflict are just three of the many barriers preventing people from receiving the food they need to keep from starving and being malnourished. Hunger due to poverty becomes a cycle. People that do not have the energy to work or learn due to being malnourished have less opportunities to earn the proper income to afford the food they need. Changes in climate such as drought, floods, and severe weather patterns can affect the food supply available for distribution. Even smaller farmers, herders, and fishermen aren't immune to food insecurity, even though they produce about 70% of the global food supply.³⁸ Conflict and instability makes food harder to access due to weaker infrastructure and transportation interruption for countries that are more dependent on imports. Disruptions in the food supply can also be caused by a lack of migrant workers to work the fields, leaving large quantities of fruits and vegetables to rot.³⁹

Globalization has led to a dependency on imported food, with around 80% of the world's population relying on it.⁴⁰ This allows countries to eat specific foods year-round rather than wait for when it's in season locally, as well as provide the food people need if local crops did not perform well. However, producing a lot of food does not exactly mean a country is self-sufficient. Even though China is one of the world's top four food-producing countries producing an output of \$1.79 trillion worth of food in 2020, it now imports 23% of its food in 2020 compared to being almost self-sufficient in 2000.⁴¹ Importing food can have negative impacts when there is a sudden decrease in exports, or sudden infrastructure damage that

³⁴ <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

³⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/food#:~:text=Nearly%20one%20in%20three%20people,people%20in%20just%20one%20year.>

³⁶ <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/food/world-hunger-facts-how-to-help>

³⁷ <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/food/world-hunger-facts-how-to-help>

³⁸ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/grains-and-hydrocarbons-middle-east-and-war-ukrainehttps://www.actionagainsthunger.org/world-hunger-facts-statistics#:~:text=The%20proportion%20of%20undernourished%20people,million%20people%20globally%20are%20undernourished.>

³⁹ <https://www.europeanscientist.com/en/agriculture/majority-of-the-worlds-population-depends-on-imported-food/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.europeanscientist.com/en/agriculture/majority-of-the-worlds-population-depends-on-imported-food/>

⁴¹ <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/100615/4-countries-produce-most-food.asp>

prevents the food from getting from place to place. Russia and Ukraine are some of the world's largest exporters of wheat, maize, and barley, which is why the reduced outputs following the Russia and Ukraine war has caused rising prices and shortages to areas dependent on its supply.⁴² This has led to an increase of food insecurity by decreasing the power of real incomes due to food prices that have reached their highest levels on record.⁴³ This effect is detrimental because "food consumption accounts for 45% of total household expenditure in low-income economies, and diet is heavily based on staple foods including wheat. Further price increases of farming inputs - such as seeds, fuels, and fertilizers, could lead to worsening food price pressures."⁴⁴ Conflicts, whether internal or external, tend to reduce the functioning capacity of formal markets while also making resources less available, making it harder for farmers to sell their products.⁴⁵ Black markets tend to flourish under these conditions, leaving communities with informal markets that expose consumers in conflict areas to a less reliable market exposed to more risks and shocks than traditional markets.⁴⁶

B. History in the Arab World

The MENA region imports half of its food supply, and that amount is rising to 90% in the Gulf Cooperation Countries.⁴⁷ Egypt is the world's largest importer of wheat, importing nearly 70% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine.⁴⁸ Wheat imports from both countries came into question after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022, which shows how important it is to diversify food imports. For example, Egypt has now started to purchase wheat from Latvia, a source it hasn't imported from before.⁴⁹ The conflict also brings with it increasing inflation on necessities, making it harder for businesses to keep up with the prices while simultaneously trying to keep themselves afloat. A Gaza businessman who imported cooking oil from Turkey ended up having to pay \$26 dollars for a box of cooking oil after being forced to start importing from Egypt, a price double of what they were used to paying.⁵⁰ The price of 1 gallon of cooking oil in Lebanon has increased to the monthly minimum wage, demonstrating how staples are getting out of reach for citizens to get what they need.⁵¹ Millions more already vulnerable to the high rates of poverty and inflation of basic food costs could be driven into 'food poverty' due to

⁴² <https://ourworldindata.org/ukraine-russia-food>

⁴³ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2022/07/01/food-insecurity-and-economic-misery-in-low-income-countries/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2022/07/01/food-insecurity-and-economic-misery-in-low-income-countries/>

