

LOGIC

INSIGHTS



SPORTS ON THE RISE **IN THE MENA REGION**

SAUDI ARABIA & EGYPT
ON THE FAST TRACK

Issue Date: May. 2025

1 THE RISE OF SPORTS IN MENA REGION

MORE THAN JUST A GAME

A. REGIONAL FRONT-RUNNERS: WHO'S LEADING THE SPORTS CHARGE IN MENA?

As the global sports industry continues to expand, the MENA region is rapidly establishing itself as a key player on the world stage. From hosting prestigious international events to investing heavily in infrastructure and talent, countries across the region are leveraging sports as a strategic driver of **economic growth**, **cultural influence**, and **global visibility**.





The **UAE** has positioned itself as a premier destination for elite competitions, with the **Abu Dhabi Formula 1 Grand Prix** at Yas Marina Circuit delivering thrilling experiences and the **Dubai World Cup** standing as one of the most renowned horse racing events globally.



In **Saudi Arabia**, a diverse, year-round calendar includes **horse racing, golf, motorsports, boxing, tennis, and martial arts**—drawing global attention and participation. A landmark moment came with **Cristiano Ronaldo's** signing to **Al-Nassr FC**—an international statement of intent that underscored the Kingdom's ambitions to become a central hub for global sporting events while strengthening its domestic sports economy. These ambitions are set to reach new heights with Saudi Arabia confirmed as the **host of the 2034 FIFA World Cup**, further cementing its status on the international sports map.



Qatar's successful hosting of the **2022 FIFA World Cup** was another defining moment for the region, showcasing world-class execution and significantly elevating the MENA region's profile in global sports.



Tunisia excels in sports such as **handball, football, and swimming**. The national handball team is one of the strongest in Africa, having won multiple African Championships and consistently qualifying for the World Championship. Regionally, Tunisia remains a competitive force in North African and Arab sporting events.



Morocco has also established itself as a regional powerhouse in athletics and football. The country boasts a rich history in middle- and long-distance running, producing world-class athletes like **Hicham El Guerrouj**, a multiple Olympic and world champion. Regionally, Morocco continues to dominate in North African competitions and invests heavily in sports infrastructure and talent development through initiatives like the **Mohammed VI Football Academy**. In **2023**, Morocco hosted the **FIFA Club World Cup**, marking its third time organizing the tournament and showcasing its capability to stage major international events. Looking ahead, Morocco is set to **co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup** alongside Spain and Portugal—becoming the **first North African nation** to do so.



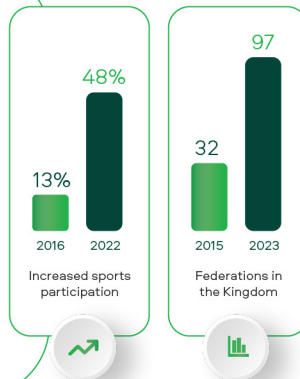
Egypt continues to shine in individual sports—particularly **squash**, where it has consistently produced world champions and dominated international rankings. In football, Egypt proudly boasts global icons such as **Mohamed Salah** and rising star **Omar Marmoush**, whose success stories inspire a new generation of athletes and reflect the growing depth of talent in the region. Egypt has also earned regional and continental acclaim in **handball and volleyball**, with its national teams regularly securing top spots in African championships and making strong showings on the global stage. Notably, Egypt clinched its **ninth (and third in a row) African Men's Handball Championship title in 2024**—a consistent performance that underscores its dominance in African handball and growing global stature.

B. BY THE NUMBERS: KEY SPORTS STATISTICS FROM ACROSS MENA

The Middle East's sports economy is projected to grow at an annual rate of 8.7% by 2026, far outpacing the global average of 3.3%, driven by ambitious investments and strategic initiatives.

