2026-2027
Model Arab League
BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers

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National Council on US-Arab Relations

Original draft by Olga Bukowska, Chair of the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers at the 2027 National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Honorable Delegates,

My name is Olga Bukowska, and I am excited to welcome you to the 2026-2027 season of Model Arab League and to the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers! I am a rising senior at Brenau University majoring in Psychology, and I am honored to serve as the chair of this council at the 2027 National University Model Arab League (NUMAL).

Joining Model Arab League was one of the best decisions I have made in my academic career, and I want to deeply congratulate you on this choice, as you just allowed yourself to further open your horizons! You not only get to travel and compete, but most importantly, you get to advance yourself and gain new perspectives from others, who might, one day, become your business partners or friends. I remember being asked by my professor if I would be willing to take part in MAL; I said yes, and before I knew it, I was learning about new countries, their traditions, culture, and social norms. The Social Affairs Council of 2027 will delve into various topics of great significance, such as mental health, consequences of regional conflicts, and educational advancements, just to name a few.

As you prepare for Model Arab League conferences this year and you research the MENA region policies and geopolitical contexts, I encourage you to be thorough and thoughtful with your studies. Think outside the box, open yourself to new points of view, and consider a variety of perspectives. You may not always be correct, but you are also not always wrong! As you represent not only yourself and your university, but also another country with its unique culture and approaches, please remember to stay true to your country's policies while forming solutions targeting MENA-specific issues. Remain creative and flexible; do not be afraid to speak up or target to fix already existing initiatives, thus don't forget to learn from others and share your knowledge as well.

When it comes to debate, be present, understanding, and confident. Speak your ideas clearly and respectfully, aim to be understood and to understand others, rather than to impress. This competition is about more than just an award; it aims to advance your policymaking, negotiation, and communication skills as well as put your leadership to the test, rather than admit additional pressure to perform. Listen to the work of your fellow delegates, be an active listener, and be supportive, especially of those with less experience. Collaborate, communicate, negotiate, and challenge each other! Strive for greatness and diplomacy in your resolutions. I can't wait to see what kinds of fruits your discussions will bear! Hope to see you at the council session!

My role as your chair is to navigate you through the competition and help you to make the most out of your time as a delegate, while fostering not only a competitive environment but also emphasizing collaboration and critical thinking. I hope the information I will provide you in this background guide will give you a better insight into our topics and help fuel your creativity and research. If at any point I can be of assistance and help, please do not hesitate to reach out at obukowska@tiger.brenau.edu.

Good luck with your preparations, and I look forward to meeting you all at NUMAL!

Olga Bukowska
Chair of the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers

Topic I: Assessing the psychological toll of conflict and displacement and the necessity of culturally adapted mental health services.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Mental health is fundamental for overall well-being, yet it remains one of the most neglected aspects of healthcare globally, particularly in regions affected by conflict and displacement. The World Health Organization defines mental health as "an integral part of health and a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and can contribute to his or her community."[1] [2] When this state is disrupted by trauma, loss, and instability, the consequences extend to affect families, whole communities, and entire societies at once, which can be seen during national and international conflicts and displacement.

Conflict and forced displacement are among the most significant drivers of mental health disorders worldwide.[3] Individuals who experience armed conflict, violence, or the loss of home and livelihood face elevated risks of developing depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other psychological conditions.[4] This elevated risk is not only theoretical, as the substantial mental health burden is visible in these populations, and depression and PTSD are persistently high among adult refugees and asylum seekers.[5] [6]

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has documented that mental health issues can both trigger displacement and result from the experience of being displaced.[7] The link is further complicated by the fact that mental health issues among displaced people have historically been neglected due to the overwhelming scale of humanitarian needs, creating a cycle where untreated conditions both drive displacement and worsen its psychological consequences. For many, the journey to safety is marked by trauma that compounds existing vulnerabilities and creates new ones. People who already struggle with mental health issues are often much more vulnerable to harm when

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[1] World Health Organization. "Mental Health," WHO, last modified October 8, 2025, accessed August 1, 2026, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

[2] World Health Organization, "Mental Health," *WHO Global Health Observatory*, accessed August 1, 2026 https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/theme-details/GHO/mental-health

[3] Mark van Ommeren, "Mental Health Conditions in Conflict Situations Are Much More Widespread Than We Thought," *WHO*, last modified June 11, 2019, accessed August 1, 2026, https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/mental-health-conditions-in-conflict-situations-are-much-more-widespread-than-we-thought

[4] World Health Organization, "Mental Health in Emergencies," *WHO*, last modified May 6, 2025, accessed August 1, 2026, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-in-emergencies

[5] Emma Peconga and Marie Høgh Thøgersen, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression and Anxiety in Adult Syrian Refugees: What Do We Know," *ResearchGate*, accessed August 1, 2026, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337839072_Post-traumatic_stress_disorder_depression_and_anxiety_in_adult_Syrian_refugees_What_do_we_know

[6] Rebecca Blackmore, et al. "The prevalence of mental illness in refugees and asylum seekers: A systematic review and meta-analysis" *PMC*, accessed August 1, 2026, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7505461/

[7] Jenny Barchfield, "Mental Health Issues Can Be Both a Driver and a Result of Displacement," *ReliefWeb, UNHCR*, accessed August 1, 2026, https://reliefweb.int/report/guatemala/mental-health-issues-can-be-both-driver-and-result-displacement

they are forced to flee their homes. In contrast, the stresses of flight and resettlement can push others into depression or anxiety for the first time.[8]

Worldwide, the disparity between the number of individuals requiring mental health care and those who actually receive it, or the treatment gap, remains persistently wide. In low- and middle-income countries, up to 90% of individuals with mental health conditions receive no treatment.[9] In humanitarian settings, the gap is even more pronounced, as mental health services are often underfunded and viewed as secondary to physical health and immediate survival needs. Yet without addressing psychological needs, individuals struggle to rebuild their lives, maintain relationships, and contribute to their communities.

B. History in the Arab World

The Middle East and North Africa region faces some of the world's most complex and protracted crises, making the mental health toll particularly severe. The region has experienced decades of armed conflict, civil wars, political instability, and forced displacement, with consequences that continue to reverberate through generations. A systematic review by Rabbani et al. from 2024 reported alarmingly high rates of depression (43%), anxiety (68%), and PTSD (52%) among women in fragile Eastern Mediterranean contexts, underscoring the psychological toll of humanitarian crises in the region[10]. For refugees and IDPs in the MENA region, the pooled prevalence was 42% for depression, 43% for anxiety, 45% for PTSD, and 22% for stress disorders.[11] Additionally, studies also confirm that this mental toll can concern children, as seen in the study based on displaced Palestinian children and adolescents (ages 8–18) residing in Qatar, which found significant mental health burden. Among these children, 71.7% scored above the clinical threshold for anxiety, and 62.6% scored above the threshold for depression.[12]

The Gaza Strip offers perhaps the starkest illustration of the mental health crisis in the Arab world. Before the recent destruction of its sole psychiatric hospital, Gaza's mental health services were already operating under strain, yet the loss of this critical infrastructure has intensified the crisis to an alarming level.[13] Approximately 452,600 individuals (22.1% of the population) in the Gaza Strip are believed to be living with mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, severe depression, severe anxiety, and severe post-traumatic stress disorder, with 104,450 (5.1% of the

