

Sixth ARAB COMPETITION FORUM (ACF)

28-29 May 2025
Baghdad, Iraq



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



E/ESCWA/CL6.GCP/2025/ACF/Agenda

Agenda

Background Information

Competition policies are fundamental to both advanced and developing economies, enhancing market efficiency and driving economic growth. Like other regions, Arab countries increasingly recognize the importance of competition laws and policies in fostering market dynamism, improving product and service quality, attracting investment, and encouraging innovation. Traditionally characterized by high market concentration and significant state participation, the Arab region is now actively strengthening its competition frameworks as part of its transition toward a market economy.

Recent years have seen notable progress in competition policy development across Arab countries, though implementation varies. The 2024 Arab Business Legislative Framework report, which tracks competition-related regulatory developments, shows an improvement in the regional competition assessment score from “moderate” in 2021 to “advanced” in 2024. Despite these gains, challenges remain, including reducing exemptions that weaken enforcement and improving transparency in competition regulations.

Further strengthening institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms is essential to align with international standards and ensure effective implementation. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in partnership with the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), supports these efforts through the Arab Competition Forum, established in 2020. The forum provides a platform for exchanging knowledge and expertise among stakeholders in the Arab.

This year’s forum will focus on advancing competition law enforcement in the Arab region, addressing key challenges, opportunities, and best practices. Key discussions topics include:

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- Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) – particularly cross-border transactions and their impact on regional market structures.
- Market studies – their role in detecting anti-competitive practices and strengthening enforcement mechanisms.
- Legal and Evidentiary Challenges – the standard and burden of proof in competition cases.
- Abuse of dominance – investigative tools and legal frameworks to improve enforcement.

Through these sessions, the forum aims to support competition authorities in strengthening institutional frameworks, ensuring transparency, and fostering a competitive and sustainable economic environment in the Arab region.

The 6th Arab Competition Forum is organized by ESCWA, in partnership with UNCTAD, OECD, and the Competition and Antitrust Council of Iraq. This two-day event serves as a collaborative platform for knowledge-sharing, fostering cooperation at the national, regional, and global levels. Experts from competition authorities in member states will benefit from peer learning through international case studies and best practices.

Objectives

The 6th Arab Competition Forum, themed “Competition Law Enforcement in the Arab Region”, aims to:

- Promote sustainable economic growth through the effective enforcement of competition laws, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Strengthen collaboration among competition authorities to combat anti-competitive practices.
- Enhance enforcement tools to improve the ability of competition authorities to detect monopolistic practices.
- Facilitate best practice exchange among ESCWA member states, strengthening regional competition law enforcement.

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Participants

The forum will bring together representatives from competition authorities in Arab countries, academia, the United Nations, international and regional organizations, and experts in competition policy and enforcement.

Meeting Language

The meeting will be conducted in Arabic and English, with simultaneous interpretation available for both in person and online participants.

Agenda

Day 1	Wednesday, 28 May 2025
8.30–9 a.m.	Registration and National Anthem
9–9.45 a.m. Opening Session (Live Broadcast)	Opening remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ahmad Youness Kassem, President of the competition and Antitrust Council, Republic of Iraq• Ali Al-Marzouqi, Representative of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq• Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA• Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benoît Coeuré, Chair of the Competition Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
9.45–10.45 a.m. Special Session	<p>Arab Youth in Competition (Iraqi Universities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating universities in Iraq have been invited to develop case studies on competition law enforcement topics, including mergers and acquisitions, market studies, sectoral investigations, and abuse of dominance cases. • This special celebratory session will feature an award ceremony honoring the winners of the Competition Challenge.
10.45–11.00 a.m.	Coffee break and group photo
11.00 a.m.–1.00 p.m. Session 1	<p>Session I: Mergers & Acquisitions: Challenges and Opportunities in Competition Law Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This session will explore the role of competition authorities in regulating and monitoring mergers and acquisitions (M&A), particularly cross-border transactions, and their impact on regional market structures. • Discussions will highlight key challenges faced by regulatory bodies. • The session will also examine opportunities to enhance regional cooperation in enforcing competition laws to prevent market concentration, promote transparency, and ensure a fair and sustainable competitive environment.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The best international practices and successful regional experiences in handling M&A cases will be shared, with a focus on developing more integrated and flexible regulatory frameworks to keep pace with modern market challenges. <p>Session Coordinator: Competition and Antitrust Council of Iraq</p> <p>Moderator: Ekram Abdul Aziz, Advisor at the Competition and Antitrust Council of Iraq</p> <p>Speakers: (Tentative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nathalie Khaled, Coordinator of the competition, consumer protection and national planning for development projects, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCWA Akari Yamamoto-Bonenfant, Legal Officer, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD Antonio Capobianco, Deputy-Head of the Competition Division, OECD Boniface Makongo, Competition Director, COMESA Competition Commission Francois Souty, Executive President, Cabinet LRACG Conseil <p>Developments in Member States</p> <p>Open Discussion</p>
1.00–2.00 p.m.	Lunch break

