

NEWSLETTER

United Nations Development Programme



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COVID-19: Accelerating the Steps towards the Knowledge Society

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a shift on the level of the society and its organizations. We are offered an opportunity to build forward better based on the lessons learned. In this framework, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF), under the umbrella of the Knowledge Project, organized an online forum from 1 until 3 September 2020.



Stemming from UNDP and MBRF common vision and continuous effort to disseminate knowledge and develop the skills of the youth of the Arab States region, the forum created a space for virtual dialogues and discussion on various knowledge issues and opportunities, aiming to accelerate the steps toward knowledge societies.

The 3-day forum brought together 21 speakers and more than 3,000 participants from the Arab region and beyond, including policymakers, scholars, UN agencies and private sector representatives, youth, and students. It tackled three main topics: 1. COVID-19 and the digital transformation accelerator, which touched on the digital landscape and divide in the Arab region, and the role of politics and economy in accelerating digital transformation; 2. building an equitable and inclusive shared future, with the speakers discussing a comprehensive sustainable global strategy, the opportunities we can benefit from through financial inclusion, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lessons learnt for a decade of action; 3. the linkages between knowledge creation, economic growth and the well-being of a society, discussing how mental health is an important contributor to achieving human development in the Arab region.

“This pandemic struck at a time when the SDGs were gaining momentum and many countries were making good progress. As SDGs losses are being counted due to COVID-19, it is our duty to keep up that momentum and help the communities we serve to go back on track.” Sarah Poole, UNDP Regional Director a.i. for Arab States added during the opening session.

Furthermore, the forum included talks with experts, on: the knowledge year equivalence, which is the model on the knowledge society trajectory between past, present and future; knowledge navigation and finding knowledge alliances; and crowdfunding your business, which addressed the secret to crowdfunding and to make any project stand out.

Besides the informative and timely discussions, a new initiative was launched by the Knowledge Project, which consisted of a series of hands-on workshops and training aimed at equipping the youth in the Arab region with some of the skills required for their future. Accordingly, the participants of the forum had the opportunity to attend a workshop from data to knowledge over the 3 days, which provided them with knowledge and skills to extracting, organizing, visualizing, and communicating data.

The Forum is one of the initiatives the project carried on during the pandemic. With the outbreak of COVID-19 and consequently the lockdown and travel ban, the Knowledge Project continued to disseminate its Knowledge Products online and organized a series of webinars to reflect on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the Arab region, including the economic crisis, the impact on education systems, the role of the knowledge economy and society post COVID-19 and human development perspectives.

Watch the recordings of the live discussions [here](#).

You can learn more about the Knowledge project initiatives on Knowledge4all Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram pages.

Giving the stage to the youth: exploring youth engagement in the Arab region

What do young people in the Arab region think about youth engagement? How are they engaged in their communities, countries and at the global level? What does the situation of youth look like from experts' point of view? UNDP Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) set out to answer these questions on the occasion of the International Youth Day 2020, on 12th August.

The theme for this year was “Youth Engagement for Global Action” highlighting the role of young people’s engagement at multiple levels: locally, nationally and globally. To celebrate Youth Day and explore the challenges and opportunities for youth in the Arab region, YLP organized a campaign with the support of 16 UNDP country offices. With a competition and two live discussions, which reached over 140,000 people through social media and gathered more than 500 people to discuss youth engagement during the live sessions, the main stage was reserved for youth.

Young people submitted their videos for the competition, reflecting on youth engagement and their actions around the YLP’s themes: civic and political participation, climate action and gender equality. Among more than 60 submissions, four were selected and the youth finalists were invited to share their experiences and ideas on a live discussion.

The first live discussion, “Youth Engagement in the Arab region: context, data and experiences” on 12th August explored the barriers and enablers to youth engagement in the Arab region with experts providing data and perspectives. Linda Haddad, Regional Youth Project Manager from UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States, opened the session with introduction to how UNDP is working with youth in the region and emphasized their role as partners to UNDP.

UNDP Arab States Deputy Director a.i. Adel Abdellatif highlighted the importance of youth representation and engagement in formal institutions, with insights from the 2016 Arab Human Development Report on youth. *“Building on the demographic momentum in the Arab region, where half of the population is below the age of 30, young people should be increasingly included in rebuilding their countries. We should go beyond inclusion and actually build a new system with them at the center”*, he noted.