KSA

- Saudi Arabia has significantly increased sports participation, rising from **13% in 2016 to 48% by 2022**, surpassing its **Vision 2030** targets.
- The number of sports **federations in the Kingdom tripled**, from **32 in 2015 to 97 in 2023**, reflecting a robust institutional framework for sports development.
- Women's participation** has surged, with over **50,000 girls** joining sports programs since 2015—a **149% increase**.



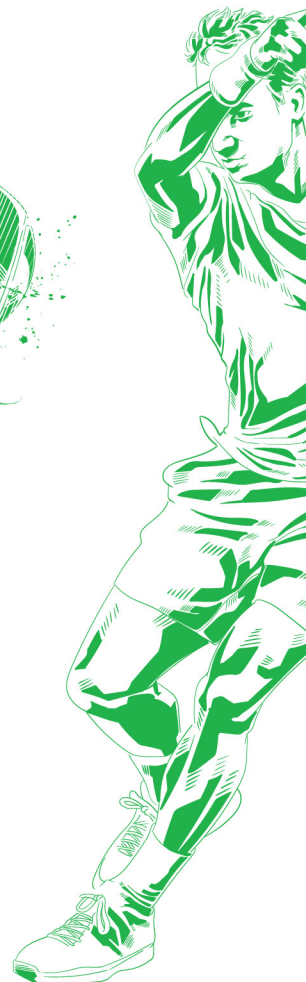
EGYPT

- The government has heavily invested in upgrading **community sports clubs and youth centers** across the country. These upgrades aim to expand access to sports for all, especially marginalized and underrepresented communities.
- Egypt's sports market revenue is projected to reach approximately **US\$56.28 million in 2025**, with an expected annual growth rate of **0.60% from 2025 to 2029**.



UAE

- As of 2022, the UAE had the highest proportion of 'sport engagers' globally, with **89%** of residents regularly following sports through various platforms.
- The National Sports Strategy 2031** aims to increase the percentage of individuals practicing diverse sports to **71% of the population**, reinforcing the country's commitment to sports as part of daily life.



2 SPORTS AS AN ECONOMIC ENGINE

POWERING GROWTH, TOURISM, AND SOCIAL IMPACT

The sports industry is emerging as a cornerstone of economic diversification in the MENA region, particularly in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Governments are leveraging sports tourism and infrastructure development to attract international visitors and stimulate local economies. Events such as Egypt's El Gouna International Squash Open and the PSA CIB Egyptian Squash Open—held at the Giza Pyramids—serve as prime examples, drawing global attention while highlighting Egypt's iconic landmarks. These events act as powerful nation-branding tools, with significant potential to boost tourism growth. Additionally, Formula 1 races in Bahrain, Jeddah and Abu Dhabi generate substantial direct and indirect economic benefits, including increased spending on hospitality, retail, and transportation. These initiatives underscore the growing role of sports in driving sustainable, inclusive economic growth across the region.



QATAR'S FIFA WORLD CUP 2022 ECONOMIC SUCCESS STORY

Qatar's hosting of the **2022 FIFA World Cup** marked a defining milestone in its economic diversification strategy, delivering profound impacts across tourism, infrastructure, and employment. The event attracted over **1.4 million international visitors**, including **1.18 million** during November and December alone, a **300%** year-over-year increase for those months. This surge in tourism generated approximately **\$17 billion** in revenue and contributed to a 1% boost in the country's GDP. The hospitality industry experienced a **64%** year-over-year increase in accommodation and food service activity during the **fourth quarter of 2022**. To support the event, Qatar invested more than **\$220 billion** in infrastructure, including the construction of seven stadiums, expansion of Hamad International Airport, and major upgrades to the metro and transportation networks. These developments not only enabled the smooth hosting of the World Cup but also created **over 1.5 million jobs** across various sectors, leaving behind a transformative legacy. Qatar's strategic sports investments have elevated its international profile, firmly establishing the country as a premier destination for mega-events and reinforcing its long-term economic resilience.