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[8] Barchfield.
[9] World Health Organization, "New WHO Guidance Calls for Urgent Transformation of Mental Health Policies," WHO, last modified March 25, 2025, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.who.int/news/item/25-03-2025-new-who-guidance-calls-for-urgent-transformation-of-mental-health-policies
[10] Fauziah Rabbani, et al., "A systematic review of mental health of women in fragile and humanitarian settings of the Eastern Mediterranean Region,"*PubMed*, accessed August 2, 2026, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38874297/
[11] F. Zaouali and I. Anes, "Prevalence and risk factors of mental disorders among refugees and internally displaced persons in the MENA Region: a systematic literature review," *NIH, PubMed*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC13445111/
[12] Mohamed Adil Shah Khoodoruth, et al., "Mental health burden of conflict: rates and correlates of depressive and anxiety symptoms among displaced Palestinian children and adolescents in Qatar," *NIH, PubMed*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12724095/
[13] Amira A Shaheen et al., "Repercussions of the Destruction of Gaza's Sole Psychiatric Hospital," *WHO EMRO*, accessed August 1, 2026, https://www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-31-2025/volume-31-issue-2/repercussions-of-the-destruction-of-gazas-sole-psychiatric-hospital.html

population) experiencing severe disorders.[14] [15] A study conducted among internally displaced persons in Gaza between June and August 2024 found that the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress were 99.5%, 99.7%, and 93.7%, respectively.[16] Those who were forcefully displaced more than four times had a significantly higher likelihood of experiencing mental health disorders, highlighting the cumulative impact of repeated displacement.[17]

The Syrian conflict has similarly created a mental health catastrophe. With over 6 million Syrians displaced internally and millions more as refugees in neighboring countries, the psychological toll is immeasurable.[18] In Lebanon, which hosts approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees, the mental health needs of displaced populations far exceed the capacity of the healthcare system to respond.[19] This gap exists because Lebanon's healthcare system is fragmented and under-resourced, while hosting over 1.5 million Syrian refugees has placed unsustainable strain on an already fragile infrastructure.[20] The system relies heavily on short-term humanitarian funding, creating sustainability risks and inequitable coverage, especially at the primary care level.[21] As another example, Gammoh and colleagues identified elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and insomnia among Palestinian women migrants in Jordan following the Gaza War outbreak, demonstrating how regional conflicts have cross-border psychological impacts.[22]

Beyond conflict zones, structural factors contribute to the rising burden of mental health disorders across the region. The region faces a critical shortage of mental health professionals, with many countries having fewer than one psychiatrist per 100,000 people, which is far below the global average of 10 psychiatrists per 100,000 population.[23]

Cultural factors present significant challenges to mental health care in the Arab world. Across the region, mental illness is often highly stigmatized, with individuals and families facing shame, social exclusion, and discrimination.This stigma stems from deeply embedded cultural norms

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[14] Amira A Shaheen et al.
[15] Fiona Charlson, "New WHO prevalence estimates of mental disorders in conflict settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis," *NIH, PubMed*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31200992/
[16] Ahmed Hassan Albelbeisi, et al., "Prevalence and associated factors of mental health disorders among internally displaced persons in Gaza,"*PubMed*, accessed August 2, 2026," https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40116260/
[17] Ahmed Hassan Albelbeisi, et al.
[18] European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, "Syria," *European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria_en
[19] Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement,"Refugees in Lebanon," *Joint Data Center*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.jointdatacenter.org/activites/refugees-in-lebanon/
[20] Rozane El Masri, et al., "Barriers, facilitators and proposed solutions to equitable mental health financing and service delivery for the Lebanese populations and displaced Syrians in Lebanon: Findings from a qualitative study," *PLOS GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11213328/pdf/pgph.0003318.pdf#6#1
[21] Rozane El Masri, et al., "Barriers, facilitators and proposed solutions to equitable mental health financing and service delivery for the Lebanese populations and displaced Syrians in Lebanon: Findings from a qualitative study."
[22] Omar Gammoh, et al., "The Prevalence and Correlates of Depression, Anxiety, and Insomnia among Camp Residing Palestinian Women Migrants during the Outbreak of the War on Gaza: A Cross-Sectional Study from Jordan,"*PubMed*, accessed August 2, 2026, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39202508/
[23] Nisheet M. Patel, et al., "Global Disparities in Mental Health Systems: A Comparative Cross-sectional Study of Ten Countries with Different Income Levels,"*PMC*, accessed August 3, 2026 "https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12531183/

that prioritize family honor and associate mental illness with personal weakness or moral failing, compounded by religious misunderstandings and a historical legacy of underfunded, institutionalized care. A study in Jordan focusing on mental health literacy, the ability to recognize, manage, and seek help for mental disorders, found a literacy rate of approximately 71%, but stigma and service barriers persist.[24] [25] In Iran, Mahmoodi and colleagues reported that only 65% of university students reached adequate mental health literacy scores, with significant distrust toward online mental health information.[26]

C. Possible Solutions to the Problems: Past, Present, and Future

Addressing the mental health crisis in the Arab world requires approaches that are culturally adapted, community-based, and integrated into existing healthcare and social systems. Traditional Western models of mental health care, which emphasize individual therapy and psychiatric medication, may not translate effectively to Arab contexts where community, family, and faith play central roles in well-being. However, these existing models are frequently underfunded, overly centralized, and poorly aligned with the cultural and religious values of the communities they aim to serve, severely limiting their scalability and long-term viability. [27]

Frameworks for culturally adapted mental health care in the MENA region have been proposed in the past. The MENA-MHPI Model, a three-tiered framework, integrates (1) culturally adapted mental health literacy, (2) technology-assisted primary care, and (3) community-based psychosocial support.[28] This model emphasizes leveraging existing infrastructure, including schools, mosques, NGOs, and digital platforms, while embedding culturally sensitive approaches such as faith-based counseling and local dialect media campaigns.[29] Through the integration of digital technologies with community-based trust networks, the framework aims to diminish stigma, improve access to services, and foster psychological resilience.

UNHCR has been at the forefront of integrating mental health and psychosocial support into humanitarian response, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic with its accompanying spikes in isolation, loss of livelihoods, and uncertainty about the future.[30] The agency's approach emphasizes working with refugee community outreach volunteers who support their own

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[24] CDC, "Mental Health Education," *CDC*, accessed August 30, 2026, https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/mental-health/mental-health-education.html

[25] Walid Al-Qerem, et al., "Assessing mental health literacy in Jordan: a factor analysis and Rasch analysis study," *PubMed*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39011325/

[26] Seyed Mohammad Hossein Mahmoodi, et al., "Mental Health Literacy and Mental Health Information-Seeking Behavior in Iranian University Students," *PubMed*, accessed August 2, 2026, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35770063/

[27] Niloofar Mikaeili, Mahdi Naeim, and Mohammad Narimani, "The MENA-MHPI Model: A culturally adapted, multi-tiered framework for mental health promotion in the Middle East: Targeted narrative review with conceptual model proposal,"*ScienceDirect*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1876201825003752

[28]Niloofar Mikaeili, Mahdi Naeim, and Mohammad Nariman.

[29] Niloofar Mikaeili, Mahdi Naeim, and Mohammad Nariman.