Prof. Amaney Jamal from Princeton University showcased socio-economic trends as well as changes in youth perspectives over time, including key findings from the Arab Barometer’s 5th wave surveys. The data presented showed that youth economic frustration, as well as the desire



to emigrate, is increasing across the MENA region, while trust in government is declining. After the expert panels, Nadine Khaouli, Youth Development Delegate in UNDP Lebanon, encouraged the participating youth to push their ideas forward. Addressing the youth directly, she said: *"You showed resilience, solidarity and a high level of engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen youth continuously participating in hackathons and virtual challenges and coming up with innovative solutions for action. Keep it up!"*

The second live discussion, "Youth Engagement for Global Action: Youth Voices from the Arab Region" took place on 17th August and put the spotlight on the four finalists from the Youth Day competition: Haia Al-Assaf from Jordan, Adam Aburok from Palestine, Yara Dargham from Lebanon and Ikrame Rekabi from Morocco. During the panel, the youth spoke about the importance of taking the initiative in their hands and engaging politically or civically for a better future for their communities and countries.

Haia highlighted that young people have the potential to use their skills in many ways. Like her, a pharmacist can be a robotics trainer and develop devices to tackle COVID-19. Drawing attention to the events in Beirut after the explosion, the importance of solidarity, and the youth raising their voices against corruption, backwardness and dependency, Yara emphasized the importance of volunteerism. Adam recounted the socio-economic impact the COVID-19 pandemic has on youth in the region and how it will further impact them in coming years. Finally, Ikrame highlighted the importance of Climate Action and noted that *"Climate change is the defining issue of our lives"*. Sara Qaddoura, Youth Development Delegate in UNDP Palestine, joined the panel discussing the importance of involving youth in planning and decision making at the global level and listening to and acknowledging young people's needs. Discussion moderator Danakhan Malhas, Innovation Specialist from UNDP Jordan ended the session with words of encouragement: *"While we should not put the whole burden on youth to change the world today, I believe that you can. You can do what you set your mind to. You make space between your studies, work, interests and passion, and carve your way among the challenges and limitations."*

The Youth Leadership Programme continues to support young people to become change-makers and social innovators in the Arab region to tackle the most demanding development challenges in their communities.

Watch all the videos related to the campaign here, including youth video submissions and recordings of the two live discussions.

Cross-regional dialogue in response to the pandemic in the Arab states

On July 27, the League of Arab States (LAS), the Government of Japan (GOJ), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convened an online senior-level roundtable to bring together stakeholders and experts to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab region and discuss responses towards recovery. As challenges and uncertainty created by the pandemic linger regionally and globally, the roundtable provided an important opportunity to address pressing issues associated with the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on different sectors across the region.



Over 100 participants connected from around the world, including representatives from the LAS Member States, the GOJ, international organizations, UN and relevant UN agencies, among which UNDP, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, ESCWA, UNDCO, etc., who came together to assess the socio-economic implications of the pandemic and discussed the need for coordination and cooperation to prevent further crises and recover stronger. Together with LAS's findings published in a report, the participants provided their findings and perspectives on public health, education, science, labor, and other socio-economic impact of the pandemic that require holistic solutions. The discussions highlighted that the pandemic is creating a multi-layered crisis in the Arab states region, exacerbating preexisting social and economic challenges and disproportionately hitting vulnerable groups, including children, women, migrants, refugees, and labors in informal sectors. Coordination and cooperation at national, regional, and global level were pointed out as essential for a response to be effective, including implementation of public health measures, sharing of scientific knowledge, and efforts for financing and investment. The importance of a mid-to long-term perspective that goes beyond the short-term emergency response was also pointed out. Multiple speakers also suggested that comprehensive, human centered approaches were the key to address these multidimensional challenges, and some stressed that the current crises should be taken as an opportunity to lead the region to a better, more sustainable future. The meeting closed with notes on the importance of bilateral and multilateral partnership among the LAS Members, Japan, and UN agencies, to support the region's recovery. This was the second policy roundtable organized by the tripartite partnership of Japan-LAS-UNDP, which aims to establish a policy dialogue platform encompassing common priorities and concerns to support the Arab region, and it is part of the regional project on Fostering Capacities in the Arab States for Sustaining Peace & Preventing Conflict. More events are planned to be organized in the 2020 and 2021 under this policy roundtable series to address common priority themes and timely issues in the region.