BEYOND THE FIELD

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POWER OF SPORTS IN EGYPT, UAE AND SAUDI ARABIA

The sports industry in Egypt, UAE and Saudi Arabia has become a significant economic catalyst, contributing to GDP expansion, job creation, and foreign direct investment (FDI). These nations have invested heavily in sports infrastructure, aiming to diversify their economies and enhance their international reputations. In Saudi Arabia, the sports industry's GDP contribution surged from \$2.4 billion in 2016 to \$6.9 billion in 2019. In Egypt, investments in sports infrastructure have exceeded billions of Egyptian pounds. These developments not only create jobs but also attract millions of tourists, stimulate ancillary industries, and promote long-term economic resilience.

The UAE has emerged as a regional leader in leveraging sports for economic diversification and tourism growth. Dubai's sports industry contributes over \$2.5 billion to its economy and supports more than 105,000 jobs. The city hosts over 300 regular annual events, attracting more than 1 million attendees each year. Abu Dhabi's Formula 1 Grand Prix is a marquee event, contributing approximately \$600 million annually to the UAE economy. These events not only boost tourism but also enhance the country's global image as a premier destination for international sporting events. The UAE's strategic investments in sports infrastructure and events have positioned it as a hub for global sports tourism. The nation's focus on hosting diverse events, from UFC fights to international cricket tournaments, underscores its commitment to economic diversification and cultural exchange through sports.



Sports play a pivotal role in promoting community well-being and social development in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, sports investments aligned with Vision 2030 focus on enhancing the quality of life and promoting social integration through initiatives like the **"Fakher" "Pride Program"**. Launched by the Ministry of Sports in collaboration with the Saudi Paralympic Committee, the Fakher Program is designed to enable people with disabilities to discover and develop their athletic capabilities through various local and international training camps and competitions. This initiative aims to rehabilitate and assist individuals with special needs, improving their quality of life and fostering inclusivity within the sports community.

Similarly, in Egypt, early engagement in sports is seen as a means to promote health and well-being among the population. A notable example is the **"You Are Stronger Than Drugs"** campaign, spearheaded by the Egyptian Anti-Addiction Treatment Fund in partnership with football star Mohamed Salah. Salah's involvement in the campaign, particularly through impactful advertisements, led to a significant increase in public engagement. Following the campaign's launch, there was a 400% increase in hotline calls from individuals seeking help to overcome addiction. This initiative underscores the power of sports icons in driving positive social change and highlights the role of sports and power of sports icons in addressing critical societal issues and driving positive social change.

3 EGYPT'S SPORTS EVOLUTION

TRANSFORMING INFRASTRUCTURE, TALENT, AND GLOBAL IMPACT

Egypt is rapidly emerging as a regional leader in the sports industry, driven by strategic investments and a clear national vision. Major infrastructure developments, such as Olympic-standard stadiums, elite training facilities, and a world-class Olympic City in the New Administrative Capital, are laying the groundwork for hosting international events and nurturing homegrown talent. At the same time, grassroots initiatives are expanding access to sports across all segments of society, particularly among youth and underserved areas. These efforts are expected to not only boost Egypt's economy but also foster social cohesion and elevate its global presence in the world of sports. By combining national policy reforms with public-private partnerships and high-profile events like the Sports Expo 2025, Egypt is building a more inclusive, competitive, and future-ready sports ecosystem. These initiatives are designed to enhance Egypt's international standing, stimulate economic growth, and empower the next generation of athletes.

Strategic Vision for Sports: Data-Driven Reforms and Future Growth

- A national policy assessment launched in the wake of Egypt's participation in Paris 2024, aimed at enhancing athletic performance and aligning investments with strategic priorities. This review will enable data-driven reforms across Egypt's sports ecosystem, optimize resource allocation, and improve the country's medal prospects and international rankings.

