Arab Forum on Digital Cooperation & Development (AFDCD 2021)

3rd Arab High-Level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda (Arab WSIS - 3)

- 9th Meeting of the Arab e-Government Directors (Arab e-Gov - 9)
- Intersessional meeting of the UN Group on Information Society
- LAS – related sessions on the Arab Digital Agenda

6th Conference of the Arab Internet Governance Forum (Arab IGF - 6)

13-23 December 2021
Virtual Event

10/28/2021 10:42 AM
Preliminary Information Note

1 Background

Launched in 2020 by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), the Arab States Action Programme on “Advancing Digital Cooperation and Development” (ADCD - ASAP),

The second track of the ADCD-ASAP aims, among others, at empowering policymakers and stakeholders to bring change in policy, thinking and/or practices, through the development and convening of unified and consolidated policy advocacy and policy dialogue channels enabling those stakeholders to raise issues and exchange expertise; showcase status, progress, success stories and lessons learnt; and/or harmonize/communicate views and positions related to global and regional digital policies.

Within the framework of the ADCD-ASAP and guided by the principles governing the Global WSIS, Global IGF, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Secretary General’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation as well as the UN Secretary General report on Our Common Agenda; UN-ESCWA, in partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS), and a number of major players in the WSIS and IGF processes, including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is organizing the first edition of the Arab Forum on Digital Cooperation and Development (AFDCD 2021).

This consolidated mega-event builds on the outcomes of three consecutive Regional Consultative Meetings that UN-ESCWA organized in cooperation with LAS respectively on 11 August 2020, 3 December 2020 and 27 April 2021 as well as on consecutive related follow-up inter-organizational meetings, during which participants from the WSIS, the IGF and the technical community, shared their views and endorsed the idea of consolidating existing regional policy dialogue platforms into the envisaged AFDCD 2021.

Therefore, it was unanimously agreed to hold the sixth meeting of the Arab Internet Governance Forum (AIGF-6) in conjunction with the third Arab High-Level Forum on the World Summit on the Information

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1 https://www.itu.int/en/wsis/
2 https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/tags/about
7 الاجتماع التشاوري الثاني ل أصحاب المصلحة المتعددين حول المنهاج العربي نحو حوكمة الإنترنت والتعاون الرقمي في المنطقة العربية - نحو منصات موحدة وعدد من العمال. كانون الأول/ديسمبر 2020
9 Five meetings of the Arab IGF took place so far:
Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (AHLF-3)\textsuperscript{10}, with the aim of aligning the Arab track of the WSIS Forum with the Arab track of the Internet Governance Forum and other related tracks; to optimize the opportunities for multi-lateral collaboration, maximize mutual benefits from harnessing ICTs, digital economy and digital transformation for the achievement of inclusive sustainable development in the Arab region and build back better in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Against this background, the consolidated AFDCD 2021 is designed with more than 30 sessions encompassing several tracks, high-level segments, diverse thematic sessions, and side-events. It will bring together relevant stakeholders representing the public and private sectors, the technical community, academia, civil society, youth and international organizations.

The consolidated AFDCD 2021 will be conducted over a two-week period, from 13 - 23 December 2021, in a fully virtual format.

The AFDCD 2021 will offer an inclusive platform for all stakeholders to debate and agree on priority issues of concerns to the Arab region in the fields of digital development and digital cooperation; and will discuss the Arab Digital Future for the next decade and beyond. Such a dynamic platform will be a norm setter, and consensus builder on regional and thematic digital development issues, guided by major global and regional fora and declarations on the subject.

In addition, the AFDCD 2021 is positioned to enhance digital development and cooperation among countries of the region and to inform regional and global forums, including the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and subsequently the global High-level Political Forum on sustainable development among others, on related issues.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \texttt{2012 AIGF-I in Kuwait}
  \item \texttt{2013 AIGF-II in Algiers}
  \item \texttt{2014 AIGF-III in Beirut}
  \item \texttt{2015 AIGF-III in Beirut}
  \item \texttt{2020 AIGF-5 in Cairo}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{10} Two AHLF meetings took place so far:
\begin{itemize}
  \item Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Beirut, 8-12 May 2017, \url{https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-high-level-forum-wsis-and-2030-agenda-sustainable-development}.
\end{itemize}
2 Objectives

This foundational edition of the AFDCD 2021 adopts a progressive consolidation approach that strengthens collaboration aimed at advancing Digital Development and Digital Cooperation among member states and a myriad of stakeholders of the region.

