



**IXP Workshop on Peering and Interconnection in the Arab World  
“Towards unlocking regional interconnection opportunities”**

**Manama - Bahrain, 2 October 2018**

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**Draft Concept Note**

In an Arab World, where Internet usage is growing at rates exceeding the average global growth rate and where online users have outgrown 43% of the population, the Internet has become a main driver for social and economic development. Despite the growing regional infrastructure, cross-border interconnection remains mostly in countries beyond the region and the local peering industry is still lagging behind. Unlocking regional interconnection opportunities on a pan Arab level, deserves further attention and more collaborative work, especially given the geographical proximity, the language and culture commonality and the similarity of Internet usage trends within the Arab countries.

On a strategic level, there has been continued support from Arab policymakers to grow regional peering and interconnect the Arab region. Since the 2011 Arab Economic, Development and Social Summit of Sharm El Sheikh, the Council of the League at the Summit Level expressed its support for the “Project to link Arab Internet networks” and commissioned the Council of Arab Ministers of Communications and Information Technology to follow up its implementation. Subsequently, various activities have been conducted in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the ITU Arab Regional Office. They have addressed the strategic value of interconnecting Arab countries and the numerous benefits of keeping local traffic within the region. Among other findings, reports have expressed the need to establish a peering forum for the region and have stressed on the importance of cooperation among policy makers and operators to advance the implementation of the project.

Despite all efforts, a gap can be still identified, suggesting that the peering landscape in the Arab region has not developed enough to unleash its full potential. As 85% of the region’s traffic continues to be routed through Europe, the lack of adequate IXP infrastructure in Arab countries drives up latency and cost. This mainly affects the quality and price of local Internet services and relatively hinders further market growth. Characteristics of this gap include, among others, the small number of active IXP within the region compared to the global landscape, the limited level of cross-border interconnection between networks in adjacent countries, with very few exceptions, as well as the absence of an inclusive platform for regional cooperation. Further, there are signs for an inter-regional gap, with some countries having a significantly more matured market, as well as little interest from the majority of operators to invest in regional peering, especially as the local hosting and content development industries remain underdeveloped. High prices of local infrastructure and IP transit services suggest that incumbents might

still consider peering to be a threat. More work is obviously need to translate the political will into more specific policies and actions, in order to eliminate regulatory barriers and create a conducive ecosystem.

This workshop will bring on board peering experts and key players from the Arab region and beyond, together with policy makers and regulators. It will look at findings of the study commissioned by ITU to assess the current ecosystem of peering and exchange points in the region and elaborate a suggested vision for the future. Participants will discuss together how to grow the peering industry and unleash opportunities offered by regional interconnection, with special focus on policies and regulations necessary for a conducive environment. They will attempt to jointly define a roadmap for the way forward.

Over half a day, the workshop agenda will include topics as below:

- Review and assess the landscape of peering and interconnection in the Arab region;
- Identify the benefits of growing local exchange points and advancing interconnection on a regional level and discuss the impact this has on the overall development of the Internet ecosystem in the Arab world;
- Recognize policy challenges, and operational and business hurdles, and identify ways to create a conducive environment for the development of local and regional peering;
- Elaborate a vision and a roadmap to enable a strong peering industry within Arab countries and unlock regional interconnection opportunities for the Arab Internet market.

The workshop is open for participation to all stakeholders of the peering industry. Targeted audience includes policy makers and regulators from the Arab region, as well as network operators, Internet service providers and Internet exchange points in Arab countries.