[30]UNHCR Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa, "Mental Health and Psychosocial Response during COVID-19 Outbreak," *UNHCR*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/77112&ved=2ahUKEwiArMai5ZOWAxWa68kDHamNBGMQFnoECBgQAQ&usg=AOvVaw1PWzmDEM9BFZZ5f1HFzlvp

communities and help navigate to appropriate services, fostering social cohesion and mutual support.[31]

Digital mental health solutions offer promising alternatives but face challenges in acceptance and implementation. Reportedly, there are mixed public attitudes toward technology-driven mental health campaigns in Gulf States, highlighting both potential and resistance.[32] While digital health platforms are expanding, their real-world use remains fragmented and often culturally incongruent.[33] Nevertheless, technologies such as telepsychiatry and mobile mental health applications could help bridge access gaps, particularly in areas with few mental health professionals. In an analysis of Gaza's mental health crisis, researchers found that remote psychiatric consultations can extend mental health services even with limited infrastructure.[34]

The destruction of Gaza's sole psychiatric hospital provides a powerful reminder of the fragility of mental health infrastructure in conflict zones and the urgent need for international intervention. Experts have called for the deployment of mobile psychiatric units, establishment of reliable supply chains for psychiatric medications, training of local health professionals to handle mental health issues, and community engagement to reduce stigma and create support networks for patients and families.[35]

In conflict zones, particular attention must be paid to the mental health needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs), who often face the compounded trauma of violence, loss, and precarious living conditions. UNHCR emphasizes that "people with preexisting mental health conditions often face major protection risks during forced displacement," making continuity of care and targeted interventions essential.[36] For those displaced multiple times, the cumulative psychological toll requires coordinated responses that address both immediate distress and long-term recovery.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What is the current state of mental health services in your country? Are services available, accessible, and affordable?
- How does your country address the mental health needs of refugees, IDPs, and asylum seekers?
- What cultural factors influence mental health-seeking behaviors in your country?
- Does your country have specific legislation or policies regarding mental health care?

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[31] UNHCR Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa
[32] Samah Alageel, et al., "Factors influencing decisions to seek mental healthcare in the Arab Gulf states: a qualitative thematic analysis,"*PubMed*, accessed August 2, 2026, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40240998/
[33] Fadi El-Jardali, et al., "Digital health in fragile states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: A scoping review of the literature," *PubMed*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37115778/
[34] Amira A Shaheen, Yara Ashour, Amjad Joma, and Samer Abuzerr, "Repercussions of the destruction of Gaza's sole psychiatric hospital," *EMHJ*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://iris.who.int/bitstreams/bb848ec4-8aab-48db-a6f2-6641a8364646/download
[35] Amira A Shaheen, Yara Ashour, Amjad Joma, and Samer Abuzerr, "Repercussions of the destruction of Gaza's sole psychiatric hospital," *WHO*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-31-2025/volume-31-issue-2/repercussions-of-the-destruction-of-gazas-sole-psychiatric-hospital.html
[36] UNHCR, "Mental Health," *UNHCR*, accessed August 2, 2026, https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/ih/mental-health/mental-health

- What NGOs or international organizations are currently operating mental health programs in your country? Have they been effective?
- What role do religious and community leaders play in addressing mental health in your country?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can the League promote the development of culturally adapted mental health services that respect local customs, religious beliefs, and community structures?
- What measures can be implemented to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, particularly among men, and encourage help-seeking behaviors?
- What role can faith-based counseling and religious leaders play in expanding access to mental health support?
- How can digital mental health platforms be developed and promoted in a culturally appropriate manner?
- What regional training programs could be established to address the shortage of mental health professionals, particularly in conflict-affected areas?
- How can the League support the mental health needs of internally displaced persons and refugees in both camps and urban settings?
- What mechanisms can be established to ensure continuity of mental health care for displaced populations during emergencies?

IV. Additional Resources

World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) Mental Health

Provides resources and data on mental health in the region, as well as strategic leadership and technical guidance for mental health across 22 Member States. Its core offerings include the Regional Action Plan for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies (2024–2030), practical tools like the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) for non-specialists, and capacity-building initiatives ranging from frontline staff training in crisis settings to the launch of the Regional Coalition for Mental Health Promotion and Substance Use Prevention.

UNHCR Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPS)

UNHCR's guidance and resources on mental health in displacement settings. MHPSS programming provides a framework of mental health and psychosocial support for forcibly displaced and stateless people. It integrates MHPSS through health, protection, education, and shelter sectors, combining community-based interventions and psychosocial support with specialized clinical care for complex conditions such as depression, psychosis, and trauma-related disorders. UNHCR also advocates for refugee inclusion in national health systems, builds the capacity of local health staff and community volunteers while supporting hundreds of thousands of individuals annually across more than 24 countries.

UNHCR Integration Handbook

The key reference text for the reception and integration of resettled refugees, providing a comprehensive resource for governments, NGOs, and practitioners involved in planning, developing, and monitoring integration programs. It lays out core integration principles established at the 2001 International Conference on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees and updated in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. The Handbook also shares a wide range of global practices and models across key program areas like housing, employment, language training, mental health, and social support, serving as a professional development tool rather than a prescriptive manual.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) - Behind the Armour

Reports on men's mental health in the Middle East and North Africa, in conflict-affected MENA countries, documenting how stigma and cultural norms drive alarming rates of untreated psychological distress, including high suicidal ideation and psychosis, while sharing testimonies of men who found hope and healing through MSF's mental health services.

Topic II: Expanding regional academic exchange and scholarship programs to deepen cultural awareness and mitigate brain drain

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Brain drain, or the migration of highly skilled individuals from their countries of origin, presents a significant challenge to the economic and social development of many nations.[37] Where students find opportunities, countries might find a leakage of potential future labor force. When talented students, researchers, and professionals seek educational and career opportunities abroad, their home countries lose not only the investment in their education but also the potential contributions they could make to local development, innovation, and institution-building.[38] This phenomenon is particularly acute in regions where political instability, economic challenges, and limited professional opportunities push the most capable individuals to seek prospects elsewhere.[39]

Education and academic exchange programs play a key role in shaping the dynamics of brain drain and brain gain. Well-designed scholarships and exchange programs can provide individuals with skills and knowledge they cannot access at home, expose students to different cultures and perspectives, build international networks, and encourage participants to return and contribute to their home countries, if designed thoughtfully. These programs also serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy, fostering mutual understanding between nations and countering negative stereotypes.

The concept of "brain circulation" has emerged as a more nuanced approach to understanding the movement of talent and workforce. Rather than viewing emigration as a simple loss, individuals who move between countries can benefit all parties involved through knowledge transfer and international collaboration. When scholars maintain ties with their home countries and eventually return, or when they contribute from abroad, the flow of talent can benefit both origin and destination countries.[40]

For sending countries, the challenge is twofold. They create opportunities that make staying or returning attractive while simultaneously preparing students to compete globally. This requires not only scholarships and educational opportunities but also the development of robust research environments, competitive career pathways, collaborative networks, student-friendly visa

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[37] AbdelNasser Gaafa, "Harnessing the MENA Youth Dividend," *Magazine QS*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://magazine.qs.com/qs-insights-magazine-30/harnessing-the-mena-youth-dividend

[38] AbdelNasser Gaafa, "Harnessing the MENA Youth Dividend."

[39] Megha Roy and Ning Luo, "Students From the Middle East and North Africa: Motivations, On-Campus Experiences, and Areas of Need," *World Education News + Reviews (WENR)*, accessed August, 29, 2026, https://wenr.wes.org/original-research/campus-life-students-middle-east-north-africa/#1

[40] AnnaLee Saxenian, "Brain Circulation: How High-Skill Immigration Makes Everyone Better Off," *ResearchGate*, accessed August 5, 2026, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259797929_Brain_Circulation_How_High-Skill_Immigration_Makes_Everyone_Better_Off

policies, and supportive professional networks. As President of the Council of Higher Education in Türkiye, Erol Özvar, has argued, academic cooperation should facilitate brain circulation rather than brain drain, ensuring that the cross-border flow of knowledge, skills, and experience ultimately strengthens both institutions and societies [41] For receiving countries, academic exchange offers access to diverse talent, cultural enrichment, and opportunities for collaboration, but also raises questions about their responsibility to support capacity-building in sending countries.

