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Export Competitiveness: Where Does The Middle East and North Africa Region Stand?

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Description / Abstract

Globalization could raise the export opportunities for the MENA region. Given its characteristics and endowments, the MENA region occupies an intermediate place in the ladder of comparative advantage and is being squeezed from above and below by a variety of countries, from China to Eastern Europe. It becomes important to assess the competitiveness of MENA in world markets at a detailed level, and beyond the oil factor. To a large extent, exports of MENA countries still rely heavily on primary products with ten out of 15 countries showing oil as one of their major exports. Moreover, most MENA countries have more than half of their exports concentrated in only three commodities. Export diversification is low, but is intensifying for some GCC countries and non-oil exporting countries, while other countries, have made no progress in upgrading their exports. Three categories of MENA countries emerge from the analysis: those that are ahead of the others in terms of export competitiveness indicators; some GCC countries that have made a noticeable effort in diversifying and upgrading exports and laggards, where efforts at improving competitiveness of non-oil exports are not evident. In order to achieve higher export competitiveness among MENA countries, several policies need to be implemented, including efforts to attract foreign direct investment, continued trade liberalization, and upgrading of labor skills and productivity.

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