Arab Youth in Competition - Student Competition Challenge

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism, Competition Department, is organizing the Student Competition Challenge as part of the Seventh Arab Competition Forum, which will be hosted in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on 20 & 21 May 2026. This initiative targets university students in UAE specializing in economics, law, and business studies, and aims to foster research, innovation, and policy thinking on the evolving theme of competition in digital markets.

1. Overview of the Challenge and its Objectives

Digital markets are reshaping the way businesses operate and consumers interact. While they offer significant innovation and efficiency gains, they also present new challenges for competition policy. Issues such as platform dominance, algorithmic collusion, data monopolies, and gatekeeping behavior by large digital firms require fresh thinking on how to maintain open and fair competition in the digital age.

In line with the theme of the Seventh Arab Competition Forum, to be held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in 2026, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism, Competition Department, is launching the fifth edition of the Student Competition Challenge. This initiative invites university students in UAE specializing in economics, business, and law to submit a research paper in **English** that explores the role of competition policy in digital markets, with a specific focus on emerging enforcement challenges and opportunities.

The submitted papers should examine real-world case studies from the Arab region or internationally, focusing on competition issues in the digital markets such as abuse of dominance by digital platforms, anti-competitive mergers in the tech sector, data access and interoperability concerns, self-preferencing by online gatekeepers, or algorithm-driven market manipulation. Students are encouraged to highlight enforcement actions, landmark rulings, or regulatory innovations that have shaped competitive outcomes in digital ecosystems.

This Challenge offers students a platform to engage with one of the most pressing issues in contemporary competition policy. It provides an opportunity to conduct applied research, propose policy solutions, and understand how regulators across the world are addressing the unique dynamics of digital markets.

Papers should demonstrate a clear understanding of digital market structures, competition risks, and the regulatory responses taken to safeguard consumer welfare and innovation. Priority will be given to case studies that analyze sectors such as e-commerce, search engines, app stores, digital advertising, ride-hailing, or fintech, where digital competition concerns are most pronounced.

Winning students will be invited to attend the Forum in Dubai and participate in a dedicated student session on the first day, culminating in an awards ceremony to recognize outstanding research contributions.

This marks the fifth edition of the Arab Student Competition Challenge, following its successful launch and continuation in the previous four editions of the Arab Competition Forum.

Challenge Objectives:

- Deepen students understanding competition issues in digital markets and their implications for innovation, consumer welfare, and market fairness.
- Promote academic research and dialogue on regulatory and enforcement challenges arising from digital platforms in the Arab region and globally.
- Foster meaningful connections between students, researchers, competition authorities, and digital market experts.
- Contribute to the development of policy-relevant and academically grounded research focused on competition policy in digital markets, including emerging tools, regulatory strategies, and case studies.

2. Target Group

University students in UAE, majoring in economics, business administration, and law.

3. Expected Results

Students are invited to submit a research paper in English focusing on a case study that addresses how competition policy and enforcement mechanisms are used to safeguard fair competition in digital markets. Submissions should highlight real-world challenges or enforcement actions involving digital platforms, online marketplaces, or other technology-driven sectors.

Participants may participate in the challenge individually or in teams, with a maximum of five students per group. A detailed guideline outlining the required structure, format, and content of the research paper will be provided to all participating students to support the development of their submissions.

4. Incentives for participants

- Winning teams will have their research papers published on the official Arab Competition Forum website, accompanied by a short biography of each team member, helping amplify their academic and professional visibility.
- Each winning team will deliver a 5-minute presentation summarizing their research findings during the awards ceremony and will share a concise overview of their study with participants at the Seventh Arab Competition Forum.
- Winners will gain exclusive access to high-level competition experts, digital economy specialists, and representatives of competition authorities, offering them valuable networking opportunities. They will also be invited to attend and engage in the main sessions of the Forum, particularly those addressing competition in digital markets.

5. Implementation and deadlines

First stage: Communication with universities to introduce the Challenge (2 February 2026)

ESCWA, in cooperation with the **UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism, Competition Department,** will communicate with the universities to introduce the Challenge. Universities must confirm their participation before the deadline.

Second stage: Challenge dissemination and participant registration (13 February 2026)

Participating universities will be responsible for disseminating the Challenge among their students. This includes posting necessary information about the Challenge on their website, and/or redirecting students to register and checking all information related to the Challenge on the Forum website.

Students can register through the website of the Seventh Arab Competition Forum. Registration

Deadline: 13 February 2026.

Third stage: Holding information sessions for participating students (20 February & 20 March 2026)

ESCWA and the **UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism, Competition Department,** will organize information session(s) for students to provide information and guidance on the Challenge and on preparing research papers. ESCWA will answer all students inquiries.

Fourth stage: Paper submission (30 April 2026)

Students are required to submit their papers before the final deadline on April 30, 2026. Submission will be made via the website of the Seventh Arab Competition Forum.

Fifth stage: Evaluation of papers (TBD)

The ESCWA team will screen the submitted papers, and the team will select 7 papers to be qualified to the jury (according to the evaluation matrix criteria). The qualifying 7 papers will then be evaluated by a jury of 6 members who will then select 3 winners before the deadline of 11 May 2026.

The jury consists of:

- One/Two experts from the UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism, Competition Department.
- Academic from UAE
- Experts from international organizations.

The judges will evaluate the papers based on the following evaluation matrix:

Table: Evaluation Matrix

	Weak (One point)	Moderate (2 points)	Strong (3 points)	Very strong (4 points)
Originality of ideas	Missing some insight	OK – but suggests only the obvious	Generally good, solid reasoning	Original with unusual insights
Organization and writing style	Difficult to follow	Clear, but with a few errors	Clear and interesting with no errors	Stimulating and has no errors
Problem Identification	Vague problem definition	Part of the problem not identified	Generally accurate but not concise and specific	Clear, specific, concise and accurate

Problem analysis	Omits important issues	Overlooks some issues	Includes most important issues	Comprehensive. No omission of issues
Recommendations	Vague problem definition	Solves only a part of the problem	Solves the problem in a general sense only	Clearly resolves the problem
				Total sum (score): ___ /20

Sixth stage: Announcing the winners (TBD)

The selected research papers will be announced, and their authors will be contacted via email to invite them to attend the forum.

For any inquiries, please feel free to contact Nathalie Khaled: khaled@un.org