



The UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and the Economic Research Forum (ERF)

CALL FOR COUNTRY POLICY BRIEFS

HOW CAN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY BENEFIT EVERYONE IN ARAB COUNTRIES?

The Arab Development Portal at the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and the Economic Research Forum (ERF) are pleased to announce a call for policy briefs on “Growth, Employment, Poverty, Inequality, and Digital Transformation in the Arab Region: How Can the Digital Economy Benefit Everyone?”.

Interested researchers are invited to submit their proposals by August 15, 2020.

The Arab Development Portal at the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and the Economic Research Forum (ERF) are collaborating on a new policy-focused research program on “Digitalization Transformation and Implications for Growth, Employment, Poverty and Inequality in the Arab Region.”

The program will publish about 10 country-level policy briefs (submitted following an open call for country-level papers) and 5 thematic pieces (commissioned from world experts).

The study will examine issues through two complementary lenses:

- How is digital transformation affecting economic growth and structural transformation through its potential impact on key sectors of the economy, and what are the opportunities that digital transformation can provide in supporting inclusive and sustainable growth, employment generation and poverty reduction?
- How is digital transformation affecting human development and human capital accumulation, and what is its potential impact on inequality and poverty? Potential risks, especially for vulnerable populations (through widening inequality, job losses, and so forth) will be assessed to the extent feasible, based on availability of data. Where data and other information are available, papers will assess the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on existing vulnerabilities (including vulnerabilities in the gig economy) that can exacerbate inequalities or overcome obstacles.

The nature of the Country Policy Briefs

The country-level policy briefs to be produced for this project will be about 20 pages (including any tables, charts, and references) long and have a similar structure.



While authors are not expected to carry out original research and analytical work on the subject, the Country policy briefs are expected to approach existing research with a fresh eye. Commissioned authors will harness existing quality knowledge on the country to produce well-substantiated and forward-looking briefs on how countries may be impacted by digital transformation and propose relevant policies in such a way as to:

- Be concise and specific, with strong empirical content,
- Avoid generalities and generic content,
- Propose policy recommendations and directions which are based on quality knowledge and analysis and reflect on the latest cross-cutting national and sectoral strategies that are adopted by governments.

General outline of the Country Policy Briefs

- Each policy brief will include a short and selective review of the development experience of the country, including the political economy context; and try to answer the following questions (where data/information are available) by providing detailed analysis on who is left behind, while accounting for gender inequality among other forms of inequalities:
 - What are the key disruptive technologies which are likely to affect growth, employment, poverty, and inequality in the country, and how may new technologies affect the country's economic prospects?
 - Which *engines and bottlenecks* to growth and equitable development in the country are most likely to be impacted and how? The areas/issues may be about: trade and exports, agriculture, education, the business environment, the supply of quality public goods and service delivery (such as justice, security, property rights, logistics), provision of finance, efficient redistribution, etc..
 - What are the forms and sources of digital inequality and how is it affecting poverty and inequality? Is it causing new forms of inequality? Is it creating a dichotomy in the labour market?
 - Does the country have the necessary infrastructure and enabling policy environment (for innovation and R&D) required to take full advantage of the digital revolution? Are specific areas or sectors left behind?
 - Are adequate social safety nets in place to deal with the potential dislocations the new technologies may cause? Is the government investing in targeted policies to ensure labour mobility and support the disadvantaged move to new sectors?
 - What policy steps/measures (institutional/governance, macroeconomic, sectoral, and social protection) need to be taken to help harness the benefits of digitalization and mitigate its risks? Is the government investing in targeted policies to ensure labour mobility and support those who are relatively in a less advantageous position? In which sectors are additional policy actions needed?



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- What roles could the international community and private sector play to help the country adjust to the changing technological/digital landscape?
- Each policy brief will cover the following key new technologies (where relevant) and how they may affect the development prospects for the country in terms of growth, employment, inequality and inclusion, sustainability:
 - **The future of work.** Automation and AI can improve productivity and boost living standards. But they can also make certain skills redundant, put some people out of work, and fragment the labor market into dynamic high-wage and stagnant low-wage segments.
 - **Financial technology (fintech).** The application of digital technologies to financial services offers multiple benefits. Fintech promises to boost access to finance, allowing unbanked individuals and small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) to obtain loans and make payments conveniently.
 - **Digitalization of government services.** New technologies are revolutionizing the way governments operate. Although important security and privacy concerns need to be addressed, e-government holds the promise of increased efficiency, allowing citizens to obtain services conveniently over the Internet and save time that would otherwise be spent filling out paperwork and visiting government offices. Digitalization may also enable easy public access to key fiscal and other government data, thereby boosting accountability and transparency.
 - **E-commerce.** For consumers, e-commerce provides access to a wider range of products and services at lower prices, boosting consumption. For firms, e-commerce can provide new business opportunities and access to larger markets, supporting investment and creating jobs. This will be examined from the lens of the SDG 16 to provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.¹
 - **Modernization of agriculture.** New technologies such as digital farming and precision agriculture, innovations in plant breeding techniques, and efficient use of water could dramatically increase agricultural productivity, raising rural incomes.

Guidelines for Submission

Candidates will submit proposals to write country policy briefs according to these TORs and the timeline indicated below.

The countries for which submissions are requested are: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates.

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>



A final list of 10 countries will be selected depending on feasibility of the country study, including the availability of qualified author (s).

Each proposal should be 2-3 pages long and provide the following:

- A brief review of the literature on the subject in the country
- A general assessment of the state of knowledge in the country about progress in digital transformation, challenges, and availability of quality data and research on the subject
- The main themes/issues which would be emphasized in the policy briefs based on existing knowledge and relevance to country's priorities and context.

IMPORTANT NOTE: the proposal should NOT include the authors' names, as it will undergo a blind review process.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The author(s) of the country policy brief will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Proven track record in quality research, including published work, (25%)
- Deep knowledge about the development experience and policy issues in the country involved, (25%)
- Proven track record of work and knowledge in the area of digital transformation. (25%)
- Quality of the submitted proposal. (25%)

ELIGIBILITY

The following eligibility criteria will be applied:

- Authors should have expertise in the topic being researched.
- Authors should be from the ERF region, whether residing inside or outside the region.
- Authors from disciplines other than economics may apply.

IMPORTANT DATES

- Deadline for submission of country-level proposals for policy briefs: August 15, 2020
- Submission by selected authors of detailed outlines of country-level policy briefs: September 30, 2020
- Submission of first drafts of country policy briefs: November 30, 2020
- Submission of full revised drafts of all papers: December 31, 2020



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To submit your proposal, please fill in the following form:

<https://erf.org.eg/call-for-country-policy-briefs-how-can-the-digital-economy-benefit-everyone-in-arab-countries/>

YOUR SUBMISSION SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Author(s)' CV(s)
- Two published papers, and
- Proposal as per the above mentioned guidelines.

For further inquiries, please contact Ms. Hoda Azmi, Conference Manager, email:

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