



Innovation in the Arab region

A strategy paper to Imagine, Invent, Impact!

UNFPA Arab States Regional Office
2024 - 2025

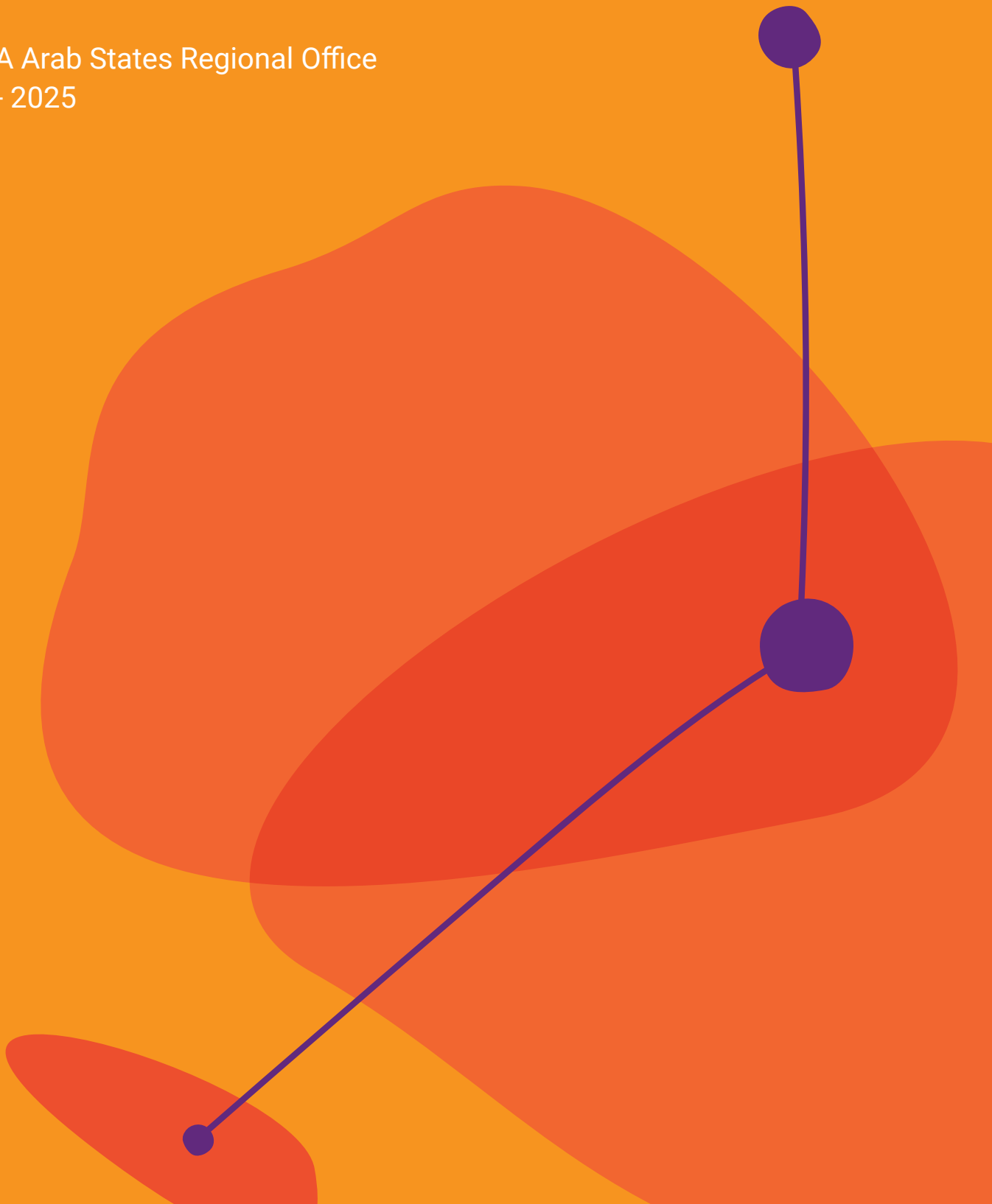


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Innovation for impact

A smartphone app to safely report cases of gender-based violence in Iraq.

A community-based funding initiative that provides microfinance to pregnant women and ensures rapid referrals to hospitals for safe births in Sudan.

An online dashboard that tracks people's movements and emergency needs in Yemen in real time and offers live data on the medical needs of people with disabilities in Syria.

A mentorship programme that supports a growing cadre of female social entrepreneurs working to transform lives and futures across nine Arab countries.

This is what Innovation looks like for UNFPA in the Arab region.

Innovation is key to unlocking an Arab world of opportunity and can help break down barriers that hold women, girls and young people back.

UNFPA's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 positions innovation as a key accelerator to reach our three transformative results: ending preventable maternal deaths, ending the unmet need for family planning, and ending gender-based violence and all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage.

