

Special Meeting on the Middle East in the Fourth Industrial Revolution Overview

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia 5-6 April 2020

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Saudi Arabia's G20 presidency in 2020, the first time an Arab and Middle East country has such a mandate, presents a unique opportunity for the entire region to take a global view of its future. The timing could not be more significant, given the paradigm shifts in technology, sustainability and geo-economic relations globally, which are poised to recast the dice on the trajectories of companies and governments, and deeply affect our private lives.

To respond to this singular context, the World Economic Forum, in partnership with Saudi Arabia's G20 Secretariat, is convening the most relevant leaders from government, business and civil society for a Special Meeting on the Middle East in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The organizing logic of this inaugural gathering will be to provide the region's stakeholders the opportunity to assume a proactive posture vis-à-vis these transformative global trends and shape many of their outcomes in the region and internationally.

It is also a crucial opportunity to rise above the fog of geopolitical uncertainty and the gravitational forces of legacy conflicts and scale up the efforts of the region's outstanding thinkers and practitioners who are committed to a can-do, positive agenda for the region and its people.

A dominant feature of the programme is the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a concept put forward by Professor Klaus Schwab in his 2016 book in which he describes the unprecedented pace and complexity of technological change and the attendant need for industry, government and civil society to work together to shape it.

At the same time, the programme will build on the World Economic Forum's long-standing work on other transformative issues such as reskilling, financial inclusion, climate change, smart cities and the energy transition.



Six public-private platforms for impact

The World Economic Forum has established public-private platforms to address the world's most pressing issues through a systems approach. This year in Saudi Arabia, the following six platforms will drive the meeting's agenda:

Building Skills for the Jobs of the Future

The dominant legacy economic model of the region, relying principally on secure government employment, has already reached its limits as it is outpaced by demographic growth. As a result, the Middle East suffers from one of the highest rates of youth unemployment globally, aggravating the chasm between generations. If countries prepare their workforces, the young, entrepreneurial and digitally dexterous population can become a significant advantage.

Global imperative:

- How can top-down models of education be transformed towards continuous learning, in line with the accelerating pace of technological change?

Implications for the Middle East:

- Which platforms need to be established to upskill and reskill workers at scale and at different stages of their careers?
- What measures need to be implemented to ensure that technological disruption is a boon to women and youth?

Financial Inclusion

According to the World Bank, 69% of adults in the Middle East and North Africa remain unbanked. There is no doubt that digital currencies have the potential to create a drastic change in the access of citizens to financial resources and products. Nevertheless, a project of this sensitivity should not be led by private companies alone. To ensure it is geared towards stability and inclusivity, it needs to be backed by national central banks. The Monetary Authorities of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have experimented with such technologies.

Global imperative:

- How can Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency be leveraged to form a stable global digital currency that is backed by the world's biggest economies?

Implications for the Middle East:

- What institutional frameworks are needed in the region to ensure that such currencies truly facilitate inclusion and are not used solely for the benefit of the few?
- How can public-private partnerships be leveraged to marshal the region's financial resources to foster entrepreneurship and inclusion?

The Great Energy Transformation

The Middle East is blessed with natural factors that are propitious to the generation of renewable energy. Scaling up renewable energy would allow oil and gas producing countries to free up more of their resources for export, while decreasing the energy bill of oil and gas importers. To showcase the potential of these technologies, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have auctioned off solar plants at record-low prices, making the ensuing electricity cheaper than that generated by fossil fuels.

Global imperative:

- How can global cooperation catalyse a transition to a more sustainable, secure and affordable energy system?

Implications for the Middle East:

- What policies need to be implemented to ensure that such a transition does not impact the macroeconomic environment of countries that still depend on hydrocarbons?
- As countries look to pare back subsidies to energy, water and food, what safety nets need to be in place to ensure that vulnerable segments of the populations remain protected?

Smart Cities

Urbanization has been a force for economic development and prosperity across the years. As this trend continues in the Middle East, cities will continue to act as drivers of economic growth and innovation. Rapid urbanization in the previous decades has led to strained infrastructure and suboptimal housing access. Studies have shown that access to housing is an important driver of perceived inequality.

Global imperative:

- What standards need to be aligned at the global level for internet of things (IoT) technologies and the management of data related to smart cities?

Implications for the Middle East:

- How can new technologies – like autonomous vehicles, the internet of things and big data – contribute to making cities in the region more connected, efficient and liveable?
- What new approaches to public-private collaboration can be employed to increase the stock of affordable housing without further straining urban infrastructure?

