



Solutions in the sand

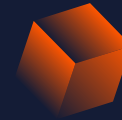
The key to seamless internet access in MENA

GNX

Country Guide | 2024

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Connectivity in the Middle East and North Africa
mirrors its physical landscape:

defined by extremes

Just as the modern megacities of the Gulf are separated by vast areas of low population, fiber infrastructure is unevenly spread. **And like water in the desert, bandwidth can be a precious and pricey resource,** with different countries favoring some technologies over others. Even the region's shape isn't fixed, with the World Bank, IMF, and international organizations drawing its borders differently¹; IP availability is just as hard to pin down, with dynamic IPs far easier to obtain than static.

But it's a region of huge importance to the global economy – which means you deserve every advantage when doing business there. Whether you need competitive pricing where no discounts seem possible, permissions and paperwork to move faster, or guarantees and diversity where options look limited, GNX is ready to provide the connectivity you need – in every country across MENA.



Introduction

MENA: places, people, and connectivity

Broadly, MENA spans around 20 countries, with different definitions including as few as 18 and as many as 24. Countries are excluded or included based on politics, geography, and culture: some put Sudan on the list, others exclude Israel, some go as far east as Pakistan. Because of these differences, its population numbers vary from 350m to 650m depending on source, with “narrow” criteria limiting it to Arabic-speaking nations and “expanded” criteria coloring a band from Morocco to Iran.

But whichever definition you prefer, MENA is an economic giant, with a GDP of up to US\$3.5tn – on par with the UK, France, and India. Over half of that is down to just six countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. An area known as the Gulf Co-operation Council, tied together by oil, with a population of less than 60m.

The GCC nations are pro-technology, with e-government expanding and smart cities like NEOM's The Line under construction. But while broadband access is near-universal, outside cities, it's mostly 4G/5G and fixed wireless; fiber infrastructure is hard in the desert. The region is a hub for submarine cables connecting to Asia and Europe, and data centers are a growth sector – but accessing both is subject to regulatory hurdles. Across wired and wireless, you'll often see local monopolies with prices to match. And, of course, the GCC is more than its cities: its horizons may seem endless and empty, but in reality, are home to thousands of smaller communities connected by culture and trade, with connectivity profiles of their own.



MENA has highs and lows of economic activity, living standards, and business potential. The GCC countries highlight all these challenges – and are where most global enterprises choose to locate their assets. So, this paper will lead with the Gulf, with notes on countries across the region. Let's go!

Listing the issues

The MENA region is characterized by strong government control over society, which may impact global enterprises looking to grow their presence. Below are some of the key challenges when it comes to connectivity.



Challenge 1:

A hard-edged political landscape

As with any world region, MENA's politics reflect its economic and security concerns. The Morocco-to-Pakistan area of the globe contains few democracies and many absolutist states, with control over information networks common.

This doesn't mean connectivity is unavailable – in places like Dubai, it can be excellent – but it almost always means dealing with government organizations rather than free market providers. So, companies used to the mix of options in

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One key issue is the lack of availability of static IPs. Many IT solutions employed by global enterprises and Fortune 500 companies rely on static IPs for global WANs, SASE/SDWAN solutions, hosting websites, and cloud services – but these are an expensive additional service in many Gulf nations, or not available for broadband services, only DIA, in some countries. While across the region, regulations often limit connections to specific areas, even specific buildings. Dubai's International Financial Center, for example, operates as a special economic zone with its own legal

system – so international financial firms have few options for their address. Outside the GCC urban centers, bandwidth itself is more of an issue. While 5G is becoming widespread – Kuwait and Bahrain score high² – far larger nations like Iran and Egypt also offer at least 4G in hundreds of cities, with 95% of citizens enjoying mobile access. But few enterprises want to connect their locations solely over the air. LEO internet-based solutions such as Starlink might appear to be great solutions for the region, but regulations block the use in many different GCC countries.

While all these problems have answers – see GNX's ideas, next – it's important to note that whatever that answer is, it means operating within the laws and policies of the MENA country you are in. And those laws aren't the same regionwide. There are no shortcuts. But there are creative solutions.



Challenge 2: The cost equation



– severe sticker shock

Local institutions and the lack of competition play a role in pricing and its impact on the selection of services. In the most in-demand MENA centers – like Dubai's DIFC district – companies often settle for less bandwidth than they'd use elsewhere, simply because the costs are too high. It's rare to see a 1Gb connection in use at a single location, even if there's plenty of capacity.

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This problem is most obvious in the Gulf states, where most international businesses tend to cluster. Connectivity costs, often a smaller line item in other parts of the world, can be a major investment here. But this is not exclusive to the Gulf, in countries like Morocco or Egypt, you'll also find connectivity to be more expensive than average.



A side issue is price information. Many companies will take the first price offered, on the basis there are so few alternatives. In fact, contracts are almost always negotiable, and existing relationships help – but few newcomers to the region realize this.

Again, there are ways forward, and GNX knows them. But in general, if all you ask for is plain-vanilla business broadband in the Gulf and beyond, expect to pay more than you do in the West for less bandwidth. Sometimes far more.



Challenge 3: Laying cables in the harshest of soil

As one might expect, fiber itself isn't the easiest infrastructure to build in the MENA region. Very often, the economic choice for fiber rollout is alongside existing communications (think roads and pipelines). Look at a road map of the region, and you'll see how limited those choices are.