B. History in the Arab World

The Arab world has long experienced significant brain drain, with tens of thousands of talented youths emigrating annually for better educational and economic opportunities. The phenomenon has deep historical roots, with waves of emigration occurring during periods of political instability, economic hardship, and conflict. The cumulative effect estimates suggest that the region has lost more than $2 trillion in human capital over recent decades, representing the value of education and potential contributions of those who left.[42]

The scale of Arab student mobility to Western countries, particularly the United States, illustrates the magnitude of this trend. According to data from the Institute of International Education (IIE), student enrollments from the Middle East and North Africa in U.S. institutions increased significantly in the 2010s.[43] In the 2012-2013 academic year, Saudi Arabia alone sent almost 100,000 students to the United States, around a 20% increase from the previous year, largely driven by the King Abdullah Scholarship Program.[44] This pattern of high mobility persists. In the 2023/24 academic year, Saudi Arabia remained the leading country of origin in the MENA region, with 25,942 students enrolled in U.S. institutions. [45] [46]

The historical context of academic exchange between the Arab world and Western countries is shaped by colonialism and post-colonial relationships. The colonization of the Middle East by European powers introduced Western educational models and created enduring connections with

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[41] Wagdy Sawahel, "Arab-Eurasian corridor: A 'breakthrough' for HE cooperation," *University World News* , accessed August 28, 2026, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20260415115935257#1

[42] Shireena Al Nowais, "Dubai Launches Search for Brightest Minds to Tackle Middle East Brain Drain," *The National*, accessed August 5, 2026, https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2022/09/29/dubai-launches-search-for-brightest-minds-to-tackle-middle-east-brain-drain/

[43] "IIE Open Doors Report 2010/2011: What Are the Latest Trends in Study Abroad and International Education?," *Semester at Sea*, accessed August 4, 2026, https://www.semesteratsea.org/iie-open-doors-report-20102011-what-are-the-latest-trends-in-study-abroad-and-international-education/

[44] Charles Taylor and Wasmiah Albasri, "The Impact of Saudi Arabia King Abdullah's Scholarship Program in the U.S.," *ResearchGate*, accessed August 4, 2026, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Number-of-Saudi-students-enrolled-in-the-US-and-worldwide-2012-13-projections-were_fig1_276419788

[45] Arabic CNN, "The most Arab countries are sending their students to receive education in America. Here's the list," *CNN*, accessed August 30, 2026, https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2024/11/22/international-students-us-arab-countries-infographic

[46] Báo Tuổi Trẻ, "The number of international students in the US continues to rise, reaching a record high," *Vietnam.VN*, accessed August 28, 2026, https://www.vietnam.vn/en/so-sinh-vien-quoc-te-tai-my-tiep-tuc-tang-cao-ky-luc#1

European institutions. As the Institute of International Education noted, the Middle East invested billions to improve its educational systems and scientific contributions.[47] However, this investment has not always translated into sufficient opportunities within the region, leading many graduates to pursue careers abroad.

Recognizing the challenges of brain drain, several Arab countries have developed large-scale scholarship programs aimed at both educating their citizens and building their countries' human capital. The King Abdullah Scholarship Program, launched in 2005, sent over 100,000 Saudi students to universities worldwide, with the stated goal of developing the skilled workforce needed for Saudi Arabia's economic transformation.[48] Similar initiatives have been undertaken by the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and other states, all seeking to equip their citizens with the skills and knowledge needed for national development.[49]

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain. A mismatch persists between what students are learning in the MENA region and the technical and professional needs of the region.[50] In Egypt, for example, World Bank enterprise surveys reveal that only 8% of companies provide formal employee training.[51] Precollege education still lags, limiting the number of qualified students for higher education. Scientific output from universities in the MENA region still falls well behind the output from Western universities, despite large investments in higher education facilities.[52] In Saudi Arabia, for instance, despite its ambitious Vision 2030 human capital goals, World Bank data show that just 4% of enterprises provide formal employee training, among the lowest rates in the region. [53]

However, promising initiatives have emerged to transform brain drain into brain circulation. The ICTP-Arab Fund Programme, launched by the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in partnership with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, offers fellowships for Arab students conducting research in cutting-edge scientific disciplines within their home countries.[54] The program provides scientific visits and training opportunities at ICTP,

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[47] "Middle East and North Africa," *Institute of International Education*, accessed August 4, 2026, https://www.iie.org/about/offices/middle-east-and-north-africa/

[48] Stefanie A. Hausheer, "King Abdullah's Legacy: Championing Higher Education in Saudi Arabia," *Atlantic Council*, accessed August 3, 2026, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/king-abdullah-s-legacy-championing-higher-education-in-saudi-arabia/

[49] Rawan bint Najeeb Tawfeeqi, “How the GCC is giving young people a central role in their future,” *World Economic Forum*, last modified, August 11, accessed August 11, 2026, https://www.weforum.org/stories/youth/gcc-youth-development-education-training/

[50] Marwam Tarzazi, "Skills Gap and Training Needs: Challenging Workplace Requirements and Implications for the MENA Region," *IEMed*, accessed August 6, 2026, https://www.iemed.org/publication/skills-gap-and-training-needs-challenging-workplace-requirements-and-implications-for-the-mena-region/

[51] UNESCWA, “Skills development, innovation and the private sector in the Arab region,” *UNESCWA*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://publications.unescwa.org/2024/sdgs-review-2024/#0

[52] Antonio Cavacini, "Recent Trends in Middle Eastern Scientific Production," *ResearchGate*, accessed August 4, 2026, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299404750_Recent_trends_in_Middle_Eastern_scientific_production

[53] UNESCWA, “Skills development, innovation and the private sector in the Arab region.”

[54] ICTP, "ICTP Arab Fund Programme," *ICTP*, accessed August 11, 2026, https://www.ictp.it/home/ictp-arab-fund-programme

enabling Arab researchers to engage with global peers and leading experts while maintaining their home base.[55] In this way, the initiative serves to reverse the outflow of skilled researchers while nurturing a new generation of scientists equipped to advance research within the Arab world. [56]

Similarly, cultural and academic exchange programs have sought to promote the Arabic language and culture internationally. In January 2026, Qatar Foundation launched the Tamim bin Hamad Chair for Arabic Language and Andalusian Culture with the University of Granada, representing a strategic investment in promoting Arabic language and culture through academic diplomacy.[57] Such initiatives reflect a growing recognition that cultural promotion and academic exchange are not only educational endeavors but also instruments of soft power and international cooperation.

C. Possible Solutions to the Problems: Past, Present, and Future

The goal is to transform a "one-way street" of talent movement into a circulatory system where knowledge and skills flow in multiple directions. One key strategy involves creating incentives for returning scholars. Governments can establish "return and reintegration" programs that provide returning academics with research funding, laboratory equipment, institutional support, and other resources needed to establish successful careers at home.[58] The ICTP-Arab Fund Programme exemplifies this approach, supporting Arab students to conduct research within their home countries while providing international training and networking opportunities.[59] Fellows have reported that the training and exposure at ICTP not only advanced their careers but also equipped them to return home with the skills and confidence needed to strengthen their local scientific communities.[60]

Establishing regional centers of excellence represents another promising approach. By creating world-class research institutions in the region, Arab countries can provide attractive career opportunities for scholars who might otherwise seek positions abroad. These centers can address shared regional challenges, foster collaboration across borders, and create ecosystems where talented researchers can thrive. Discussions among ICTP and Arab Fund delegates included proposals for "increasing research mobility, establishing regional centers of excellence, and deepening cooperation in science and technology across the Arab world."[61]

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[55] ICTP, "ICTP Arab Fund Programme."
[56] ICTP, “When Students Meet their Supporters: A celebration of impact and connection at ICTP,” *ICTP*, accessed August 10, 2026, https://www.ictp.it/news/2025/6/when-students-meet-their-supporters
[57] Al Arab Newspaper, Qatar Tribune, “QF Launches Tamim Bin Hamad Chair for Arabic Language and Andalusian Culture,” Hukoomi, accessed August 11, 2026, https://hukoomi.gov.qa/en/news/qf-launches-tamim-bin-hamad-chair-for-arabic-language-and-andalusian-culture
[58] Andrew Pinney, et al., “Impact Evaluations for Return and reintegration programmes,” *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, accessed August 10, 2026 https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/pub2023-100-r-impact-evaluation-return-reintegration-programmes-en.pdf
[59]ICTP, "ICTP Arab Fund Programme."
[60] ICTP, “When Students Meet their Supporters: A celebration of impact and connection at ICTP.”
[61] ICTP, “When Students Meet their Supporters: A celebration of impact and connection at ICTP.”