The Rise of Olympic City: Egypt's Vision for a Global Sports Hub

- Egypt is developing a state-of-the-art Olympic City as part of its New Administrative Capital project. The city will host Olympic-standard stadiums, training centers, and athlete housing. Positioned as a future hub for regional and international tournaments, it represents Egypt's strategic ambition to become a key player in global sports hosting and development.

Revamping Sports Access: Empowering Communities and Youth

- The Egyptian government has invested heavily in upgrading community sports clubs and youth centers across the country. These renovations aim to make sports more accessible to all segments of society, particularly in underserved areas. By providing safe, modern, and well-equipped facilities, Egypt is empowering youth and encouraging widespread grassroots participation.

Collaboration for Excellence: Public-Private Partnerships in Sports Development

- Recognizing the power of collaboration, Egypt is increasingly turning to public-private partnerships to drive sports talent development. Initiatives with private sports academies and clubs — like Wadi Degla, Pyramids, and ZED — are creating pathways for young athletes to receive world-class coaching and facilities, helping Egypt maintain its competitive edge in sports such as squash, football, and swimming.

Sports Expo 2025: Showcasing Egypt's Sports Vision and Investment Opportunities

- An annual exhibition event to highlight Egypt's sports strategy, innovations, and investment opportunities. Opened by the Prime Minister in 2025, this initiative hopes to attract regional and global stakeholders, encourage public-private partnerships, and boost public awareness of the sports economy's potential.



EGYPT'S SQUASH LEGACY

A Century of Dominance and Global Impact

Egypt's rise as a global squash powerhouse is rooted in a rich history that dates back to the early 20th century. The sport was introduced to Egypt in the 1930s by British soldiers, who built the first squash courts in Cairo and Alexandria during the colonial era. It quickly gained popularity among the Egyptian elite, and by the 1930s, diplomat F.D. Amr Bey emerged as Egypt's first international squash star after becoming the first non-English winner of the British Open, winning six consecutive titles from 1933 to 1938 before retiring undefeated. His domi-

In the following decades, Egypt continued to produce world-class players such as Mahmoud Karim, who won four British Open titles in the 1940s, and Abdel-Fattah Abou-Taleb, who dominated international squash in the 1960s. The sport's popularity grew steadily through the 20th century, with local tournaments and youth programs nurturing talent. By the late 1990s, players like Ahmed Barada and Amr Shabana began to redefine Egypt's presence on the global stage. Barada's victory at the World Junior Championships in 1998 and Shabana's World Open win in 2003 marked a turning point, leading to Egypt's modern era of squash dominance.



Today, Egypt is synonymous with squash excellence. **The men's national team has claimed seven World Team Championship titles, most recently in 2024**, while the **women's team has secured six titles with an unbroken streak from 2020 to 2024**. Individually, stars like **Nour El Sherbini (seven-time PSA World Champion)**, **Ali Farag (four-time PSA World Champion)**, and previously legends such as **Ramy Ashour** have kept Egypt dominating global rankings. Major tournaments like the **PSA CIB Egyptian Squash Open** and **El Gouna International Squash Open** further solidify Egypt's role as a hub for international squash, contributing significantly to sports tourism and inspiring young athletes nationwide.

MILESTONES IN EGYPT'S SQUASH JOURNEY A TIMELINE OF TRIUMPH

1930s

Squash was introduced in Egypt by British soldiers, building the first courts in Cairo.

1933

Egypt held its first National Squash Championship.

1933

Abdelfattah Amr, also known as F.D. Amr Bey, was an Egyptian diplomat who became the first non-English winner of the British Open in squash. He went on to dominate the tournament until his retirement in 1938.