It's not just a problem for remote areas, though. Even in business districts, laying new cabling is fraught with technical and permissions issues. A site can be overseen by multiple government departments with long lists of requirements. And even where fiber is available, technologies like Wavelength may not be, meaning your bandwidth may still be shared with others. Some cities (like Cairo) make use of 5G networks to ease this, but SLAs are a lot harder to maintain.

All this adds up to vastly different service levels across the region for a given price. Don't expect to pay the same price for 100Mbps everywhere you go ... even in two neighboring cities.



Challenge 4: Failover fails? Barriers to diversity

All enterprises want options for business continuity if things go wrong. Sometimes it's mission-critical real-time business information where a minute's downtime isn't viable; at other times it's everyday backup and archiving. In other regions, that means agreements with more than one provider, or using multiple technologies for connectivity.

But across much of MENA – and particularly the Gulf – fiber is owned and controlled by government. Meaning that even if you take out contracts with several ISPs, your data is still traveling on the same infrastructure. So what looks like best-practice diversity on the surface may be colocated and contended beneath.

What matters here is practicality: knowing the limitations and what can be done within them. There are ways to mitigate these diversity risks, and GNX can make them work for you.

[These are the issues. Let's look next at how GNX solves them.](#)



The GNX solution

Connecting enterprises in MENA

While large and diverse, the Middle East and North Africa area is just one global region among many – and we're ready to help you build your business wherever you go.

Creative thinking that solves your problems

Network architecture matters. The right ideas can get you connected at a more competitive cost. Even with a shortage of competition and often only a single provider to work with, there's always a way. And if there's a way, our engineers have probably done it before.

*Could specifying different paths for data on the same fiber network offer you diversity of sourcing that complies with your IT goals with little compromise? Or could a private Point-to-Point solution between two remote sites – by fiber, cellular, or satellite – provide guaranteed bandwidth and great SLAs without affecting your primary broadband? **Let us show you.***

Regional relationships that smooth your rollouts

Operating in 24 countries can mean 24 contracts. Or more if you add diversity in the mix. Each with its own SLA, its own capacity and bandwidth limits. And every new contract creates business friction, slowing your workflow and sapping your people's energy. What if you could make this process simpler for MENA – and for the entire world?

With GNX, you can. thanks to **working relationships with over 1,500 Internet Service Providers** and our **global NOC offering 24/7 support**. By working with GNX, all that paperwork is handled by us, not you. And we're 100% carrier-neutral and solution-agnostic: we don't play favorites or push one technology over another. It's about giving you what you need.



Local knowledge that unlocks hidden advantages

The ideal solution isn't obvious on the surface. Which is why we take advantage of our local expertise and market insight to find the solutions that make most sense. One size does not fit all. So we create ours district by district, city by city, and across borders, using what works best for each situation and use case.

Imagine local knowledge that can find 30% savings on a “fixed” price.

Economies of scale that give you more buying power across borders. And SLAs that give you preference on contended infrastructure. All available when you see both the Big Picture and the detail within it, ready to be optimized at every node.

Case in point

Fast and reliable networks for financial and trading

As one of the world's business capitals, Dubai is home for many international banks, financial, and trading institutions – an industry dealing with hundreds of digital transactions between Dubai's financial center and the rest of the world.

To them, GNX offers latency- and cost-optimized private connectivity from the UAE to any financial hub globally. A solution that's been adapted successfully to several customers in the region, leveraging our partnership with Equinix.

Business benefits:



Best-in-class local, regional, and international peering



Ultra-low-latency services to run business operations smoothly



Cost-effective and high-bandwidth solution



Local expertise and tailored advice

The connected way



Global internet access

Our core offer is internet connectivity. Working with over 1,500 ISPs, MSPs, and telcos worldwide – wired and wireless – GNX brings you business broadband, Dedicated Internet Access, and mobile internet in 190+ countries, all under a single contract. Turning complexity into simplicity.



Point-to-point

Wherever you go, network coverage has gaps – and Point-to-Point is how you join them up. From private fiber in the ground to microwave connections in the air, a dedicated link between two sites often offers great bandwidth and the best possible SLA at a competitive cost. That's why we do it at GNX.



Cloud fabric

It's not just how you connect; it's what you connect. Services like SD-WAN and cloud applications keep your business data secure and smooth – completing your connectivity landscape. Private to public to hybrid, GNX can help put the Big Picture together.

GNX+

How GNX brings it together



The cherry on top is GNX+, our automated and carrier-neutral platform that lets you compare different connectivity services from thousands of providers. Much like browsing different travel deals when planning a trip, we'll show you all the options and information available – technologies, speeds, prices, and more.

And at all times, GNX+ gives you a clear view of your entire network setup, with management, monitoring, and support functions at your fingertips, making the complex world of connectivity as it should be: straightforward and simple.



Get in touch

Based in Amsterdam, GNX is a carrier-neutral, solution-agnostic connectivity provider with established relationships with over 1,500 ISPs worldwide. We offer creative solutions to business broadband in all the world's regions, making use of both global perspective and local expertise. Make this the year you join our growing roster of over 200 enterprise customers.

Learn more about us at gnx.net or contact us at contact@gnx.net

GNX. Straightforward Connectivity.

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The GNX logo is displayed in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. The letters are thick and blocky, with a slight shadow effect. The 'G' and 'N' are connected, and the 'X' is composed of two thick strokes.