The modernization of curricula and the integration of Arabic language and cultural heritage into the global academic discourse are equally important. The Qatar Foundation's Tamim bin Hamad Chair for Arabic Language and Andalusian Culture represents a strategic investment in promoting the Arabic language not merely for religious or historical reasons, but as a modern, dynamic force in global scholarship. Such initiatives counter negative stereotypes that associate the region with conflict and demonstrate the richness of Arab cultural contributions to world civilization.

Partnerships with international universities can create pathways for collaboration that benefit all parties. The Institute of International Education has documented the proliferation of partnerships between U.S. and Middle Eastern universities, as well as "pathway programs" that help international students build the skills and credentials needed for academic success.[62] These partnerships can be structured to ensure that sending countries benefit from their citizens' international education, whether through joint research projects, institutional collaborations, or alumni networks that remain connected to their home countries.

The role of economic factors cannot be overlooked. Many talented individuals leave because they cannot find suitable employment at home, not because they prefer to live abroad. Creating competitive job markets, reducing bureaucratic obstacles to employment, and developing innovation ecosystems can make staying or returning more attractive. Some proposals include tax reductions for returning students or mandatory periods of labor within the country of origin to contribute back to the country, though such measures must be carefully designed to avoid creating resentment or limiting individual freedom.[63]

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What is the current state of academic mobility in your country? How many students study abroad, and in what fields?
- What are the main push factors driving talented individuals to leave your country, and what pull factors might encourage them to stay or return?
- What partnerships does your country have with foreign universities and research institutions? Does your country have scholarship programs for international study? What are their terms and conditions?
- How does your country balance the promotion of Arabic language and culture with the need for international competitiveness?
- What role does the diaspora play in your country's development?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can the League establish a coordinated framework for scholarship programs to maximize their developmental impact?

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[62] Institute of International Education, "Scholarship Programs," *IIE*, accessed August 12, 2026, https://www.iie.org/scholarships-programs/?pag=1

[63] Jacopo Bassetto and Giuseppe Ippedico, "Tax Incentives and Return Migration," R*ockwool Foundation Berlin Institute for the Economy and Future of Work (RFBerlin)*, accessed August 10, 2026, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.rfberlin.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/26097.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjTpsz95ZSWAxUzEFkFHU5oDb4QFnoECBgQAQ&usg=AOvVaw18_RbgQdxmrpo4B-g7mmJc

- What "return and reintegration" programs could the League support to encourage returning scholars?
- What measures could be taken to modernize curricula and integrate Arabic language and culture into global academic discourse?
- How can the League facilitate partnerships between Arab universities and international institutions?
- What role can digital and online platforms play in connecting Arab scholars globally and promoting knowledge sharing?
- What mechanisms could be established to facilitate research mobility within the Arab region?

IV. Additional Resources

Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors Report

The Open Doors Report is the U.S. government's flagship annual resource on international educational exchange, providing the most comprehensive data on international student mobility in and out of the United States, with participation from thousands of U.S. higher education institutions, including students from the MENA region.

ICTP-Arab Fund Programme

The programme offers Arab scientists across Arab Fund member states the opportunity to access ICTP's specialized training and educational programmes, regardless of their current country of residence.

Qatar Foundation - Tamim bin Hamad Chair Initiative for promoting Arabic language and culture.

It brings together scholars from Qatar and Spain through conferences, lectures, and exhibitions that preserve manuscripts and foster cultural dialogue. Additionally, it includes a translation initiative to make the University of Granada's academic programs and scholarly publications accessible to Arabic-speaking audiences.

UNESCO - Higher Education in the Arab World

Reports on higher education development and challenges. UNESCO, often in partnership with ALECSO, publishes a series of edited volumes and research reports that provide comprehensive analysis of the higher education landscape across the Arab region, with focused volumes examining topics like research and development, governance, quality assurance, and digital transformation.

Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development

The Arab Fund offers soft loans, grants, and technical expertise to governments and private enterprises across the Arab world, financing everything from major infrastructure projects like power grids and water networks to social investments in education, health, and rural development. Beyond project financing, the Fund invests in human capital through research mentorship programs, like its partnership with ICARDA, and provides grants for emergency relief and institutional support to countries facing crises

Topic III: Creating frameworks and avenues of support for victims of human trafficking within the MENA region

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Human trafficking is a grave violation of human rights that affects millions of people worldwide. The United Nations defines trafficking in persons as recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or vulnerability, for exploitation.[64] This exploitation can take many forms, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, organ removal, and other forms of servitude. The International Labour Organization estimates that over 27.6 million people are in forced labor globally, generating an estimated $236 billion in illegal profits annually.[65]

Trafficking is a highly complex crime that involves interconnected factors at individual, community, and systemic levels. Poverty, lack of education, gender inequality, and limited economic opportunities increase vulnerability to trafficking, as individuals seeking better lives may fall prey to fraudulent recruitment promises.[66] Armed conflict and displacement further increase risk, as instability disrupts social protections and creates large populations of vulnerable people. The trafficking chain typically involves recruiters who deceive victims, transporters who move them, and exploiters who profit from their labor.

Addressing trafficking requires a comprehensive approach built on the "four Ps": prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership.[67] Prevention efforts address the root causes and risk factors of trafficking through education, awareness-raising, and economic development. Protection measures provide support to victims and ensure their rights and well-being. Prosecution holds traffickers accountable through the justice system. Partnership involves collaboration among governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector to coordinate responses and share information.

A victim-centered approach is fundamental to effective anti-trafficking efforts. This approach places the rights and needs of survivors at the center of all interventions, recognizing that individuals who have been trafficked are victims of crime first and foremost, not criminals. Victim-centered responses prioritize physical and psychological safety, provide comprehensive support services, and avoid re-traumatization.[68] They also ensure that victims have access to

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[64]United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Human Trafficking," *UNODC*, accessed August 13, 2026, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/human-trafficking.html

[65] International Labour Organization, “Forced labour, modern slavery and trafficking in persons ,” *ILO*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons

[66]AchieveCE, “How Socioeconomic Factors Contribute To Human Trafficking,” *AchieveCE*, accessed August 13, 2026, https://achievece.com/blog/how-socioeconomic-factors-contribute-to-human-trafficking

[67] Saudi National Committee to Combat Trafficking, “The 4 Ps of Anti-Trafficing,” *NCCT*, accessed August 10, 2026, https://www.ncct.gov.sa/en/4-ps-anti-trafficking

[68] The Freedom Story, “The Victim-Centered Approach,” *The Freedom Story*, accessed August 14, 2026 https://thefreedomstory.org/the-victim-centered-approach/

justice and compensation, regardless of their immigration status or willingness to testify against traffickers.