⁴⁵ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XkCe33r-Tk7fQvIEScPNfCuAsvhG45HagUQM_HIkVLM/edit

⁴⁶ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XkCe33r-Tk7fQvIEScPNfCuAsvhG45HagUQM_HIkVLM/edit

⁴⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2021/09/24/mena-has-a-food-security-problem-but-there-are-ways-to-address-it>

⁴⁸ <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/how-are-mena-nations-moving-bolster-food-security>

⁴⁹ <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/egypt-approves-latvian-wheat-as-new-import-origin-says-official>

⁵⁰ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-africa-religion-middle-east-30a631e524483223ea1e82ccb599ed>

⁵¹ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-africa-religion-middle-east-30a631e524483223ea1e82ccb599ed>

the war in Ukraine.⁵² However, it's hard to stop relying on imports because the population growth is exceeding what agricultural productivity can keep up with.⁵³

Yemen is currently facing an unprecedented level of hunger with 17.4 million citizens being food insecure.⁵⁴ The country imports 90% of its food, but people are not able to pay for it due to the high prices.⁵⁵ Employment opportunities in Yemen have been drastically affected by the years of conflict in the region, affecting the ability to afford the food that has doubled in price.⁵⁶ However, there are multiple NGOs that are assisting to bridge the gap with food insecurity in the region by providing food assistance, agriculture support, water system rehabilitation, and malnutrition information in order to assist people in all stages of food insecurity in Yemen. Some members in the league are now trying to become self-sufficient and not rely as much on imports as a way to have a more stable pile of resources. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are two countries in the League that created projects aiming to make themselves more self-sufficient after facing supply disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Qatar's State Food Security Projects 2019-23 sets out to be "30% self-sufficient in red meat, 70% self-sufficient in eggs and greenhouse-produced vegetables, 95% self-sufficient in fresh fish, and 100% self-sufficient in fresh dairy products, poultry and shrimp by 2023".⁵⁷

Some countries have been using subsidies and programs in order to help their citizens afford food during this time of inflation. For example, The UAE government has announced to cover 75% of the inflation placed on food items due to the increase of prices from Russia's invasion in order to ease prices on low-income citizens.⁵⁸ However, this will only be implemented for Emirati citizens, even though they only make up 10% of the population in the UAE.⁵⁹ Saudi Arabia has lessened the amount of welfare the government provides as the population increase has made it difficult to sustain, making it more difficult for citizens to rely on the state.⁶⁰ However, they are still trying to crack down on price manipulations by encouraging citizens to phone in whenever it happens.⁶¹

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

One possible solution is to look at diversifying imports alongside investing in agriculture development programs promoting self-sufficiency in food. Any resolution going this route needs

⁵² <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-food-mideast-idAFL8N2V31BU>

⁵³ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-africa-religion-middle-east-30a631e524483223ea1ede82ccb599ed>

⁵⁴ <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/yemen-emergency>

⁵⁵ <https://foodtank.com/news/2020/09/12-organizations-combating-food-insecurity-in-yemen/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-food-mideast-idAFL8N2V31BU>

⁵⁷ <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/how-are-mena-nations-moving-bolster-food-security>

⁵⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/06/saudi-uae-inflation-middle-east/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/06/saudi-uae-inflation-middle-east/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/06/saudi-uae-inflation-middle-east/>

⁶¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/06/saudi-uae-inflation-middle-east/>

to keep in mind the availability of cultivable land and water due to a changing climate. Infrastructure can be put in place to make sure anything created is preserved through transportation and storage, and a cash-for-work program could be put in place to make sure there are people willing to work in the fields. Another way debate can go is to establish safety nets keeping people from going further into poverty, allowing them to have the money they need to sustain themselves as inflation persists. This can be done through subsidized food boxes to vulnerable households, but corruption has led to the selling of them on the black market, making the food shortages worse.⁶²

