



Workshop

Driving growth in the creative and cultural economy

19 November 2026

13:00–16:00 | Room TBC

Background and regional context

Creative and cultural industries (CCIs) are increasingly recognized as important drivers of economic growth, innovation, job creation, and cultural identity. Globally, CCIs contribute more than 3.1% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 6.2% of employment.¹ For the Arab region, this presents a unique opportunity to build on its rich cultural heritage, creative talent and young population to develop a sustainable, innovative, knowledge-based economy.

Across North Africa, countries are leveraging their cultural assets and traditional industries to create new economic opportunities. In Morocco, CCIs contribute around 2.4% of GDP and support more than 116,000 jobs, covering sectors such as crafts, fashion, audiovisual production, design, and digital arts.² In Tunisia, the handicraft sector remains a key part of the creative economy, contributing around 4% of GDP and employing approximately 300,000 artisans,³ of whom 85% are women,⁴ underscoring the sector's role in supporting inclusive employment. In Egypt, the handicraft sector supports more than 25,000 micro and small-sized enterprises and around 80,000 jobs.⁵ The country's National Strategy for Handicrafts (2025–2030) aims to increase handicraft exports to \$600 million by 2030 by strengthening value chains, improving marketing, and supporting craft clusters.⁶

In the Gulf subregion, countries have placed CCIs at the centre of economic diversification strategies. Saudi Arabia has positioned culture as a strategic investment sector under Saudi Vision 2030, with initiatives such as Riyadh Season and Jeddah Season, and national cultural programmes helping create new opportunities in entertainment, arts, heritage and creative businesses.⁷ The United Arab Emirates is also seeking to expand its creative economy, with a target of increasing the contribution of CCIs to 5% of national GDP by 2031 through support for creative talent, entrepreneurship, cultural production and international partnerships.⁸ Oman has taken important steps to develop its creative economy through the Oman Creative Industries Roadmap, the country's first research-based framework for the sector. The roadmap highlights strong activity across creative fields, with performing arts representing 12% of the sector and digital arts 9.6%.⁹

In the Mashreq countries, CCIs continue to provide opportunities for entrepreneurship, cultural preservation and young people engagement. Jordan's creative economy is growing through sectors such as film, digital content, gaming, design and cultural production. The country has attracted international film productions, including 6 Oscar-winning and 41 Oscar-nominated films.¹⁰ For Lebanon, despite economic challenges, CCIs remain an important source of cultural identity and entrepreneurship. The BERYT initiative supported 139 cultural and creative practitioners and organizations through \$1.7 million in grants, covering areas such as intangible cultural heritage, heritage tourism, visual arts and crafts.¹¹ Traditional Palestinian crafts remain an important cultural and economic asset, including embroidery, glassblowing, pottery, olivewood carving, weaving and soapmaking. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has supported efforts to preserve and commercialize endangered crafts by working with 20 craft initiatives to enhance their economic sustainability.¹² In Iraq, traditional crafts are not only part of the country's cultural heritage but also hold strong potential to drive economic growth and create jobs, particularly for families in rural and marshland areas. The

National Development Plan (2024–2028) therefore supports the revival of traditional and heritage industries as an investment opportunity and encourages the private sector and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in cultural activities. It also promotes new initiatives to develop craft skills and entrepreneurship, including training 170 young women and men in nine areas of the Kurdistan Region to develop products inspired by local heritage.¹³

Given their strong potential, further development of CCIs in the Arab region could help address challenges related to limited market access, skills gaps, weak financing, and difficulties in modernization, branding, and intellectual property protection. This requires stronger policies, innovative financing, and collaboration among Governments, the private sector and creative entrepreneurs.

With the right support, the Arab region can build on its cultural heritage and creative talent to advance economic diversification, innovation and sustainable growth. This workshop will explore how policymakers, ecosystem actors, financial institutions and creative entrepreneurs can collaborate to strengthen the creative economy, improve competitiveness, and unlock new growth opportunities.

Objectives

- Highlight the contribution of the creative and cultural sector to economic growth, innovation, entrepreneurship, employment and sustainable development.
- Discuss emerging trends, opportunities and challenges shaping the sector at regional and global levels.
- Explore the role of Governments, institutions, ecosystem actors and the private sector in creating enabling environments and supporting the sector's development.
- Examine approaches to strengthening competitiveness, including financing, capacity-building, innovation, technology adoption and collaboration among key stakeholders.
- Showcase regional and international examples of successful creative and cultural economy initiatives, enterprises and growth models.