Another objective of the event is to enable engagement, dialogue and partnership among various stakeholders and experts from the Arab region on crucial issues pertaining to digital development and digital cooperation, and to review and discuss the inter-linkages between the areas of information society, digital economy and Internet governance with the 2030 development agenda.

The event also enables building institutional capabilities of Arab states through specialized technical cooperation tracks, for advancing a safer, more equitable digital region, leading to a brighter and more prosperous future for all Arab citizens.

3 Partners, Segments and Tracks

Operating under the One-UN approach, the event will engage various UN organizations, in addition to key regional organizations and national entities. It will involve several policy dialogues and policy advocacy platforms, including:

The 3rd Arab High-Level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda (Arab WSIS - 3)  

The Arab WSIS will include several special sessions such as:

1. The 9th Meeting of the Arab e-Government Directors (Arab e-Gov - 9)
2. A special youth-oriented session on the Future of Work
3. A special session on Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities
4. A special session on Technology and Innovation for the Transport sector
5. A special session on e-Trade, e-Commerce and Digital Economy
6. Special sessions on specific Action Lines of WSIS or specific SDGs of the 2030 Agenda
7. Other partners’ and stakeholders’ sessions in line with the various topics covered by the WSIS Action Lines (topics are open for all WSIS stakeholders interested to participate).

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11 addressing a wide range of digital development and digital cooperation thematic areas, cross cutting with WSIS action lines and SDGs targets and response to several issues, including those related to internet governance; such as, among others, digital inclusion, digital economy, measurement of digital economy and information society, access to information and privacy, indicators on e-government, ethics, and partnerships for sustainable development, etc.
Global WSIS Process and Arab WSIS Process

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is a unique two-phase United Nations (UN) summit that was initiated in order to create an evolving multi-stakeholder platform aimed at addressing the issues raised by information and communication technologies (ICTs) through a structured and inclusive approach at the national, regional and international levels. The goal of WSIS is to achieve a common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information. The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005. In 2003, the number of participants was 11,000 representing 175 countries and in 2005 the number of participants was more than 19,000 representing 174 countries.

The World Summit on the Information Society Forum represents the world's largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community. The WSIS Forum, co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in close collaboration with all WSIS Action Line Facilitators/Co-Facilitators, has proven to be an efficient mechanism for coordination of multi-stakeholder implementation activities, information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices and continues to provide assistance in developing multi-stakeholder and public/private partnerships to advance development goals.

In the quest to fulfill its mandate stipulated in the global Plan of Action and in Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, ESCWA as a UN Regional Commission promotes, supports the follow-up on the WSIS process at the regional level since its inception in 2003; and in order to propel the WSIS momentum forward, ESCWA helps member states conduct national reviews; furthermore it holds periodically a conference entitled "Arab High-Level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda" to review and follow up on the implementation of the WSIS outcomes in Western Asia.

The 6th Conference of the Arab Internet Governance Forum (Arab IGF 6) 12

The Arab IGF segment will encompass a number of main plenary debate sessions, namely:

1. Global and Regional Internet Governance Ecosystems
2. Access and Inclusiveness
3. Legal, Policy and Regulatory Framework
4. Digital Economy and Digital Transformation
5. Human, Cultural and Behavioral Aspects related to Digital Platforms.

12 The Arab Multistakeholders Programme Advisory Committee (AMPAC), in close coordination with ESCWA and LAS, as the umbrella organizations for the Arab Internet Governance Forum (Arab IGF), entrusted a special taskforce to work intensively towards the elaboration of the agenda and the organization of the Arab IGF-6 track as part of the ADCD-F&C.
The Global IGF Process and the Arab IGF Process

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) serves to bring people together from various stakeholder groups as equals, in discussions on public policy issues relating to the Internet. While there is no negotiated outcome, the IGF informs and inspires those with policy-making power in both the public and private sectors. At their annual meeting delegates discuss, exchange information and share good practices with each other. The IGF facilitates a common understanding of how to maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges that arise.

Established in 2012 by ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS) who serve as the umbrella organizations, the Arab IGF process is an essential mechanism of bottom-up and multi-stakeholder policy dialogue between governments and various regional stakeholders, and contributes to reaching a common understanding and enhancing cooperation on Internet-related policy issues.

