

## Covid-19 and trade: finding opportunity in crisis

On June 15, the League of Arab States (LAS) in partnership with UNDP conducted the first online regional workshop on the impact of COVID-19 on trade in services, under the theme “Finding Opportunity in Crisis”. The webinar aimed at assisting LAS Members in formulating strategies and policies to respond to the pandemic’s consequences on the services sectors in Arab countries. Participants included around 50 among trade policymakers and government officials responsible for cooperation in

trade in services from several Ministries, besides representatives of Arab regional organizations such as the Arab Tourism Organization, academia experts and LAS officials, who actively engaged in the discussion. They exchanged knowledge and experiences regarding the development of national policies and related trade measures to overcome the negative impact of Covid-19.

Arab policymakers also held technical discussions during dedicated sessions on the impact of the pandemic on commercial transaction in trade in services at both the international and regional level, including on the impact on tourism services, logistics and transport services, financial services sectors and estimated post Covid-19 scenarios in Arab countries.

Participants and experts emphasized the pivotal role of trade in services in the aftermath of the pandemic, for its potential to create job opportunities for Arab citizens. The attendees reflected on the importance of increasing the number of member countries in the Arab Trade in Services Agreement, as a key enabler to Arab economic development. This could contribute to strengthening resilience and livelihood in the aftermath of the pandemic, as pointed out in the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to Covid-19.

Arab policymakers and officials, LAS representatives and UNDP staff expressed high appreciation for the support provided to Arab countries in deepening regional economic integration, and policy coordination by the Government of Sweden through the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Participants also acknowledged UNDP’s contribution in pioneering the initiative in close collaboration with League of Arab States. In addition, the strong partnership between UNDP and League of Arab States proved to be effective in delivering support in trade policy and economic cooperation in the Arab region during the Covid-19 crisis.

H.E Ambassador Kamal Ali, Head of the Economic Sector at the League of Arab States, in his closing remarks announced that a series of regional webinars on the impact of Covid-19 on Arab economies will be conducted in close coordination with UNDP as the lead UN organization in these activities.

*You can learn more about Arab economic integration and UNDP work in the region [here](#).*



## Embracing the change: engaging youth online during COVID-19

With the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping through the Arab region, many development programmes and projects must rethink their activities on the ground.

The Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) was faced with the challenge of organizing the launch event of its sixth edition that aimed to gather programme partners and alumni together from across the region. When it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic would not only affect the launch event, but also the organization of the national activities, YLP decided to embrace the change and transfer its planned activities fully online. YLP believes that young women and men can be in the forefront in responding to pandemics and supporting their communities and societies recover from them. However, in the middle of the immediate response, long-term development challenges should not be forgotten. The COVID-19 pandemic affects the ability to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in 2020, there is only one decade left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Young women and men can have a great role in tackling the most difficult challenges of our time, including the current pandemic and climate change. However, without civic and political engagement, youth are not able to fully contribute to development and the future of the Arab region and their countries.

In this context, the Youth Leadership Programme entered its sixth year with the title '**Decade of Action**' and a focus on three main themes: pandemics, SDG16 and Climate Action. YLP brings together youth, alumni, youth-serving organizations and partners to support the youth in the Arab region to become change-makers, leaders and drivers of sustainable development and social change. More than 20,000 youth have participated in YLP since 2015, and many more will join this year.

To kick off the sixth edition of YLP, finalize national action plans and familiarize partners with these themes, YLP team organized a series of webinars running for 3 weeks with an average of 80 participants, covering the 3 themes of this year and introducing YLP methodology and approach. During 14 webinars, the YLP partners were able to gain in-depth information, get to know each other, and discuss the new context we live in. The webinars also offered an opportunity to use different online tools and alternative methods to engage with youth and partners.

