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Capacity Building on Competition and Consumer Protection Law and Policy

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Capacity Building on Competition and Consumer Protection Law and Policy

Nathalie Khaled, Economic Affairs Officer, UNESCWA
8th UN Review Conference on Competition and Consumer Protection, 21 October 2020



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1. ESCWA's, the OECD's & UNCTAD's technical assistance activities in the Arab region

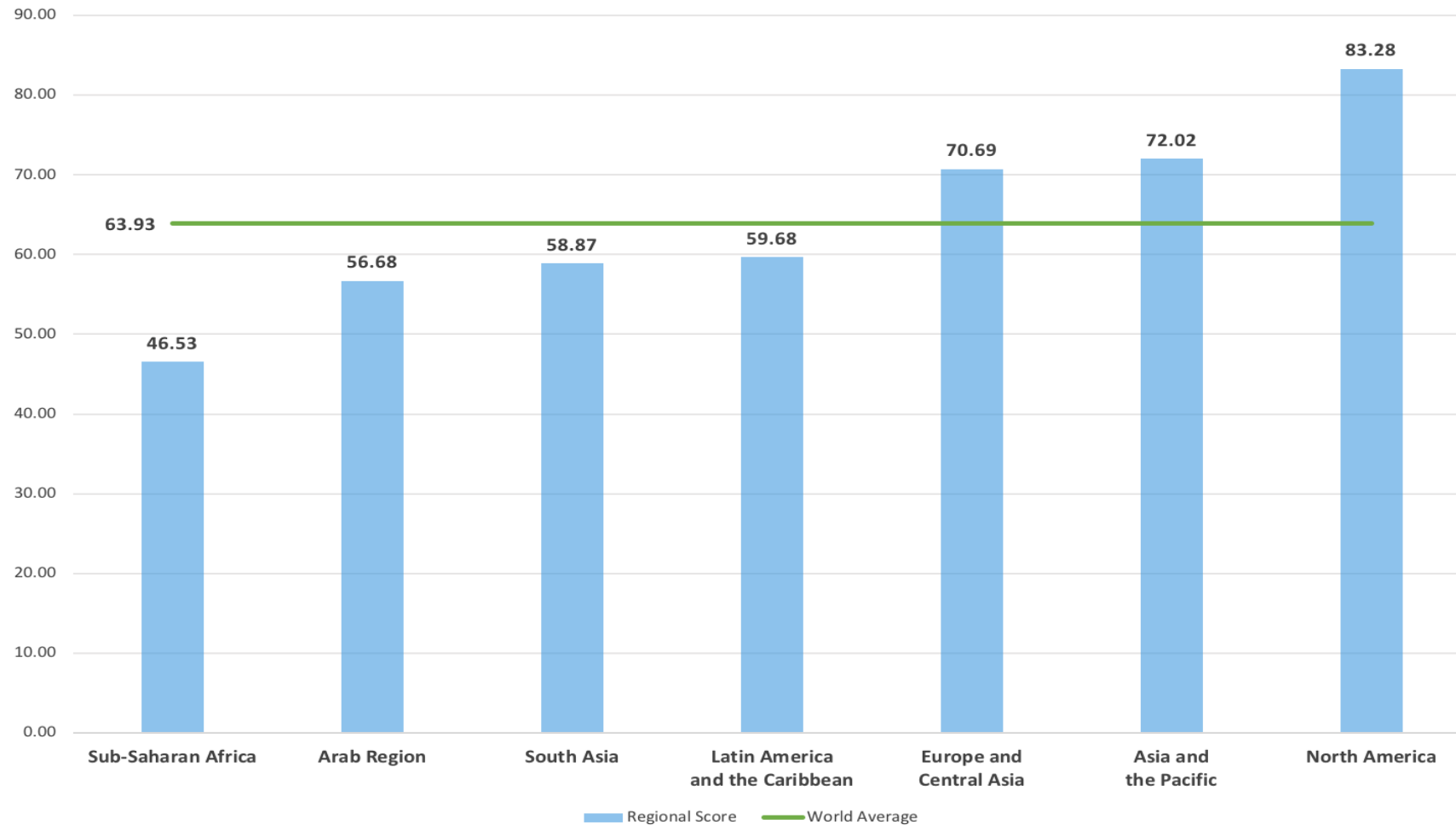


The Arab Region



- Arab countries are lagging behind in the areas of competition law and policy and consumer protection
 - They are in great need of capacity development and technical assistance