As per the mandate of the Arab IGF, efforts were made to engage and have a balanced representation of all stakeholders, and ESCWA and LAS served as a convener, host, and facilitator of its activities, and conducted the process within the partnership framework and through the financial and in-kind contributions of international, regional and national partners. During 2016 and 2017, the Arab IGF process underwent a transformation exercise led by the joint ESCWA-LAS Arab IGF 2020 initiative. The initiative brought together representatives of different stakeholder groups engaged in Internet governance (governments, business sector, civil society, and the technical and academic community) from Arab countries to conduct a comprehensive survey, convene consultations and analyze five priority areas of development of the Arab IGF process: Objectives, Structure and Mechanisms; Financing Mechanisms; Content and Outputs; and Communication, Media and Outreach. The results of the work done were used as the basis for developing a Charter for the Arab IGF and supported the development of the Second Arab Roadmap for Internet Governance.

Since its inception, the Arab IGF has held five annual meetings, Kuwait 2012 attended by over 300 participants, Algiers, 2013 attended by some 800 participants, Beirut (ESCWA) 2014 attended by over 500 participants, Beirut (Ogero) 2015 attended by 650 participants, and Egypt 2020 attended by 150 participants. The main output of these annual meetings is a set of key strategic messages to help policymakers in the Arab region take adequate decisions in the field of Internet governance.

Other related Special Tracks:

- An Arab IGF pre-event will be convened on 7 December as part of the 16th Global IGF taking place in Poland from 6 to 10 December.

- An Arab Digital Development Experts Symposium (DDES), will be hosted in the AFCD 2021, and will be dedicated to the National Digital Development Reviews (NDDRs) and the Arab Digital Development Report (ADDR), as well as to the Arab Digital Agenda (ADA) project. A space will be dedicated to policy debate on the envisaged Arab Digital Agenda/ICT Strategy (ADAICTS)
The AFCD 2021 will host a special session for The United Nations Group on Information Society (UNGIS), consisting of the relevant UN bodies and organizations with the mandate to facilitate the implementation of the WSIS outcomes. This year’s UNGIS is chaired by UNESCO, and UN ESCWA is one of the Vice-Chairs members, along with ITU, UNDP and UNCTAD.

**Community engagement:**

In line with the inclusive and participatory nature of the AFCD 2021, two open calls for submissions of session and workshop proposals are available on the event’s webpage and are open until November 6th.

**Call for Session Proposals to the Arab WSIS Community**

All Arab WSIS stakeholders who would like to share their digital development experiences or engage in the discussions around their Arab WSIS-related thematic work, or policy-aspects pertaining to digital development and/or digital cooperation as a mean to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, are encouraged to participate by submitting proposals for special sessions using the online form available [here](https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/ungis/About).

**Call for Workshop Proposals to the Arab IGF Community**

The Arab IGF Community, youth in particular, is encouraged to engage in workshops around the five thematic areas namely: Global and Regional Internet Governance Ecosystems, Access and Inclusiveness, Legal, Policy and Regulatory Framework, Digital Economy and Digital Transformation and Human, Cultural and Behavioral Aspects related to Digital Platforms. Workshop proposals can be submitted using the online form available [here](https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/ungis/About).

Based on the different inputs from the Arab WSIS and Arab IGF communities, a general outline for the event, indicating the organizational layout of plenary sessions and tracks and proposed time and break slots will be made available on the event’s webpage.

**4 Outcomes**

It is expected that this event will result in an Outcome Document, on Advancing Digital Cooperation and Development in the Arab Region, to serve as a unique and streamlined multipartite regional collaboration platform.
5 Organization

UN-ESCWA and partners is organizing the Arab Forum on Digital Cooperation & Development virtually on Zoom platform, spreading over a two-week period from 13 to 23 December 2021.

The AFDCD 2021 event is open to all stakeholders who are welcome to join and lead on dedicated sessions to highlight their own work and achievements in the ICT for Development field and to ultimately contribute to and inform the event’s main recommendations and outcome.

6 Participants and Registration

This event will bring together key stakeholders with interest in digital development and digital cooperation, including government policy & decision-making bodies, parliamentarians, representatives of the public and private sectors, civil society, technical community/practitioners, business sector, academia, non-governmental organizations, international and regional organizations involved in developing the information society for the attainment of the SDGs in the Arab region. Registration in the event is required through the event’s official website. https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-forum-digital-cooperation-and-development

7 Languages

Arabic and English are the working languages of the AFDCD 2021 event. Simultaneous translation between English and Arabic will be made available.
8 Additional Information and correspondence

A dedicated webpage will be made available on UN-ESCWA’s official website (https://www.unescwa.org/) providing updated information on the event. Further inquiries could be communicated to the persons listed in the correspondence section below.

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