As UN Secretary General António Guterres highlighted in late 2023, digital transformation is a game-changer in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNFPA is committed to boosting rights and choices through a growing toolbox of innovative enablers for sexual and reproductive health and rights such as expanding digital solutions, artificial intelligence, extended reality, blockchain and other emerging technologies.

The challenge

From war, poverty and inequality to climate-change fuelled emergencies, the Arab region faces large and complex challenges, with women and girls often the worst affected.

In some areas, nearly two-thirds of Arab women report suffering some form of violence in their lifetimes. More than one in five girls in the region have their futures stolen through early marriage, and the Arab region has the world's lowest rate of women's economic participation.

Tackling gender equality is crucial for all Arab states. Pervasive injustice keeps women and girls out of school, jobs and leadership roles. It limits their agency and ability to make decisions, and it heightens their vulnerability to violence, forced marriage and other harmful practices.

We must pave the way for all citizens, especially women and girls, to reach their full potential.

The opportunity

With a young, vibrant and growing population, the Arab region is brimming with talent, drive and energy. The region boasts a buzzing start-up scene, a growing innovation ecosystem, high internet access, and increasingly digitized markets. In the coming years, the region has the potential to become a major player in the global innovation economy.

We must power this potential, as the current share of patents from the Arab region remains low and just three Arab countries were ranked within the top 50 in the Global Innovation Index in 2023. A growing and dynamic cadre of Arab women social entrepreneurs and innovators are helping to bridge this gap.

There are more young women graduates of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the Arab region than men, and one in three start-ups are led or founded by women, which is more than Silicon Valley.

Building on existing strengths and boosting female participation in the workforce - especially in emerging technologies - could add trillions of dollars to regional economies, significantly advance social stability and equality, and ultimately increase opportunity for everyone.

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UNFPA Innovation in the Arab region



Be bold, be revolutionary...and disrupt... because without innovation, there is no way we can overcome the challenges of our time.

United Nations Secretary-General,
António Guterres



In 2023, two-thirds of UNFPA country offices in the Arab region were ramping up innovation, including working with new technologies and new partners, exploring new ways of delivering programmes, finalizing prototypes and creating models to scale.

For example, in **Tunisia, Morocco** and **Palestine**, UNFPA reaches young people with realtime information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights through innovative online apps and platforms.

In **Iraq, Jordan** and **Syria**, digital training tools are being rolled out with partners to strengthen the capacity and skills of midwives and health workers to deliver in humanitarian emergencies.

In **Morocco, Iraq** and **the Gulf countries**, UNFPA and partners are developing apps with referral mechanisms to prevent, report and ultimately reduce gender-based violence.

In **Somalia, Egypt** and **across the region**, UNFPA is building an ecosystem of women entrepreneurs to drive progress towards the three transformative results through social

incubators, youth fellowships and women-led social businesses.

Launched in 2023, the GenF mentorship initiative now supports women entrepreneurs in nine countries, and works to empower a growing cadre of future female leaders and entrepreneurs.

Our innovation network continues to expand: UNFPA's iNetwork brings together staff in all 15 Arab states that are working to cultivate innovative thinking, to build communities of practice and to help shape an enabling environment for innovation. Six UNFPA country offices have staff that are leading innovation initiatives, and a number of countries have formed innovation labs for cross-thematic collaboration.

Reaching women and girls fast, efficiently and at scale

All innovation must start with the challenges faced by women and girls, and must be designed with them, not just for them. UNFPA works to ensure that all innovations apply gender analysis to understand how gender-responsive or transformative each solution is and to how it can help tackle harmful gender norms and structures.

From across and beyond the region, UNFPA scouts and sources the most promising innovations to introduce into programming and humanitarian response to boost our impact.

UNFPA also works with external innovators and start-ups to tap into the most cutting-edge and pioneering inventions, technologies and resources.



Our three impact areas to Imagine, Invent, Impact

In alignment with the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and UNFPA's global innovation framework, UNFPA in the Arab region will advance in three key impact areas to accelerate and promote innovation in culture, programmes and partnerships.



Impact area one

Create a culture of innovation

Output: Innovation is integrated into programming across the Arab region through the regional innovation network, and a repository for innovation knowledge products is made available which will include thematic sessions, virtual learning activities, and stories on innovation.

An enabling environment for innovation is fundamental to turn pioneering ideas into results. UNFPA will continue to invest in 'innovation spaces' that include physical environments, human resources and expertise and learning and capacity building activities.

UNFPA in the Arab region will:

1. Grow and nurture our innovation network with innovation champions, particularly young innovators, in all country offices and lead a community of practice on innovation.
2. Increase our understanding of innovation's role for programmes and provide tools and guidance to promote and advance innovation in UNFPA

3. Support UNFPA management in understanding risk-taking and give them the tools and inputs to inspire creativity and innovation among team members.
4. Drive internal dialogue and knowledge sharing on initiatives that have had a positive impact on the level of interest in innovation among staff members.
5. Engage programme teams across thematic areas to review their planning through an innovation lens, fostering a wider culture of open dialogue and collaboration.