1940s-1950s

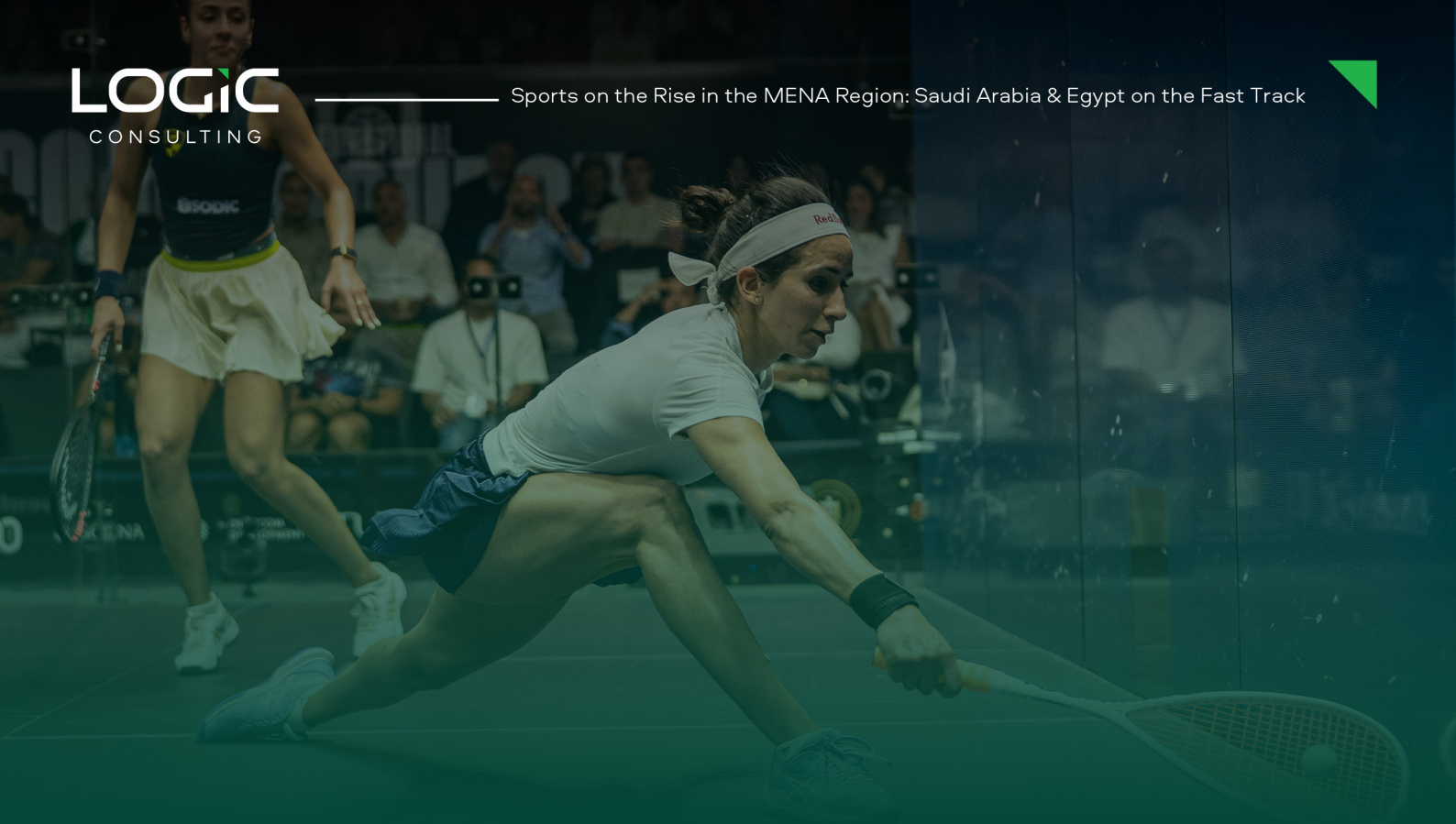
Mahmoud El Karim continued Egypt's success by winning four British Open titles.

1960s

Abdel-Fattah Abou-Taleb and Mahmoud Karim dominated international squash, inspiring a new generation of players.

1990s

Ahmed Barada became a junior world champion and reached World No. 2, reigniting interest in squash across Egypt.