Environmental Stewardship

Wild fires in Lebanon; floods in Jordan and the Gulf; water pollution in Iraq; desertification in Egypt; dangerous rises in temperatures in the Mediterranean basin: Climate change, previously perceived as a secondary problem, is starting to impact the daily lives of citizens with striking consequences for social stability. A systematic regional approach will be required to provide a holistic response to this challenge.

Global imperative:

- What global financing mechanism can be put in place to curb negative externalities and to support in mitigation and adaptation efforts?

Implications for the Middle East:

- What policies are required to mitigate the impact of climate change that is compromising the economic growth needed to create employment for the next generation?
- How can regional collaboration and dialogue address the systemic environmental risks that cannot be addressed only at the national level?

The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Harnessing the Fourth Industrial Revolution is particularly important for countries in the Middle East as an opportunity to kick-start their economies and respond to the aspirations of their youthful populations. This presents the region with a unique challenge: Addressing the immediate needs of its citizens by building on the momentum for ongoing reform efforts, while at the same time implementing the policies required to reap the benefits and mitigate the risks that this transformation will bring about in the years to come. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is such a complex, intricate and overarching phenomenon that no segment of society can shape it on its own. Most of all, we need to tap into the imagination of young people, who will have to bear the consequences of the path that leaders set for the region.

Global imperative:

- How can collaboration be fostered between business and government to design the policy and regulatory frameworks required to benefit from new technologies, while keeping the digital commons secure?

Implications for the Middle East:

- How can digitalization and the rise of successful start-ups in the region contribute positively to job creation and economic growth?
- In the context of the fragmentation in regional markets, how can the digital economy be leveraged to create bigger markets in the Middle East?

Programme at a glance

Sunday 5 April	Monday 6 April
12.00 - 14.00 Welcome Lunch	
14.00 - 19.00 Official Programme	07.30 - 19.00 Official Programme
20.00 - 22.00 Cultural Soirée	19.00 - 20.00 Farewell Dinner



Who is taking part?

Institutional Members and Partners – The most influential Middle East and international corporations

New Champions – Innovative businesses harnessing technology to drive future growth

Public Figures – Ministers, public-sector leaders and policy-makers committed to improving the state of Middle East

Technology Pioneers – Companies developing life-changing technologies with the potential for long-term impact on business and society

Young Global Leaders – Leaders under the age of 40 providing insight into the priorities and expectations of future generations

Civil Society Organizations – Leaders driving social progress from non-governmental, labour and faith-based organizations

Global Shapers – Individuals under the age of 30 selected for their leadership potential

Social Entrepreneurs – Leaders driving social change with innovative business solutions and partnership models

Young Scientists – Exceptional researchers producing ground-breaking work across disciplines

Faculty and Global Future Council Members – Top experts generating insight through thought leadership and interdisciplinary collaboration

Cultural Leaders – Renowned artists challenging assumptions about technology, sharing visions of the future and building bridges on global issues

Media Leaders – Publishers, editors-in-chief, columnists and opinion leaders from top media outlets

Frequently asked questions

How will the meeting be structured?

The programme will feature innovative formats to generate insight, spark inspiration and drive impact. These formats include plenary and arena sessions, interactive panel and media sessions, issue briefings and hubs.

Where will the meeting take place?

The meeting will take place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

What does registration include?

Registration includes access to all sessions, including lunches and dinners.

What is the working language of the meeting?

Most sessions will be held in English. Simultaneous interpretation in Arabic and French will be offered.

Can my spouse participate in the meeting?

Due to space limitations at the venue, we welcome spouse participation at the welcome lunch, cultural soirée and farewell dinner. Please contact your Forum engagement manager for any questions.

By when do I need to register?

Participation in this meeting is by invitation. The deadline for registration is **5 March 2020**. We strongly recommend that you register as early as possible due to limited capacity.

Where will I stay?

PublicisLive, service provider of logistics and key support services to the World Economic Forum, will arrange accommodation for participants who request hotel booking assistance on [TopLink](#). Please request hotel booking assistance when registering your delegation on [TopLink](#).

Do I need a visa?

The World Economic Forum cannot assist with visa provision. Please check with the Saudi Arabian embassy or consulate nearest you for visa requirements. You can also find some visa information [here](#).

Where do I find additional information about the programme?

When you register, you will receive access to [TopLink](#), the Forum's online collaboration and interaction platform, where you can find the programme and other details.

Who do I contact for more information?

Please send your enquiry to MiddleEast@weforum.org.

