ITU Regional Initiative for Europe on Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Youth

**The Expert Group Meeting on
Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Youth
*"ITU-ICT Agora"***

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ATHENS MANIFESTO

Based on the discussion, the participants identified the following set of recommendations which may serve as a base for planning and implementing future activities in the area of entrepreneurship, innovation and youth in the Europe region. The set of recommendations developed by the community gathered at this meeting are all equally important and are non-binding and only for consideration. They are designed to strengthen regional cooperation and identify areas for concrete actions under the ITU EUR Regional Initiative 5 adopted by the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2014.

Recognizing the critical role of ICTs across all sectors of the economy and the particular contribution of ICT centric innovation and entrepreneurship to socio-economic development, the following key challenges were articulated by the ICT ecosystem stakeholders present at the meeting:

1. There is a need for national and transnational strategies for ICT centric innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly one providing clear common vision and targeted objectives, with a special interest in the cross-cutting and cross-sectoral impact of ICTs.
2. ICT centric policy frameworks fostering innovation are necessary and should take into account the following
   - facilitation of the work of incubators;
   - intellectual property (IP) protection;
   - strengthening technology transfer and facilitation of licensing across all relevant stakeholders;
   - strengthening of spinoffs from research efforts;

- improved funding mechanisms for applied research, innovation and development;
- more effective and specialized financial instruments need to be developed to address differing needs of entrepreneurs throughout their lifecycles;
- stronger incentives for industry driven research and IP creation;
- promotion of methodologies strengthening the culture of entrepreneurship and business skills of all stakeholders, and attracting highly skilled individuals to join in entrepreneurial activities, especially within academic community.

3. A platform for systematic collaboration between all stakeholders involved in the ICT centric innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem is necessary in order to better support user driven innovation, collaborative development and co-creation at the national, regional and global level.

4. There is a need for more synergistic actions between the different components of the ICT centric innovation ecosystem, including via mechanisms such as:
- Formal and informal forums to bring together the stakeholders of the ecosystem to discuss the issues at hand;
- Blended approach for collaboration, e.g. face-to-face or online, should be applied;
- Mechanisms of co-creation should be applied in order to strengthen bottom up approach fostering ICT centric innovation at each level.

5. Entrepreneurs driving innovation still face several challenges, including the following:
- Incorporation of innovation and entrepreneurship in the education systems still remain as a challenge. More attention must be given to the teaching of business knowledge, entrepreneurial spirit, and sharing of best practices from around the world;
- Tax policies must be formulated in ways that encourage and reward the founders and potential investors of businesses;
- Access to funding is currently limited and can be improved via mechanisms filling the gaps in the different lifecycle of the business funding (e.g. between ideation and proven financial viability);
- Depending on the national circumstances, mechanisms should be put in place to ease the burden of taxation for young entrepreneurs and ensure that early stage entrepreneurs are compensated for their contributions to social security;
- The legal processes to create a company should be streamlined and digitized this should be the case in all areas where business and government connect;
- Understanding of IP management needs to be fostered.

6. Cooperation needs to be encouraged between the financial sector, and other relevant stakeholders in the ICT centric innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem and government.

7. Special efforts may be dedicated to bridge the disconnect between large corporations and national entrepreneurship ecosystems. These corporations may provide new opportunities in terms of funding, research and education.
8. Efforts should be made to raise awareness of the role that ICT centric innovation and entrepreneurship can make in all sectors of the economy.
9. Incentives should be considered which would encourage participation of individuals with proven business skills in the entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem.
10. Innovation hubs provide critically needed mechanisms for advancing the innovation and entrepreneurship agenda. Creation of hubs and linkages between them should be fostered.
11. A mix of competition and cooperation between hubs is key, strengthening resources for entrepreneurs, and leading to lower risk for investors.
12. Large companies should be encouraged to establish small hubs for education of entrepreneurs, and have a key role to play in fostering entrepreneurship.
13. More activities should be systematically undertaken to diffuse the best practice initiatives from national and regional environments to the European level and vice versa.
14. The following primary concerns and needs have been identified regarding the role of the public sector within the entrepreneurial ecosystem:
    - It is essential to create an enabling environment and foster an ICT-centric innovation ecosystem.
    - This environment should consider the transnational nature of the ICT sector, and allow for the necessary levels of international trade and collaboration.
    - More flexible legal and institutional frameworks and funding mechanisms may need to be developed in response to the new and evolving nature of business models and emerging technological sectors.
    - The public sector might consider a focus on early adoption of emerging and innovative technologies, creating demand and accelerating transformation of public services. Particular activities might be undertaken to initiate the development and exploitation of these innovative technologies.
    - Mapping of the national ICT centric innovation ecosystems, including the role of all stakeholders and the interdependences between them, is essential to enhance organic functioning.
    - Special efforts may be dedicated toward building a community relevant to the ICT centric innovation ecosystem to further enhance consultation processes on policies and initiatives.

- Creation of a central innovation focal point at the national level might facilitate coordination at the governmental level. It would give better access to information for entrepreneurs and enhance the engagement of the stakeholders.
- The one-window platform could be a supportive tool for such efforts which might include the following components – funding mechanisms, community of the innovators, forging strategic partnerships within the ecosystem, access to venture capital, information on the sources of funding, including funds coming from the EU or national level.
- It is important to create a platform for networking and organizing physical meetings of all the interested stakeholders.
- Further efforts are required to fully digitalize government services in order to facilitate and accelerate B2G and G2B interactions.
- Dedicated effort may be considered to strengthen the national sources of funding and national funding mechanism for innovation-driven initiatives.
- Attention should be paid to the challenges and opportunities of IP rights in the context of startups, SMEs and research, especially the education of all stakeholders regarding IP rights.
- Systemic action is needed to address the challenge of brain-drain. Financial or tax incentives for startups may be considered.
- A mechanism for facilitating commercialization of results of research is needed.