B. History in the Arab World

The Middle East and North Africa region is a major destination, transit point, and source region for human trafficking.[69] [70] The combination of high demand for cheap labor, large migrant worker populations, ongoing conflicts, and weak governance in some areas creates conditions conducive to trafficking.[71] The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that approximately 600,000 migrant workers in the Middle East are victims of forced labor, a form of human trafficking.[72]

The Kafala (sponsorship) system, which regulates the relationship between migrant workers and their employers in many Arab countries, has been identified as a structural driver of vulnerability to trafficking. The system requires workers to be sponsored by a specific employer, tying their legal status to their job. This creates an unequal power dynamic that leaves workers vulnerable to abuse, as they cannot change employers or leave the country without their sponsor's permission.[73] The ILO study, based on more than 650 interviews conducted over two years in Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, found that workers are often deceived about working conditions, have their passports confiscated upon arrival, and experience poor working conditions and abuse.[74]

Conflict has further increased trafficking risks in the region. The ongoing wars in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq have displaced millions of people, creating large populations of vulnerable individuals. Traffickers prey on refugees and internally displaced persons, promising safety and opportunity but delivering exploitation instead.As the UN Security Council has noted, "armed conflict" in countries such as Libya and Syria is a major contributing factor to irregular migration and human trafficking, with external military intervention creating "protracted instability" that enables criminal networks to operate. [75] In conflict zones, trafficking is often

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[69] Human Trafficking Search, “Research Guide North Africa,” *Human Trafficking Search*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://humantraffickingsearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/North-Africa-Research-Guide.pdf

[70] IOM UN Migration, “Middle East and North Africa: Migrant Deaths and Disappearances in 2023,” *IOM*, accessed August 15, 2026, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://mena.iom.int/resources/middle-east-and-north-africa-migrants-deaths-and-disappearances-2023&ved=2ahUKEwjSxMGy-ZSWAxWND1kFHXRwLdQQFnoECCAQAQ&usg=AOvVaw21cqOP-ubnoxqKfANa5tY3

[71] Human Trafficking Search, “Research Guide North Africa.”

[72] International Labour Organization, “Tricked and trapped: How migrant workers are getting a raw deal in the Middle East,” *ILO*, accessed August 13, 2026, https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/tricked-and-trapped-how-migrant-workers-are-getting-raw-deal-middle-east

[73] International Labour Organization, “Sponsorship reform and internal labour market mobility for migrant workers in the Arab States,” *ILO*, accessed August 13, 2026, https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/sponsorship-reform-and-internal-labour-market-mobility-migrant-workers-arab

[74] United Nations, “Migrant workers in the Middle East often exploited, UN reports at human trafficking conference,” *UN*, accessed August 12, 2026,https://news.un.org/en/story/2013/04/436622

[75] Dai Bing, “Remarks by Ambassador Dai Bing at the UN Security Council Briefing on Combating Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking on the High Seas off Libya’s Coast,” *Permanent Mission of The People’s Republic of China to the UN*, accessed August 30, 2026, https://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/chinaandun/202412/t20241220_11507376.htm#1

intertwined with other forms of organized crime and may be used by armed groups to finance their activities.

In response to this challenge, many Arab countries have developed legal frameworks to combat trafficking. Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the United Arab Emirates are party to the UN's Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (the Palermo Protocol) and have established national anti-trafficking committees.[76] These committees are typically charged with developing action plans, coordinating national responses, and reporting on progress. However, the implementation and effectiveness of these frameworks vary widely. The gap between legislation and implementation remains a significant challenge across the region.

C. Possible Solutions to the Problems: Past, Present, and Future

Addressing human trafficking in the MENA region requires a comprehensive approach that addresses victim protection, law enforcement, prevention, and regional cooperation. Recent initiatives in several countries provide models for effective responses.
Jordan has emerged as a leader in the region in developing comprehensive anti-trafficking measures. The country's Anti-Human Trafficking Law No. 9 of 2009 established a National Committee for the Prevention of Human Trafficking, comprising senior officials from multiple ministries and civil society.[77] In 2022, Jordan launched a revised National Referral Mechanism and Standard Operating Procedures, providing clear indicators of exploitation and delineating the roles of all agencies involved from victim identification to safe reintegration or repatriation.[78] The country also established a dedicated fund to provide financial support, compensation, and legal aid to victims.[79]

Victim protection is a critical component of anti-trafficking frameworks. Several Arab countries have made provisions for victims' rights. In Kuwait, Law No. 91 of 2013 regarding the Trafficking of Persons and Smuggling of Migrants stipulates that the public prosecutor or a competent court shall refer victims of trafficking to medical and social care centers to receive care and treatment.[80] In Qatar, Law No. 15 of 2011 grants victims the right to personal dignity,

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[76] Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, "Trafficking Women and Children in the Arab Region: A Regional Perspective," *UN*, accessed August 15, 2026, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https%3A%2F%2Farchive.unescwa.org%2Ffile%2F29928%2Fdownload%3Ftoken%3DOFNrP0du&ved=0CAEQ1fkOahcKEwjA2bbd-5SWAxUAAAAAHQAAAAAQAw&opi=89978449
[77] UNODC, "Anti-Human Trafficking Law of 2009," *UNODC*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://www.unodc.org/cld/document/jor/anti-human_trafficking_law_of_2009.html?
[78] FanaNews, "Jordan Marks World Day Against Trafficking in Persons with Renewed Commitment and Expanding Reforms," *FanaNews*, accessed August 15, 2026, https://www.fananews.com/language/en/jordan-marks-world-day-against-trafficking-in-persons-with-renewed-commitment-and-expanding-reforms/
[79] FanaNews, "Jordan Marks World Day Against Trafficking in Persons with Renewed Commitment and Expanding Reforms."
[80] "Kuwait: Law No. 91 of 2013 on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants," *Warnath Group*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://www.warnathgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2013-Law-on-Traffickin-in-Persons-and-Smuggling-of-Migrants.pdf

legal advice, protection in secure shelters, and compensation for damages suffered.[81] In Saudi Arabia, Royal Decree No. M/40 of 2009 specifies procedures including informing victims of their legal rights, providing medical and psychological care, and ensuring protection.[82]

Regional cooperation is essential for combating trafficking, which is by nature a cross-border crime. The Arab League has the potential to facilitate information sharing, coordinate joint investigations, and develop common standards for victim protection. Cooperation with international organizations and NGOs is also important; organizations such as the ILO, UNODC, and IOM have expertise and resources that can support national efforts. The ILO has worked with governments and social partners to address the systematic gaps in labor migration management, including reforming the Kafala system.[83]

Prevention efforts must also address the root causes of vulnerability, including poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality. Awareness-raising campaigns targeting potential victims and the public are important but must be accompanied by efforts to create economic alternatives and strengthen social protections. In particular, the recruitment industry requires stronger regulation to prevent fraud and deception.

Reforming the Kafala system is crucial to reducing vulnerability to trafficking. Several countries have taken steps toward reform: Bahrain announced reforms to allow workers to change employment without employer approval, Saudi Arabia introduced a new contract-based system in 2021, and Lebanon drafted new legislation to amend the binding nature of the sponsorship system.[84] [85] [86] However, as human rights organizations have noted, many of these reforms have been insufficient, and abusive and exploitative elements of the system remain prevalent.[87] [88]

The role of technology in combating trafficking is increasingly important. Proposed solutions include a publicly accessible criminal offender map, a citizen-involved mobile application enabling users to securely upload photos of suspected trafficked individuals to assist authorities,

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[81] "Law No. 15 of 2011 Combating Trafficking in Human Beings," *Ministry of Justice*, accessed August 13, 2026, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=2512&language=en

[82] UNODC, "Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law Royal Decree No. (M/40)," *UNODC*, accessed August 16, 2026, https://www.unodc.org/cld/uploads/res/anti-trafficking-in-persons-law-2009_html/Anti-Trafficking_in_Persons_Law_2009_Saudi_Arabia.pdf

[83] International Labour Organization, "Sponsorship reform and internal labour market mobility for migrant workers in the Arab States."