Participants



Policymakers, government institutions, research and academic institutions, and sector stakeholders.



Business support organizations, incubators, accelerators and ecosystem actors.



SMEs, entrepreneurs across creative sectors, private sector representatives, logistics providers, financial institutions.



Investors, development partners and organizations interested in supporting sector growth and innovation.

Structure

- **Session 1: Growing the creative and cultural economy: from potential to impact**
How can Governments, institutions and ecosystem actors collaborate to transform creative and cultural potential into measurable economic and social impact?
- **Session 2: Innovative financing for the creative and cultural economy**
How can creative and cultural SMEs access financing models that better reflect the specific characteristics of creative entrepreneurship, including the value of intellectual property and intangible assets, and support business growth?
- **Session 3: Strengthening creative and cultural talent for market access**
How can creative and cultural SMEs leverage talent, innovation, digital skills, and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), to expand into new markets and drive business growth?

Potential partners

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO – Baghdad Office).
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).
- Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND).
- Makers of Baghdad.

Agenda

Time	Title	Session description	Speakers/Moderators
13:00-14:00	Session 1 Growing the creative and cultural economy: from potential to impact	This session explores the role of CCIs in driving economic growth, job creation, innovation and cultural preservation, while highlighting enabling environments, ecosystem support and successful examples across key creative sectors, with a view to unlocking the sector's potential and maximizing its impact.	Mohammed Issa , Director, Creativity Lab, State of Palestine Jafar Sadik , CEO, Becorp, Iraq Salam Bannoura Project Officer, UNESCO, Jordan
14:00-15:00	Session 2 Innovative financing for the creative and cultural economy	This session examines financing approaches for creative and cultural businesses, including blended finance, crowdfunding, guarantee schemes, investment readiness and alternative models that enable SMEs to scale, grow and achieve sustainability.	Luis Nicolás Barrios Regional Manager, Innovation, Education & Investments, UN Tourism Nour Hashim Founder, Hili – Dar Al-Hiraf Nouran Farouk , Co-founder, Dosy Bikes, Egypt Eyad Rached , Digital Transformation Specialist, Love Damascus, Syria Khalid Alsatti Senior Project Specialist; Innovation, Education & Investments, UN Tourism

Time	Title	Session description	Speakers/Moderators
15:00-16:00	Session 3 Strengthening creative and cultural talent for market access	This session explores how talent development, innovation, digital skills, AI and intellectual property can help creative businesses strengthen their competitiveness, access new markets, and achieve sustainable growth while preserving cultural value. It also emphasizes developing the creative capacities of young people and women and preparing them to enter target markets through training and mentoring, product development, marketing and stronger links with markets and business networks.	

Endnotes

1. United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), [Unlocking the Potential of the Creative Economy in Kyrgyzstan](#), 18 April 2024.
2. International Finance Corporation (IFC), [Assessment of the Creative and Cultural Industries in Morocco](#), 8 April 2026.
3. Tunisia, Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, [Augmentation des recettes du secteur de l'artisanat à 137 millions de dinars](#), 15 November 2024.
4. World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), [IP for Her: Women Artisans in the Handicraft Sector in Tunisia](#), 2026.
5. Cairo Governorate Electronic Portal, [PM Madbouly Opens 7th 'Turathna' Exhibition](#), 5 October 2025.
6. Egypt, State Information Service, [The 7th Edition of 'Turathna 2025' Exhibition](#), 4 October 2025.
7. Oxford Business Group (OBG), [Saudi Arabia Cultural Market Outlook: Vision, Impact and Opportunities](#), 2025.
8. United Arab Emirates, Ministry of Culture, [National Strategy for Cultural and Creative Industries](#), 2021.
9. Yousuf bin Hamed al Balushi, [Oman's creative economy: A path to diversification](#), *Oman Observer*, 2 June 2025.
10. Invest Jordan, [Overview of Jordan's Creative Industries Sector](#), n.d.
11. United Nations Lebanon, [BERYT Project closing ceremony: a milestone in Beirut's cultural and creative industries revival](#), 6 May 2025.
12. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), [Preserving Endangered Traditional Crafts and Enhancing Employability in the Creative Sector in Palestine](#) (accessed on 8 April 2026).
13. Iraq, Ministry of Planning, [National Development Plan 2024–2028](#), 2024.