

# Innovative Community Solutions - Regulatory Opportunities & Challenges

{ Internet Society ISOC ME }

## Background

The increased reliance on the Internet during periods of lockdown and confinement resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need to ensure that everyone can use the Internet. The Middle East and North African region have experienced impressive growth in the availability and adoption of the Internet in recent years, with a number of the Gulf States at the global forefront of new fiber broadband networks and 5G mobile networks along with near universal adoption of the Internet.

However, other countries in the region are lagging further behind. As a result, as of 2019, average Internet adoption in the region was at 55%. While this is slightly ahead of the global average, a significant challenge is that the growth rate is steadily falling. There are a number of reasons for low adoption rates in countries, and for the slowing growth rate in adoption. Our focus would be one of the fundamental reasons in that regard. That is the lack of availability of Internet access in a geographic area.

The Internet is not always commercially viable in areas with high cost of deployment and/or low-income levels among the population. This is often true in rural areas with low populations of citizens who are typically below the average income levels in the country. However, in urban areas there may be access, but it may be poor quality or unaffordable for certain segments of the city.

One increasingly popular solution to these challenges comes in establishing innovative ways for connectivity in under- and un-served areas. Those could be Internet networks that are developed by and for their communities, and which could play an important role in providing access and capacity building where there is little or none. Rather than waiting for the Internet to eventually reach their community and meet their needs, the communities could consider building a local network to reach the Internet.

It is important that such networks operate within the relevant regulations for networks in their countries; however, it is also important that policymakers and regulators recognize the benefits of community networks and adapt policies where feasible to enable them to develop.

## Description

This high-level meeting aims to highlight the need for innovative ways for connectivity in MENA and the beneficial policies that can create an enabling environment for them. It will set the scene through:

- shedding light on examples for popular innovative connectivity models; case study from another region.
- Introducing Community Networks and how they could be developed; What Challenges do community networks face:
  - Technical Challenges
  - Policy and Regulatory Challenges

## Key facts

- Examples for popular innovative connectivity models;
- Policy and Regulatory Challenges
- Issues Related to Lack of Access to Spectrum
- Financial and Sustainability Challenges

### Moderator:



Mr. Michael Kende  
Senior Advisor at Analysis Mason ;  
Digital Development Specialist, IFC.

### Keynote speaker:



Dr Walid Mathlouthi  
Head of Future Network & Spectrum  
Management Division at International  
Telecommunication Union, ITU.

### Speakers:



Mr. Ayman El Sherbiny  
Chief of ICT policy - UNESCWA



Mr. Juan Peirano  
Senior Policy Advisor –  
Internet Society



Ms. Marwa Azelmat  
Women's rights policy  
advocacy coordinator, APC,  
Morocco



Mr. Sharaf Azzain  
Entrepreneur and Founder of  
Ultimate STC - President of Internet  
society Yemen chapter.

8 DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES



Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