Another opportunity is to focus on how the cycle of food insecurity impacts human capital. Looking into programs that focus on the after effects of malnutrition could be beneficial because it affects the ability of people to work in the long run, further impacting their poverty status. For example, Yemen has resources such as nutrition counseling, malnutrition screening, and local agriculture support to address the dire health conditions present in the region.⁶³ There are multiple NGOs that provide assistance throughout the stages of malnutrition to keep those that grew up with ailments of hunger in their youth be able to provide for themselves in the future.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What investments in infrastructure can be improved to make growing, transporting, and storing food more efficient?
- Is there help in place for people living with the effects of malnutrition and its impact on their quality of work?
- What support is given to farmers in the region? Is it possible to give them enough assistance so that over time the region can become self-sufficient?
- What welfare packages are available for citizens who are living in poverty?
- Are black markets (specifically dealing with food) prevalent in your region?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What policies and investments should be put in place to assist those with medical problems that incurred due to food insecurity?
- Should there be more of a focus on investing in small farmers within the league in addition to diversifying imports?
- What cash-for work solutions can be put in place?
- Will any solution be available to those who aren't citizens in the region?

⁶² https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XkCe33r-Tk7fQvIEScPNfCuAsvhG45HagUQM_HIkVLM/edit

⁶³ <https://foodtank.com/news/2020/09/12-organizations-combating-food-insecurity-in-yemen/>

IV. Additional Resources

- [Grains and Hydrocarbons: The Middle East and the War in Ukraine](#)
 - Gives some information on how the war in Ukraine has impacted the MENA region's reliance on grain imports.
- [How are MENA nations moving to bolster food security?](#)
 - Explains what the MENA region is doing in an effort to combat food insecurity.
- [MENA Has a Food Security Problem, But There Are Ways to Address It](#)
 - Provides information on ways the MENA region could combat food insecurity.
- [Food insecurity and economic misery in low-income countries](#)
 - Provides a global outlook on how low-income countries are being hit by food and fuel inflation.

Topic IV: Analyzing ways to increase the safety of working conditions as a League in order to improve worker retention.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Safety in the workplace is regulated in a variety of ways on federal, state, and country levels. This makes sure that workers are able to get the money they need without the fear that they will be harmed or discriminated against in preventable situations at their job. The United States Department of Labor has OSHA, there is EU-OSHA for Europe, and China has the State Administration of Work Safety. Even with these regulatory bodies, things can still fall through the cracks. For example, child labor has increased to 160 million children world wide after the COVID-19 pandemic, which was an increase of 8.4 million within the last four years.⁶⁴ The pandemic has shone a light on cramped working conditions, resulting in cases spreading rapidly with workers in businesses such as meat-processing plants.⁶⁵ Women are still trying to find their way into the workforce, with 178 countries maintaining legal barriers preventing their full economic participation, and 95 countries do not guarantee equal pay for equal work.⁶⁶ Some global reforms include protecting against sexual harassment in employment, providing assistance for parenthood, and removing job restrictions for women.

According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project, migrants frequently face higher risk of injury or death than other workers due to typically working more dangerous jobs.⁶⁷ These businesses include construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and general jobs in the informal economy. It is estimated that 164 million migrant workers make up 5% of the global workplace, but the number of fatal injuries on the job was higher among migrants than native-born workers.⁶⁸ Deaths in the workplace often cause unexpected financial struggles to their family members relying on their incomes, affecting their own status in the economy.

The Great Resignation deals with retention on a more local level. One reason this occurred is through the want to continue a hybrid workforce after working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees are also more likely to leave the workforce and change careers than they were in the past. More than half of adults between 18 and 25 world wide are planning on quitting their jobs, which will create disruptions throughout the workforce.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/child-labour-rises-160-million-first-increase-two-decades>

⁶⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/02/cramped-workplaces-parties-the-factors-fuelling-local-covid-19-spikes>

⁶⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/01/nearly-2-4-billion-women-globally-don-t-have-same-economic-rights-as-men>

⁶⁷ <https://www.iom.int/news/migrant-workers-face-heightened-risk-death-and-injury-new-iom-report>

⁶⁸ <https://www.iom.int/news/migrant-workers-face-heightened-risk-death-and-injury-new-iom-report>

⁶⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/remote-workers-burnout-covid-microsoft-survey/>

B. History in the Arab World

Migrant workers are not protected by most Arab countries.⁷⁰ Refugees are in fear of being sent back to their country of origin, and new struggles were added to foreign domestic workers during COVID-19. The Kafala system adds stress to migrant workers as the sponsorship system gives employers the power to hold migrant workers' visas, preventing them from leaving without the employer's permission.⁷¹ Due to the weak labor protections towards domestic migrant workers, they are more open to abuses in the workplace through confiscated passports, little food, 21 hour work days without rest, and withheld wages.⁷² Qatar has relied heavily on migrant workers while preparing for the 2022 World Cup. The publicity following the assembly of the stadium has shown that some migrant workers have been subjected to wages that are paid late, subjected to illegal deduction, or not paid at all.⁷³