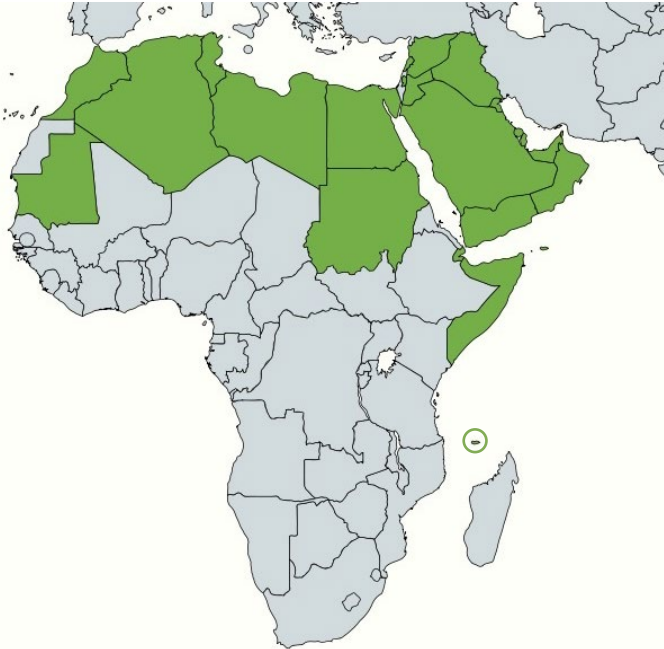
Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 - Regional Scores 2019 (Weighted by Population)



ESCWA staff calculation. Based on the Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 (2019 edition) by the World Economic Forum and World Bank Data from 2019.



The Role of ESCWA



- Promote economic and social development in the Arab region
- Offer capacity-building programs and policy advice
- 22 countries & 430 million people

LOU on Competition Between ESCWA, the OECD, & UNCTAD

- Support countries in the development of competition frameworks
- Raise awareness of the importance of competition policy
- Offer capacity-building programs in line with member countries' interests
- Enhance regional integration





Collaboration with UNCTAD on Consumer Protection

- [Webinar “Consumer protection in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic: Focus on digitalization”](#)



Future Aspirations

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



- Strengthen our collaboration with the OECD and UNCTAD
- Establish a regional competition framework
- Project on the interrelation between competition and trade



2. Developing countries' challenges related to digitization of the economy

The impact of COVID-19 on developing countries' competition and consumer protection policies



ICT Infrastructure in the Arab Region



- Online sales in the Middle East equal only 2% of total retail revenue, as opposed to 15% in more developed regions
- Weaknesses in ICT infrastructure concerning e-payment, postal reliability, secure internet services, and affordability of the internet
- Acceleration of the digital economy → widening of the digital divide

Impact of the Pandemic on Consumer Protection

- Increasing reliability on digital platforms
- Increase in cases of
 - Price gouging
 - Deceptive online marketing techniques
 - Financial fraud and phishing schemes

Reaction by consumer protection authorities:

- Increased market monitoring
- Advocacy for better online consumer protection
- Information campaigns to educate consumers
- Online portals to facilitate the filing of complaints

Impact of the Pandemic on Competition

- Increase in cases of price gouging
 - Export bans
 - Shutdown of businesses
 - Mergers as a survival technique
 - Intensification of government intervention
-
- Increase in market concentration
 - Decrease in competition

- Competition authorities have struggled to remain effective in the face of the containment measures
 - Need to remain vigilant and closely monitor the market

- Cross-border anti-competitive practices are on the rise
 - Need for cross-border cooperation

How ESCWA and UNCTAD can Support Competition and Consumer Protection Authorities

- Offer technical support in mitigating the challenges of the pandemic
- Promote regional cooperation and the sharing of information among Arab countries



Webinar on competition law and policy during the COVID-19 pandemic



Webinar on consumer protection during the COVID-19 pandemic



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Thank you!

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