In addition, a number of sessions were dedicated to the topics of pandemics and resilience, the use of big data to tackle fake news related to COVID-19, as well as the implications to development in the Arab region and the impact of the pandemic on its youth. The youth's potential role especially in awareness-raising and outreach to share news and tackle misinformation, supporting compliance, promoting social solidarity, and ensuring inclusivity, were emphasized. Young people could also develop technology-based initiatives that aim to support their local communities.

Many YLP alumni are already involved in tackling COVID-19 in their communities. For example, YLP4 alumna Sara Mahmoud from Egypt is using artificial intelligence to support people with disabilities during COVID-19. Farah Nasrallah, YLP4 alumna from Lebanon, worked together with her team to launch a campaign that raises awareness and distributes food to vulnerable families in Beirut and Southern Lebanon. You can learn more about YLP alumni initiatives and ideas to tackle



COVID-19 on YLP Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages.

YLP will continue to explore online working options both at the regional level and nationally. As we are encouraging young people to innovate when faced with challenges like this, we should keep innovating our own way of working too.

## Towards innovation for corruption prevention in the Arab region

*Tangier, 4 March 2020* –The city of Tangier in Morocco hosted more than 50 public officials, civil society representatives and expert specialists who came together to attend the regional workshop organized by UNDP on “Innovation for Corruption Prevention”. The event was held in the framework of the regional project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries (ACIAC), with the support of the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and in collaboration with the Moroccan National Authority for Probity, Prevention and Fight Against Corruption (INPPLC).



Two days of expert discussions and exchanges of comparative experiences highlighted the importance of increasing the investment in corruption prevention, and how the latter is often mistakenly limited to awareness-raising and public education. Presentations made during the workshop provided participants with a more comprehensive understanding of the standards, tools and approaches, which have demonstrably proven their effectiveness in preventing corruption in the Arab region and beyond, including Georgia, Italy, Korea, Moldova and Ukraine.

*“The added value of the workshop is in its emphasis on how specific and relatively small-scale preventive interventions can have high returns on investment in terms of anti-corruption and can make measurable contributions to sustainable development efforts”* said Arkan El-Seblani from UNDP.

Participants took a deep dive into specific innovative solutions and methodologies for corruption prevention, including sector-specific risk management; behavioral insights; the use of technology to increase transparency in procurement and asset declarations by public officials; stress-testing by civil society for enhanced access to information; and analysis and reduction of corruption vulnerabilities created in the course of legislative and regulatory drafting.

Cristina Tarna from Moldova remarked that *“countries often wait for corruption to happen before taking action. New methodologies, including the corruption proofing of legal texts, can be more impactful with their preemptive power”*.

The workshop resulted in the formulation and adoption of ten main recommendations that will be disseminated to anti-corruption authorities, government entities and non-governmental organizations across the Arab states region. Those include the need for governments to prioritize the completion of the preventive legislative framework according to the UN Convention against Corruption, and to invest more in new technologies to enhance transparency, especially in the areas of public procurement, government subsidies and public official asset declaration. They also highlighted the importance of collaboration with civil society in this regard as demonstrated in related experiences from Lebanon and Ukraine.

Also, participants recommended to integrate corruption risk management in specific sectors, such as the work supported by UNDP in Tunisia on the health sector; and resolved to explore further

the application of behavioral insights to promote public integrity and strengthen the relationship between state and citizens, as well as the adaptation and utilization of the methodologies on corruption risk management and corruption proofing of bills, laws and regulations. They also called for the creation of a regional electronic platform in the framework of the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network (ACINET) to encourage, document and exchange innovative experimentation in the area of anti-corruption.

*“It is my first time participating in one of ACIAC’s regional workshops”* commented Maymouna AlSharari, from the Jordanian Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission, *“the insights shared, and experiences presented are eye opening. I am excited to share them back with my colleagues and benefit from them in the implementation of our national strategy”*.

This activity is the first major event held by UNDP, in the framework of its new partnership with KOICA that was announced on 9 December 2019 in support of the third phase of the ACIAC regional project. For more information about it, you can follow @UNDP\_ACIAC on Twitter.