More than half of the children in employment in the region are in agriculture. In Egypt, there are 1.8 million working children, with 1.6 million of them working in hazardous work.⁷⁴ Egypt's Child Law prohibits the work of children under 15 years old except for seasonal professions that will not harm their health.⁷⁵ Poverty is the main cause for children to get jobs in the first place, due to needing the extra financial support for their family. However, children who end up going to work instead of school will create a new generation of illiterate adults who won't be able to move themselves up in the workplace. Egypt's administration is trying to prevent this by extending social protection to the poor as food prices keep rising, but it still isn't enough.⁷⁶

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

When debating this topic, the term "safety" is used loosely to cover a range of topics. This includes the safety of employees in ensuring they can make a living off of the jobs they do have as well as looking to improve the flexibility and structure of the workplace. It also deals with the safety of children, women, and migrants in obtaining, working, and being able to work without the fear of not being able to pay for their basic needs.

The Kafala system is one of the main concerns when dealing with the regulation and safety of migrant workers. Some measures have been taken in order to lessen the impact of the system.

⁷⁰ https://www.ilo.org/beirut/projects/WCMS_226948/lang--en/index.htm

⁷¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/06/domestic-workers-middle-east-risk-abuse-amid-covid-19-crisis>

⁷² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/06/domestic-workers-middle-east-risk-abuse-amid-covid-19-crisis>

⁷³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelposner/2022/03/29/as-the-world-cup-in-qatar-approaches-its-time-to-protect-migrant-workers/?sh=19f5cb843917>

⁷⁴ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/01/child-labor-assumes-fatal-proportions-egypt>

⁷⁵ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/01/child-labor-assumes-fatal-proportions-egypt>

⁷⁶ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/01/child-labor-assumes-fatal-proportions-egypt>

Qatar was the first country to allow migrant workers to quit or change jobs in 2020, and all GCC countries except Saudi Arabia allow migrants to leave the country without permission from their employer as of 2021.⁷⁷ However, some of the restrictions being let up in Saudi Arabia won't affect an estimated 3.6 million migrant workers, believed to be domestic workers and farmers, who are already the most vulnerable and least protected.⁷⁸

Education is a barrier that can be improved to make sure women are able to go into these jobs, and to prevent children from working long hours. A focus on education for children paired with working on retaining adult employees in the workforce will allow children to stay out of a situation of them needing a job, because they are usually working due to trying to assist their family out of poverty. Incentives could be created to make sure that families will be willing to let their children go to school, and therefore missing a paycheck they may need to sustain the family.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What barriers exist to women and those different in the traditional working sector from job security?
- What jobs are seeing the most worker turnover? For the jobs that have a low turnover rate, is it because they can't leave due to restrictions like the Kafala system?
- What did COVID-19 uncover in relation to unsafe working practices? Have they been resolved since then?
- What incentives can be given to the public and private sector when it comes to worker retention? Would businesses need to be given incentives for things like higher minimum wage, social security, etc.?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What safety measures can be put into place so families don't have to rely on child labor?
- How can agricultural and domestic workers be better protected? Would the same solution be beneficial for migrant workers in the same field?
- How can businesses be better analyzed to improve worker retention?
- Are quotas on women in the workforce beneficial in allowing them to have stable working conditions?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Nearly 2.4 Billion Women Globally Don't Have the Same Economic Rights as Men](#)
 - Provides examples of reforms around the globe on legislation moving towards gender equality in the workplace.
- [As The World Cup In Qatar Approaches, It's Time To Protect Migrant Workers](#)

⁷⁷ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/changing-tide-gulfs-migrant-workers>

⁷⁸ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/changing-tide-gulfs-migrant-workers>

- An overview of the migrant labor used in Qatar to prepare for the 2022 World Cup.
- [Changing the Tide for the Gulf's Migrant Workers](#)
 - Provides statistics on migrant workers as well as provides some information on the reforms created lessening the impact of the Kafala system.