1996

The iconic Al Ahram tournament – later known as PSA CIB Squash Open - was launched at the Pyramids of Giza, showcasing Egyptian talent on a global stage and elevating the sport's profile.

2003

Amr Shabana became the first Egyptian to win the PSA Men's World Championship, starting a streak of dominance.

2024

Egypt became the first nation to win both the men's and women's World Team Championships in the same year.

2025

Egyptian players continue to dominate the global squash scene, maintaining a strong presence across both the men's and women's PSA World Rankings.

2025

In the men's PSA World Rankings, Mostafa Asal holds the No. 1 position, followed closely by Ali Farag at No. 2. Overall, five Egyptian men are ranked within the top 10.

2025

In the women's PSA World Rankings, Nouran Gohar, Nour El Sherbini, and Hania El Hamamy occupy the top three spots. A total of six Egyptian women are currently ranked in the world's top 10.

4 THE RISE OF SPORTS INDUSTRY IN KSA

KEY MILESTONES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Saudi Arabia's sports Industry has surged in recent years, powered by Vision 2030's ambitious objectives to diversify the economy and elevate the nation's global stature. This transformative growth has been punctuated by a series of high-profile events and initiatives that showcase the Kingdom's increasing prominence as a global sports hub.

Future-Ready: Upcoming Sports Events Shaping Saudi Arabia's Global Role

2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hosting the Olympic Esports Games, a groundbreaking milestone in the Kingdom's esports journey. Riyadh welcomes the 19th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, marking Saudi Arabia's capabilities in hosting major international sporting events.
2027	Saudi Arabia will host the AFC Asian Cup, one of Asia's premier football tournaments.
2029	The Asian Winter Games will be held at Trojena, a futuristic mountain resort in NEOM, showcasing cutting-edge winter sports facilities.
2034	A historic moment—Saudi Arabia will host the FIFA World Cup, making history as a regional sporting hub.

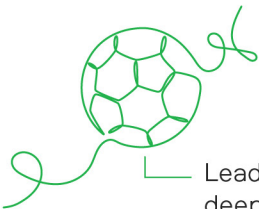
SIGNATURE ANNUAL EVENTS

A YEARLY SHOWCASE OF SPORTS EXCELLENCE

 <p>Formula 1</p> <p>Formula 1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix</p> <p>Since 2021, the Jeddah Corniche Circuit has hosted the event, attracting global attention.</p>	 <p>Saudi Cup</p> <p>The world's richest horse race, featuring a \$20 million purse, and held annually at the King Abdulaziz Racecourse in Riyadh.</p>	 <p>Dakar Rally</p> <p>One of the most iconic and grueling off-road endurance races in the world, and has been hosted in Saudi Arabia since 2020.</p>	 <p>Tennis Stars at Riyadh</p> <p>Riyadh is rapidly positioning itself on the global tennis map, hosting the WTA Finals from 2024 to 2026 and engaging top stars like Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.</p>
--	--	--	--

I. PLAY ON: HOW SAUDI ARABIA IS REDEFINING SPORTS

Saudi Arabia has rapidly developed into a sporting powerhouse, with football taking center stage. From professional leagues to community sports, participation has flourished, particularly with rising interest in equestrian sports, Formula 1, and tennis.



FOOTBALL

Leads as the dominant sport, deeply embedded in the Kingdom's culture.



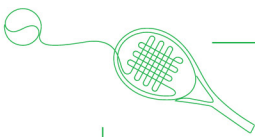
EQUESTRIAN SPORTS

Remain a key part of Saudi heritage, with major events like the Saudi Cup elevating its global status.



FORMULA 1

Has quickly become a major annual attraction since its introduction in 2021.



TENNIS

Saw global stars like Carlos Alcaraz and Novak Djokovic at the Riyadh Season Tennis Cup in 2024.