[84] ADHRB, "Bahrain Moves to Reform Kafala, Exclusions Remain," *ADHRB*, accessed August 15, 2026, https://www.adhrb.org/2016/10/bahrainkafala/

[85] JonesDay, "Saudi Arabia Continues Modernization Measures by Introducing Significant Labor Reforms," *JonesDay*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://www.jonesday.com/en/insights/2020/12/saudi-arabia-continues-modernization-measures-by-introducing-significant-labor-reforms

[86] Amnesty International, "Lebanon: Blow to Migrant Domestic Worker Rights," *Amnesty International*, accessed August 12, 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/10/lebanon-blow-to-migrant-domestic-worker-rights/

[87] Council on Foreign Relations, "What is the Kafala System?," *CFR*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/what-kafala-system

[88] United Nations Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner, "UN experts urge Saudi Arabia to end Kafala system amidst World Cup preparations,"*UN*, accessed August 15, 2026, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/un-experts-urge-saudi-arabia-end-kafala-system-amidst-world-cup-preparations

and integrated monitoring systems for border enforcement.[89] [90] The protection of survivors' privacy and avoiding vigilantism must be central to the design of any technological solutions.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What victim protection measures exist in your country? Do they include access to shelter, medical care, legal assistance, and psychosocial support?
- Does your country have a national anti-trafficking committee or task force? What is its mandate and how effective has it been?
- Who are the victims and what forms of exploitation are most common?
- What measures exist to prevent trafficking, including awareness-raising, recruitment regulation, and economic development?
- Does your country use the Kafala system? If so, what reforms have been made to address exploitation?
- What cooperation exists with other countries and international organizations on trafficking?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can the Arab League establish a coordinated regional framework for victim protection, including minimum standards for shelter, medical care, legal assistance, and psychosocial support?
- How can the League support the repatriation and reintegration of trafficking victims?
- What reforms to the Kafala system could reduce vulnerability to trafficking?
- What role can technology play in combating trafficking, and what safeguards are needed?
- How can the League support the development and implementation of National Action Plans against trafficking?

IV. Additional Resources

UNODC - Global Report on Trafficking in Persons

Annual report with global and regional data. The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons is the UN's definitive statistical and analytical resource on human trafficking, covering 156 countries with data on victim profiles, exploitation types, and conviction trends.

International Labour Organization - Forced Labour Reports Research on forced labor and trafficking.

The world's most comprehensive statistical data on forced labour prevalence, profiling over 27 million victims globally and analyzing exploitation across sectors like agriculture, construction, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation.

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[89] Emmanuel Chisom, "UN agency honours "Talkam App" for reporting human rights abuses," *SundiataPost*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://sundiatapost.com/un-agency-honours-talkam-app-for-reporting-human-rights-abuses/

[90] Georgios Mourkousis, "EURMARS: An Advanced Surveillance Platform to Improve the European Multiauthority Border Security Efficiency and Cooperation," *Springer Nature Link*, accessed August 29, 2026, https://rd.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-62083-6_31#1

ESCWA - Combating Human Trafficking in the Arab Region

Report on legal frameworks and victim protection which examines trafficking in persons within and among Arab countries, focusing primarily on women and children as the main victims. It addresses three key areas: the alignment of national laws with international instruments, governmental and civil society efforts to protect victims through legal, medical, and psychosocial services, and prevention strategies including capacity-building, advocacy, and data dissemination.

ILO - Trapped in the Trap: Trafficking in Persons in the Middle East

A two-year study based on over 650 interviews across Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, and the UAE that documents how an estimated 600,000 migrant workers are deceived and coerced into forced labor and sexual exploitation. It analyzes the structural barriers, such as the Kafala sponsorship system and gaps in labor law coverage, that perpetuate abuse across sectors like domestic work, construction, manufacturing, and agriculture. The study also examines government, employers, and civil society responses while providing concrete policy recommendations to improve labor migration governance, extend legal protections, and strengthen victim access to justice.

US State Department - Trafficking in Persons Report

The Trafficking in Persons Report is the U.S. government's principal diplomatic tool for assessing and ranking the anti-trafficking efforts of more than 180 countries around the world, grading them from Tier 1 to Tier 3 based on compliance with minimum standards to eliminate forced labor and sex trafficking

Topic IV: Expanding accessibility to digital education throughout the Arab League, improving the varying levels of digital literacy.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

The digital transformation sweeping the global economy has created new opportunities for education, employment, and social participation. However, these opportunities are not equally distributed. The gap between those who have access to digital technologies and the skills to use them effectively and those who do not, also known as the "digital divide", remains a persistent barrier to inclusive development. Digital inclusion, ensuring that even the most disadvantaged individuals and communities can access and use information technologies, is essential for achieving equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, and public services. [91]

Digital education, or technology-enhanced learning (TEL), utilizes digital tools and technologies aiming to improve learning experiences by addressing educational challenges such as accessibility, equity, and quality.[92] TEL encompasses a wide range of approaches, from basic computer-aided instruction to sophisticated systems incorporating virtual and augmented reality, learning management systems, and mobile applications. These tools facilitate more interactive, engaging, and efficient learning experiences for diverse student populations.[93]

The potential benefits of digital education are substantial. TEL can address barriers to access by enabling distance learning, providing flexible scheduling, and offering personalized learning pathways. It can improve learning outcomes by fostering active learning, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. It can also address the shortage of qualified teachers by supplementing instruction with high-quality digital content. As the World Bank has noted, the universal adoption of digital technologies in Middle East and North Africa countries could boost economic growth, raising GDP per capita by at least 46% over 30 years with an estimated gain of almost $300 billion in the first year alone.[94]

However, effective and widespread adoption of digital education presents challenges. Issues such as the digital divide, digital equity, technostress, and mismatches between student needs and institutional technological infrastructure can hinder digital education's effectiveness[95]. These challenges are particularly acute in low- and middle-income regions and low-tech settings such as parts of the MENA region. The disparity in digital access across the region reflects broader

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[91] National Digital Inclusion Alliance, "Definitions," *NDIA*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/

[92] Abid Haleem, et al., "Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review," *ScienceDirect*, accessed August 12, 2026, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666412722000137

[93] Abid Haleem, et al., "Understanding the role of digital technologies in education: A review."

[94] Asharq Al-Awsat, "World Bank: Economic Digitalization in Middle East Can Generate $1.6 Trillion in Gains," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, accessed August 13, 2026, https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3535086/world-bank-economic-digitalization-middle-east-can-generate-16-trillion-gains

[95] Nada Eltaiba, Samira Hosseini, and Kingsley Okoye, "Benefits and impact of technology-enhanced learning applications in higher education in Middle East and North Africa: A systematic review," *ScienceDirect*, accessed August 5, 2026, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589791825000271

economic and social inequalities, with high-income Gulf countries far ahead of lower-income and conflict-affected states.

B. History in the Arab World

The MENA region can be segmented into three distinct country groups: oil-rich, high-income countries of the GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE); middle-income countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Tunisia, and Jordan); and lower-income or conflict countries (Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen)[96].

