

Building partnerships to mainstream entrepreneurship

27 - 28 October 2021 | Virtual event

More information and registration at <https://www.itu.int/go/GIF2021>

Context

This Regional Innovation Forum for the Arab States is organized within the framework of the 2021 ITU Global Innovation Forum. Its main aim is to build partnerships that mainstream entrepreneurship-driven innovation and competitive digital ecosystems.

Recovering from — as well as preventing — crises and bridging the digital divide require new partnerships and approaches to close the digital innovation gap. Countries can use this opportunity to transform their communities into thriving and competitive digital economies through accelerating entrepreneurship-driven innovation and focusing on job creation.

The Regional Innovation Forum for the Arab States will empower participants with new approaches, insights, tools, frameworks, communities and relevant case studies to understand how to mainstream sustainable ecosystems that accelerate digital transformation in the Arab States region. The forum's programme builds on ITU's [Regional Initiative 5: Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#), which was adopted by the [World Telecommunication Development Conference 2017 \(WTDC-17\)](#) in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Objective

This two-day forum aims to build regional and national capacities by identifying, learning, networking and highlighting successful projects and/or initiatives, policies and programmes in developing competitive digital innovation ecosystems.

Each day will have a specific focus:

- Day 1: the forum will examine the state of regional countries' readiness and show practical cases of how key economic sectors can benefit by nurturing digital innovation.
- Day 2: the forum will continue its regional deep dive by sharing good practices, stories of digital change-makers and offering insights for new partnership actions at the regional level.

Participant will learn the “why”, “what” and “how” of building new partnerships and initiatives that ensure that communities have the right innovation capabilities to be resilient and competitive with digital technologies.

Who should attend?

This forum targets all stakeholders involved in nurturing digital innovation in the Arab States region. Particularly, this agenda has been customized for the needs of the ICT policy-makers, regulators, tech incubators, national innovation agencies, development agencies, entrepreneurs, ecosystem builders, media, academia as well as institutions willing to undertake a national review on ICT-centric innovation ecosystems and develop sustainable initiatives to accelerate digital transformation in countries.

Expected results

This forum is designed to empower participants from the Arab Sates region with methodologies, frameworks, tools and context-relevant case studies to accelerate digital transformation by promoting competitive digital ecosystems and entrepreneurship-driven innovation. Furthermore, participants will also



be able to identify and pitch sustainable projects or initiatives relevant to ecosystem and entrepreneurship development.

Organizer

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs). ITU is committed to connecting all the world's people – wherever they live and whatever their means. Through its work, ITU protects and supports everyone's fundamental right to communicate. The Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D), one of three pillars of ITU, fosters international cooperation and solidarity by delivering technical assistance and helping to create, develop and improve telecommunication and ICT equipment and networks in developing countries.

Partners

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology of Oman (MTCIT)
King Abdulaziz City of Science and Technology (KACST)
Arab Innovation and Entrepreneurship Network (AIEN)

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Draft agenda

| Wednesday, 27 October 2021 | |
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| 10:00 – 10:10 GMT+2 | <p>Welcome remarks Mr Adel Darwish, Regional Director, ITU Regional Office for Arab States</p> |
| 10:10 – 11:00 GMT+2 | <p>Tech entrepreneurship and key sector development in the Arab regional context <i>Session type: Ministerial session</i></p> <p>Overview The intertwined roles of entrepreneurship, innovation and technology are fuelling a paradigm that calls for new thinking and insights. ICT-centric innovation ecosystems have a critical role to play in fostering digital transformation, leading to economic inclusion, positive externalities and sustainable growth for communities, cities and countries. This ecosystem of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial support organizations, academics, public- and private-sector stakeholders, and financiers are some of the ingredients necessary to fuel a positive digital transformation. Some countries in the Arab States region are able to provide a fertile breeding ground for innovative ideas, whereas in others, many brilliant ideas are not realized due to the lack of an enabling environment.</p> <p>This session will bring together high-level speakers to provide insights about key sector development with technology through tech entrepreneurship. Panellists will discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How is tech entrepreneurship fuelling competitiveness (or the lack thereof) for key sectors with potential in the Arab States region? ● What are the challenges and opportunities for the digital ecosystem in the region? ● What new mechanisms or initiatives are needed to accelerate sectoral transformation using a whole-ecosystem approach? |