CULTURAL SHIFTS: RISING FEMALE PARTICIPATION AND GRASSROOTS GROWTH

Participation trends indicate a significant shift towards more inclusivity and physical activity. Female participation has jumped from 16% in 2018 to over 40% in 2022, driven by initiatives like the Women's Community Football League and the Women's Fitness Festival. Major events like the Riyadh Marathon have seen participation numbers double, with 20,000 runners in 2024.

STRATEGIC GROWTH: KEY INITIATIVES SUPPORTING SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

Saudi Arabia's strategic vision for sports development is driven by bold initiatives that promote inclusivity, grassroots participation, and world-class sports excellence.

Saudi Games

▶ The Kingdom's largest national sporting event, designed to uncover and nurture local talent.

Quality of Life Program

▶ Aimed at increasing physical activity rates from 13% to 40% by 2030.

Sports Boulevard Project

▶ A 135-km urban development initiative to integrate fitness with daily life in Riyadh.

Mahd Sports Academy

▶ Focused on scouting and developing young athletes, with professional training and pathways to the global stage.

Women's Community Football League & Women's Fitness Festival

▶ Empowering women through football and fitness, in line with Vision 2030's gender inclusivity goals.

2034 FIFA WORLD CUP A Landmark Moment for Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's successful bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup is a defining moment in its Vision 2030 goals. This global sporting event will cement the Kingdom's place as a key player in the world of international sports, offering unprecedented economic, cultural, and social benefits.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The FIFA World Cup will spur billions of dollars in GDP growth through tourism, infrastructure development, and foreign investments. The event will create long-lasting economic benefits, from new high-speed rail networks to expanded airports and hospitality facilities.

INFRASTRUCTURE ADVANCEMENTS

The World Cup will feature 15 cutting-edge stadiums, with many powered by renewable energy. Infrastructure projects, including new transport networks, will also support the event and offer long-term improvements for the Kingdom.

LEGACY AND GLOBAL INVESTMENT

The 2034 FIFA World Cup is expected to leave a lasting legacy, positioning Saudi Arabia as a hub for sports, entertainment, and global investment. The Kingdom's mega-projects, such as NEOM and the Red Sea Project, will benefit from increased international exposure, contributing to its diversified economy.

The evolution of the sports ecosystem in Saudi Arabia and Egypt marks a significant shift in how the region leverages sports as a strategic tool for national development. Driven by ambitious government visions, particularly Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, both countries are channeling substantial investments into infrastructure, global event hosting, talent development, and inclusive participation. This transformation is not only redefining their positions on the global sports map but also generating tangible socioeconomic benefits—from job creation and tourism growth to improved public health and increased youth and female engagement.



In Saudi Arabia, over \$65 billion has been invested in developing federations, clubs, and major international events, while Egypt is building on its rich sports heritage through youth academies, digital innovation, and international partnerships. Both nations are expanding access to sports, professionalizing pathways for athletes, and boosting their global visibility through partnerships with iconic sports figures.

Crucially, this momentum goes beyond sports—it's about economic diversification, urban development, and community empowerment. The rise of sportswear markets, modest and tech-integrated apparel, and growing private sector involvement further demonstrate the ecosystem's depth. As sports become intertwined with tourism, education, health, and culture, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are emerging not just as regional leaders, but as global contenders shaping the future of sport and society.

Cairo Office

+20 127 350 5023
SODIC West, Block 1, Zone 4B

Riyadh Office

+966 53 662 0650
3888 Anas Ibn Malik, Al Malqa

Jeddah Office

+966 53 661 8642
1004 Jameel Square Building. Tahlia St.

Dubai Office

+971 52 499 2567
Business Bay, Parklane Tower, Office 1102

Bahrain Office

Park Place Building. Seef Area
office 9001/ 9th Floor- Bahrain

Meet the Contributors

Nihal Ghannam

Partner at LOGIC Consulting

The article was edited by

Mohamed Salama, Consultant at
LOGIC Consulting and **Omar**
Elhalawany, Business Analyst at
LOGIC Consulting