

Session title: WS 165: Fostering Digital Capacities for Decent Life in the MENA region

Date: Thursday, 8 December

Time: 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Workshop Organizer: Nadira Al-Araj & Hafedh Yahmadi

Chairperson/Moderator: Walid Al-Saqaf (trustee, Internet Society)

Rapporteur/Note Taker: Michael Oghia

List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:

Nibal Idlebi (chief of Innovation, UNESCWA)

Hisham Aboulyazed (senior manager, National Telecom Regulatory Authority of Egypt)

Hafedh Yahmadi (independent ICT strategist and engineer)

Noha Fathy (Internet Legislation Atlas project manager, iGmena)

Mohit Saraswat (founding Member, ISOC - United Arab Emirates)

Nadira Al-Araj (vice chair, ISOC Palestine)

Cherkaoui Leghris (professor, Hassan II University)

Key Issues raised (1 sentence per issue):

1. Capacity building in the education and vocational sectors of the Middle East and North Africa
 - a. An underutilized strength of the region is its young population with a common culture and language. Yet, the region also faces the challenge of connecting schools to the Internet and developing quality online content. Moreover, educational reform and the respect for intellectual property are two of the most important issues in the region.
2. Global and regional partnerships for development of the Internet economy in the MENA region
 - a. A significant challenge in the region is the weak efficiency of the ICT sector, as well as limited research, development, and innovation.
3. Internet governance and implementation issues in the MENA region
 - a. A challenge to the Internet ecosystem in the region regards it still being underdeveloped in terms of stakeholder involvement and engagement – making multistakeholder effective interaction more challenging.

If there are Presentations during the workshop session, please provide a 1-paragraph summary for each Presentation

No presentations were shared

Please describe the Discussions that took place during the workshop session: (3 paragraphs)

Some participants discussed the development of the ICT sector. Some of the discussion specifically highlighted the positive role of technology zones and business incubators in the region, as well as Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are investing abroad in ICT, especially infrastructure and services. Others discussed the development of the Internet ecosystem in the MENA region, which features a strong movement of Internet-based entrepreneurship across the region led by young entrepreneurs. A challenge to the Internet ecosystem in the region, however, regards it still being underdeveloped in terms of stakeholder involvement and engagement – making multistakeholder effective interaction more challenging. He also stressed that academia in the region is not very organised in terms of academic networks.

Other speakers discussed capacity building as well as ICT infrastructure in the region, and highlighted multiple opportunities for the region, including increased investment in infrastructure both from the government and from private entities. Yet, it was also stressed that there are not enough Internet exchange points (IXPs). Moreover, the impact that ICT Infrastructure has on the MENA region, including that the region is willing to roll out ICT infrastructure, was discussed. Yet, the speakers also added that it is difficult to measure the impact of this infrastructure on sustainable development.

The role of women in the regional economy and vis-à-vis ICTs was also discussed. One speaker said that women in the MENA region are unexploited human capital; however, it is difficult to bring MENA women into the labour force.

Please describe any Participant suggestions regarding the way forward/ potential next steps /key takeaways: (3 paragraphs)

The session concluded with various recommendations offered by the panellists, including:

- Developing the ICT sector as a key tool for moving towards a knowledge-based society
- Creating policies for educational reforms and the respect for Intellectual property
- Expanding institutional capacity building
- Improving capacity building within government and the private sector
- Deregulating regional telecom services in the region
- Gender balance in the economy and greater economic inclusion of women
- Developing local Internet content and fostering its usage

DiploFoundation report: <http://digitalwatch.giplatform.org/sessions/fostering-digital-capacities-decent-life-mena-region-ws165>