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| <p>11:00 – 12:00 GMT+2</p> | <p>Mechanisms for partnership to mainstream entrepreneurship</p> <p><i>Session type: Blueprint sharing</i></p> <p>Overview</p> <p>Vibrant ecosystems require a culture in which stakeholders organically leverage existing resources and continuously update their policies and programmes to remain competitive. Building an innovation culture at the country level is a journey. Entrepreneurs who find ideas worth exploring undertake this journey to turn these opportunities into businesses and deliver products and services to the market. A successful journey results in entrepreneurs delivering problem-solving innovations to their communities and regional or global markets. Nevertheless, this success depends on many enabling building blocks — talent, infrastructure, capital, market, culture, policies and an overarching vision and strategy alignment — that provide the key ingredients of robust and vibrant digital innovation ecosystems.</p> <p>This session will explore in-depth the needs of an entrepreneur in their journey to contribute to economic development. If the enabling environment for entrepreneurs is not ready, they will falter in the valley of death. Panellists will address the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are the mechanisms for fuelling partnership in the ecosystem to mainstream entrepreneurship? ● What lessons can be learned from these partnerships? ● What recommendations can be made for the region? <p>Video: <i>What does the “valley of death” teach entrepreneurs?</i></p> |
| <p>12:00 – 13:00 GMT+2</p> | <p>Development of the Arab States’ regional entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem</p> <p><i>Session type: Panel</i></p> <p>Overview</p> <p>Entrepreneurs are driving a revolution that is transforming and renewing economies worldwide. They raise capital, create jobs and add value to further economic growth. As the number of SMEs and start-ups grows annually in the Arab States region, so does the number of the supporting incubators and accelerators to create a better environment for their growth.</p> <p>The Arab Innovation and Entrepreneurship Network (AIEN) is an ITU-affiliated NGO that develops and shares expertise between business incubator managers and stakeholders in the Arab States region; unifying ecosystem efforts in science and technology and applying localized good practices. AIEN provides a platform for knowledge sharing, co-creation and engagement; supports business incubation and acceleration; smart networking; internationalization of SMEs; and innovation for sustainable growth and new opportunities for entrepreneurs.</p> <p>The session will take the audience through the renewed strategy, mission and goals of AIEN and its contributions to ecosystem development. The session will further share the experiences of AIEN members. Panellists will discuss the following questions:</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What challenges and opportunities do incubators and accelerators in the Arab States region face?• How can we better support and develop digital change-makers focused on digital entrepreneurship in the region?• How can AIEN assist members and member countries on their path toward innovation and entrepreneurship leading to digital transformation? |
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| Thursday, 28 October 2021 | |
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| <p>10:00 – 11:00 GMT+2</p> | <p>Regional good practices and collaboration insight for mainstreaming digital innovation ecosystems</p> <p><i>Session type: Panel and report launch</i></p> <p>Overview</p> <p>The Arab States region has many good practices that can be used to accelerate digital transformation and serve as a basis for better policies in countries where gaps persist. By replicating and amplifying good practices in the region, countries can strengthen their digital innovation ecosystems and follow in the footsteps of the global leaders.</p> <p>During this session, ITU will launch its report, <i>Regional Good Practices: Accelerating innovation, entrepreneurship and digital transformation in the Arab States region</i>. The session will then build on insights from the report; engaging high-level, public- and private-sector stakeholders in discussion of their practices in guiding innovation dynamics, building innovation capacity and integrating ICT innovation into national development agendas. Experts and good practice holders will discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the regional and national performance of the engines of economic growth in the Arab States region? ● What are the key challenges regarding the enablers for digital transformation in the region? ● What are lessons from good practices that can be amplified or twinned with other countries? |
| <p>11:00 – 12:00 GMT+2</p> | <p>Fundamentals on building competitive and innovative ICT-centric ecosystems</p> <p><i>Session type: Interactive panel</i></p> <p>Overview</p> <p>This session will set the stage for renewed focus on capacity development to nurture entrepreneurship-driven innovation in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic. Competitive digital ecosystems are complex; requiring new thinking, new approaches and new stakeholders who can develop the skills and expertise to take action and prepare their communities for potential crises.</p> <p>This session will explore the need for new approaches and partnerships to prepare fertile ground for the talent and ecosystem stakeholders in the Arab States region. The session will end with a call to action to build new partnerships with academia in ecosystem building for the region.</p> <p>The discussion will draw on experiences from students of the ITU Academy courses Innovation Ecosystem 101: Fundamentals on building competitive and innovative ICT-centric ecosystems and Digital Innovation Ecosystem Training (DIET), answering the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the importance of new approaches to capacity building in ecosystem development? Why? ● What tools, new approaches and partnerships are needed to embrace the new paradigm in capacity development? ● How can we accelerate capacity building in ecosystem development in the Arab States region? |

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| <p>12:00 – 13:00 GMT+2</p> | <p>An innovation journey: stories from the frontlines</p> <p><i>Session type: Panel</i></p> <p>Overview Entrepreneurs and innovators are the heart of the digital innovation ecosystem. The economic and cultural diversity in the Arab States region means that many innovators face different challenges; and have access to different levels of support and resources. During this session, winners of the ITU Innovation Challenges and the AI for Development Challenge from the region will share their stories. The panellists will discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● What does it feel like being an innovator in your ecosystem?● What is missing to help innovators achieve their potential?● What problems are innovators in your ecosystem trying to solve? |
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