Impact area two

Advance high-impact solutions

Output: UNFPA country offices are able to demonstrate and share initiatives in which innovation is a clear accelerator in achieving UNFPA's three transformative results.

UNFPA will source innovations and adjust them appropriately to each country's unique context to address needs and gaps. We will work across all programmatic areas and in humanitarian crises to identify where innovation can play a role in addressing challenges, breaking barriers and improving outcomes for women and girls.

UNFPA in the Arab region will:

1. Identify bottlenecks across the three transformative results that require new



and innovative approaches and source solutions that have worked in other settings.

2. Formulate innovative ideas and proposals to address key barriers and seek to adapt and integrate them in existing programmes and initiatives.
3. Scale promising interventions and initiatives, communicate and replicate what works through cross country and regional collaboration.
4. Document best practices and successful programme approaches as well as risks, failures and errors to inform innovation learning.



Engage local innovation ecosystems

Output: UNFPA country offices engage in partnerships for innovation and leverage funding opportunities. Country offices also invest in local innovation ecosystems, including through support to social entrepreneurship.

Local startups, technology companies and social entrepreneurs are major untapped resources. UNFPA will forge new partnerships to work with local innovators and the private sector to provide expertise and resources to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights.

UNFPA in the Arab region will:

1. Strengthen UNFPA's network and alliances with regional and local innovation ecosystems including through incubators, start-ups and social entrepreneurs.
2. Increase UNFPA's role in the innovation ecosystem through engagement and partnership building, and seek to actively shape and influence it.
3. Identify partnership building opportunities and leverage new partnerships with donors and funders. Use existing partnerships to increase earmarked funding for innovation such as through UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programmes and other interagency initiatives.
4. Explore innovative financing models as a means to advance innovations developed by UNFPA and partners.

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The way forward

Innovation accelerates impact for UNFPA's three transformative results. Across the Arab region we are working with innovative technologies and networks of innovators, including female entrepreneurs, businesses and female leaders, to shape and scale game-changing solutions.

A vibrant team of country-based innovation advocates continue to scout and support powerful innovations, and UNFPA works to link country offices with useful global innovations and will provide a platform to young innovators across the region.

Arab innovations and young leaders are strategically positioned in regional and global fora, and set to take innovation to the next level, powering more positive change for women, girls and youth across the region.

We must accelerate now, to reach the transformative impact that innovation can offer. We must aspire to no less than disruptive innovation reaching women and girls fast, efficiently and at scale to break generations of deprivation, inequalities, harmful practices and wasted potential.

In the coming years, UNFPA in the Arab region is committed to enhancing innovation in our corporate culture, encouraging the integration of innovative solutions into programme streams and humanitarian responses, and cultivating shared value partnerships with local innovators and entrepreneurs.

Regional Office Results Framework 2024-2025

Outcome: An enabling environment within the Arab states for innovation to be a fundamental accelerator for the achievement of the three transformative results

Outputs	Indicators
<p><i>Impact area one</i> <i>Create a culture of innovation</i> RO Output: Enhanced knowledge and culture on innovation in ASRO</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of a repository for innovation products. Baseline: No (2023), Target: Yes (2024) • Number of innovation knowledge products available Baseline: 3 (2023), Target: 5 (2024), Target: 7 (2025) • Number of innovation webinars, thematic sessions, clinics rolled out regionally. Baseline: 2 (2023), Target: 4 (2024), Target: 6 (2025) • Number of blogs, stories, news published at the global level showcasing country and regional innovation efforts. Baseline: 0 (2023), Target: 2 (2024), Target: 4 (2025)
<p><i>Impact area two</i> <i>Advance high impact solutions</i> RO Output: Integrated innovation approach into ASRO's and CO's programming (to address the 3 TRs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of COs that have identified innovation focal points as part of the regional innovation network. Baseline: 10 (2023), Target: 12 (2024), Target: 14 (2025) • Number of launched initiatives in country offices where innovation is an accelerator with the support of the Regional Office. Baseline: 8 (2023), Target: 10 (2024), 14 (2025) • Number of COs participating in cross-regional initiatives. baseline: 5 (2023), Target: 7 (2024), Target: 10 (2025) • Number of COs that articulate innovation in CPDs. Baseline: 10 (2023), Target: 15 (2024), Target: 15 (2025) • Availability of regional innovation strategy: No (2023), Target: Yes (2024)
<p><i>Impact area three</i> <i>Engage local innovation ecosystems</i> RO Output: Strengthened partnerships and resources for innovation in the Arab states</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of regional-level partnership initiatives on innovation. Baseline: 1 (2023), Target: 2 (2024), Target: 3 (2025) • Number of COs that have participated in global and regional calls for innovation. Baseline: 6 (2023), Target: 8 (2024), Target: 10 (2025) • Number of COs that have received innovation funding to accelerate innovation initiatives. Baseline: 3 (2023), Target: 4 (2024), Target: 5 (2025).



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