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Day 1	Wednesday, 28 May 2025
2.00–4.00 p.m. Session 2	<p>Session II: Market Studies – Their Role in Strengthening Competition Law Enforcement in the Arab Region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This session will focus on the role of market studies in strengthening competition law enforcement in Arab countries, particularly how they are used to analyze market dynamics and identify anti-competitive practices. • Discussions will cover modern tools and methodologies that help competition authorities in assessing market structures, detecting signs of economic concentration, and improving enforcement efforts. • Best practices from other countries will be examined to enhance market studies, with an emphasis on how innovation and technology can improve the accuracy of analysis and strengthen regulatory interventions, ensuring a more competitive and equitable economic environment. <p>Session Coordinator: ESCWA</p> <p>Moderator: Nathalie Khaled, Coordinator of the competition, consumer protection and national planning for development projects, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCWA</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teresa Moreira, Head, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, Division on International Trade and Commodities, UNCTAD • Saïd Kechida, Manager for Africa and the Middle East, Competition Division, OECD • Mohamad Cheikhrouho, General Rapporteur, Tunisian Competition Council

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kondwani Kaonga, Manager of Research and Policy, COMESA Competition Commission Menna Mahmoud Fahmy, Competition Consultant/Economist at the Ministry of Finance, Egypt <p>Developments in Member States</p> <p>Open Discussion</p>
Day 2	Thursday, 29 May 2025
8.30–9 a.m.	Registration
9–11 a.m. Session 3	<p>Session III: The Standard and the Burden of Proof in Competition Law Cases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This session will discuss the crucial importance of the rules regarding the standards and burden of proof, as well as the relationship between them. Topics will include the challenges faced by competition authorities in meeting the standard of proof in their jurisdictions, and whether the standard of proof and the related evidentiary requirements have become more stringent for competition authorities in proving anti-competitive conduct or blocking mergers. The session will also address the ongoing debate on whether the standard of proof should be modified or the burden of proof adjusted to overcome the challenges faced by competition

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Day 2	Thursday, 29 May 2025
	<p>authorities, and how to achieve the right balance between enforcement, legal certainty, and effective judicial review.</p> <p>Session Coordinator: OECD</p> <p>Moderator: Saïd Kechida, Manager for Africa and the Middle East, Competition Division, OECD</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hassen Guizani, President, Competition Council, Tunisia • Hend Hassanien, Manager Legal Service and Compliance, COMESA Competition Commission • Alaa Alsubhi, Legal Specialist, General Authority for Competition, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia • Amine Mansour, Case Handler, DG COMP, European Commission • Dina Waked, Professor, Sciences Po Law School <p>Open Discussion</p>
11–11.30 a.m.	Coffee break
11.30 a.m.–1.30 p.m. Session 4	<p>Session IV: Strengthen Competition Law Enforcement against Abuse of Dominance – Developing Legal Frameworks and Investigation Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This session will focus on enhancing the effectiveness of investigations into abuse of dominance cases by developing an integrated legal framework and adopting modern mechanisms to better capture market dominance and its abuse.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions will highlight advanced technologies, as well as economic and legal methodologies used to assess market power and anti-competitive effects, improving investigation speed and precision and ensuring timely intervention. The session will also review best practices from around the world to strengthen enforcement actions against abuse of dominance. <p>Session Coordinator: UNCTAD</p> <p>Moderator: Akari Yamamoto-Bonenfant, Legal Officer, Competition and Consumer Policies Branch, UNCTAD</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hassan Abu Abd El Majid, Vice President, Competition Council of Morocco Passant Youssef, Head, Bid-rigging Team, Egyptian Competition Authority Francis Kariuki, Senior Consultant in Competition and Trade Policy, Bowmans Law Firm Seyoung Oh, Deputy Director, Antitrust Investigation Division, Korea Fair Trade Commission <p>Developments in Member States</p> <p>Open Discussion</p>
1.30–2.30 p.m.	Lunch break

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Day 2	Thursday, 29 May 2025
2.30–3 p.m. Closing Session	<p>The Way Forward for Strengthening Competition in the Arab Region</p> <p>Session Coordinators: ESCWA and Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In this session, participants will present lessons learned and discuss key areas for intervention necessary to advance competition in the Arab region.• The session aims to reach consensus on concrete recommendations to enhance the enforcement of competition policies in member states.