The GCC countries have made significant progress in digital inclusion. With ambitious national digital strategies and substantial ICT spending, these countries boast some of the highest mobile penetration and broadband connectivity rates in the world. Qatar and the UAE are among the top five most improved countries globally in digital inclusion between 2017 and 2020, with Qatar breaking into the top ten countries overall.[97] As of 2025, both Qatar and the UAE are ranked in top 20 countries in the IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking 2025, with Qatar placing in 20th position and the UAE climbing two places from the previous year, to the ninth place. [98]The UAE has implemented various digital inclusion initiatives focused on women, children, people of determination, and the elderly, including the National Policy for Quality of Digital Life, launched in January 2021, aiming to maintain a safe digital community and promote positive digital citizenship through four pillars: digital capacities, digital behaviour, digital content, and digital communication.[99] [100]In Egypt, the digital gap stems mainly from the urban-rural divide, with gender, wealth, and education level also significant predictors of digital access. Egypt has made significant strides, improving its digital inclusion score from 52 to 60 between 2017 and 2020.[101]

Lower-income and conflict countries face the most glaring digital gaps. In places such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, strained by conflict and economic chaos, users face low-speed internet and prolonged periods of disconnection. Misuse of digital technologies by opposing sides, including cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure and electronic surveillance, has led to concerns about

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[96] PWC, "Bridging the Digital Gap: The state of digital inclusion in the MENA region," *PWC*, accessed August 10, 2026, https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/publications/documents/bridging-digital-gap-state-digital-inclusion-mena-region.pdf

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[101] PWC, "Bridging the Digital Gap: The state of digital inclusion in the MENA region."

online privacy and surveillance. Sudan was the only country in the world that showed no improvement in its digital inclusion score between 2017 and 2020.[102]

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital education adoption across the region but also exposed deep inequalities. School closures forced rapid transitions to online learning, which was feasible for students with access to devices and internet but nearly impossible for those without. As Save the Children estimates, 9.7 million children in the poorest and most marginalized areas worldwide may permanently miss out on educational opportunities due to the pandemic.[103]

Recent research on technology-enhanced learning in MENA higher education has documented these regional disparities. The review of 85 peer-reviewed studies from 2015 to 2024 found that successful TEL adoption in the region has been concentrated in countries that have made it a national priority, backed by significant public investment and clear policy frameworks, whereas other nations have been left behind, facing infrastructural and capacity constraints that cannot be resolved without sustained intervention. [104]

C. Possible Solutions to the Problems: Past, Present, and Future

Addressing the digital divide in education requires a multi-pronged approach addressing infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy, content, and inclusion. The Digital School (Madrasa), launched in November of 2020 by Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives, provides a compelling model for expanding digital education in the Arab world.[105] The starting point of the Digital School was to create a robust learning platform with high-quality educational content in Arabic. Although Arabic is one of the most common languages globally, optimistic estimates from 2015 put the percentage of online educational content in Arabic at 3%.[106] The "translation challenge" involved institutions and individuals contributing to localization through text translation, voice-overs, and graphics, with guidelines emphasizing the use of "colloquial language" like Modern Standard Arabic, understood across many regions.[107]

Infrastructure development is critical to expanding access. The Digital School has partnered with government agencies, companies, and NGOs to create digital learning centers in existing schools where teachers are present, and students can use digital devices. Partnerships with telecommunications companies provide free SIM cards for tablets and free internet access for

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[102] PWC, “Bridging the Digital Gap: The state of digital inclusion in the MENA region.”
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students. Electronic device donation campaigns collect and refurbish printers, computers, and tablets to support education worldwide. To address electricity challenges in vulnerable areas, Emirati engineers developed a "school in a bag," —solar-powered equipment including a charger, five tablets loaded with learning content, a projector, and other devices.[108] [109]

Teacher training is essential for effective digital education. The Digital School developed a training program in collaboration with the University of Arizona, available in four languages, consisting of three levels, and taking about three months to complete. So far, 1,500 teachers have graduated from the program. This evolved into the Global Academy for Digital Teachers, which focuses on developing teachers' teaching, facilitation, and management skills, with certification mechanisms ensuring global verification. The academy aims to "enable teachers to impart and shape knowledge globally, while supporting local values."[110]

The World Bank has outlined a roadmap for addressing the digital skills gap in the region. Key recommendations include making digital skills foundational by introducing them early in education; facilitating a skills ecosystem rather than merely providing training; offering quick skilling solutions such as short-term courses, bootcamps, and stackable credentials; and understanding the supply and demand gaps in the digital skills arena.[111] The Bank notes that nearly 70% of CEOs in the region view the shortage of key digital skills as a major business threat, and the demand for digital and AI skills far outpaces supply.[112]

As a study on digital inclusion in the region concluded, the "MENA region has yet to unleash its full potential, and a regional collaboration between digital government leaders across MENA to tackle digital inclusion barriers and bridge the digital gap between the high-income and low-income countries of the region would benefit the entire region."[113]

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What is the current state of digital infrastructure in your country?
- What is the level of digital literacy in your country, and how does it differ by region, gender, age, and socioeconomic status?
- What digital education initiatives exist in your country? How accessible are they?
- What barriers to digital education exist in your country (infrastructure, affordability, training, cultural factors)?

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[108] Victoria Masterson, "This school-in-a-bag helps educate the most remote areas," *World Economic Forum (WEF)*, accessed August 14, 2026, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2021/07/tespack-solar-bag-access-school/
[109] Awad Amr and Ali Al Waleed, "Removing Barriers to Quality Education in the MENA Region," *Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)*, accessed August 18, 2026, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/removing_barriers_to_quality_education_in_the_mena_region
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[111] Shwetlena Sabarwal, Samia Melhem, and Meshael M. Abusalem, "Level Up MENA: How digital education and skills are powering the next generation of jobs," *World Bank*, accessed August 21, 2026, https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/arabvoices/level-up-mena-how-digital-education-and-skills-are-powering-the-the-next-generation-of-jobs
[112] Danielle McAllister, "Global CEOs double down on AI & talent drive despite economic challenges," *KPMG*, accessed August 21, 2026, https://kpmg.com/xx/en/media/press-releases/2025/10/global-ceos-double-down-on-ai-and-talent-drive-despite-economic-challenges.html
[113] PWC, "Bridging the Digital Gap: The state of digital inclusion in the MENA region."

- How does your country compare to others in the region in terms of digital inclusion?
- What is your country's national digital strategy, and how does it address education?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What measures could be implemented to make digital devices and connectivity more affordable for students?
- How can the League promote the development of high-quality Arabic-language digital educational content?
- What teacher training programs could be established to support effective digital education?
- What support can be provided to students in refugee camps and conflict zones to access digital education?
- How can digital education be integrated into national education systems while respecting local curricula and cultural values?
- What regional partnerships could be established to share best practices and resources for digital education?

IV. Additional Resources

Digital School (Madrasa)Information on the initiative providing digital education to vulnerable groups.

The Digital School offers a free, accredited online learning platform with interactive courses in key subjects, delivered through a mix of live instruction and self-paced modules, with the goal of reaching one million disadvantaged students, particularly in refugee and underserved communities

PwC - Bridging the Digital Gap

Report on the state of digital inclusion in the MENA region through research, community programs, and workforce upskilling. PwC works to close digital divides via programs such as the Digital Heroes program, which offers refugees and marginalized groups accredited digital training, mentorship from PwC professionals, and a pathway to internships, while firm-wide initiatives like the Learning Collective focus on building essential AI and human skills for the digital age

Global Academy for Digital Teachers

Information on teacher training programs. The program provides online teacher training in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish, with different tracks for roles like management, facilitation, teaching, and support.

Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO)

Resources on educational technology in the Arab world. Founded in 1970 Tunis-based organization, ALECSO works under the Arab League to raise educational, cultural, and scientific standards across the Arab world in pursuit of greater intellectual unity. Its key missions range from developing human capital and spreading Arabic language and culture to building bridges with other global cultures. ALECSO brings together 22 Arab member states, from Jordan and Egypt to Somalia and Yemen, all collaborating under its framework.