

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/27/CRP.4
12 April 2012
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Twenty-seventh session
Beirut, 7-10 May 2012

**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TUNIS AGENDA
FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY**

1. During 2011, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) produced a new edition of the *Regional Profile of the Information Society in Western Asia*. The 2011 edition is the fifth in a series of biennial publications which began in 2003. The profile falls within the framework of follow-up activities to the outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). It examines the status of implementation of information societies in ESCWA member countries, measures the progress made in building such societies and compares the performance of the region with that of other regions throughout the world. The 2011 profile concluded that the outlook for the implementation of information societies in Western Asia is optimistic, that the rate of the adoption and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is higher than it was in 2005, that costs are comparatively lower and that Governments and other stakeholders are paying closer attention to the ICT sector.
2. ESCWA uses the Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region (ISPER) as a supplemental tool to track the progress of the implementation of WSIS outcomes in the region. ISPER is a dynamic, bilingual (English/Arabic), database-driven and open-source application which contains updated versions of the regional and national profiles of the information society as well as sections dealing with various information society topics. The portal also provides real-time discussion forums to WSIS stakeholders and is connected to the ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS) which allows users to search for statistics related to the implementation of WSIS in the region.
3. During 2011, ESCWA published a study entitled *Promoting the ICT Sector to Meet the Challenges of the Knowledge Economy*. The study reviewed the status of the ICT sector in the region, outlined obstacles and challenges in the current economic situation, assessed the role of Governments and gaps that hinder the needed enabling environments. The study identified the socio-economic priorities related of the ICT sector in the ESCWA region, proposed actions to enhance the contribution of the ICT sector to the socio-economic development of ESCWA member countries and presented case studies of the contribution of the ICT sector to economic growth in selected member countries. Finally, the study highlighted methodologies and indicators to measure the contribution of the ICT sector in national economies.
4. A workshop entitled Promoting and Benchmarking the ICT Sector in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 10-11 May 2011) aimed at creating awareness of solutions for the development of a more productive ICT sector in the ESCWA region and presented an opportunity for participants to contribute to the enhancement of the above-mentioned study. The event also sought to build the capacity of member countries to benchmark the ICT sector and to create policies, mechanisms and modalities for promoting the impact of the sector on socio-economic development.

5. ESCWA organized two interrelated workshops on the Delivery of e-Services in Civil Society, held in Beirut on 28-29 December 2009 and 29 November 2010. The workshops aimed at increasing the awareness, capacities and capabilities of selected non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the ESCWA region to provide and use e-commerce services that are based on the priorities and development needs of citizens and communities. They also looked into the impact that portal technologies and e-commerce applications may have on the sustainability of NGOs. Furthermore, the workshops encouraged NGOs to use existing e-commerce applications in order to increase economic opportunities and to expand market and client bases. A web-based forum complemented the workshops and was used by NGOs to discuss and assess their progress with respect to promoting and using e-commerce services, creating new economic opportunities, expanding outreach and encouraging the participation of communities.

6. During 2010, ESCWA organized the Workshop on the Management and Sustainability of Knowledge Hubs (Khartoum, 11-14 January 2010). Its main objectives were to bring together telecentre managers in order to build relationships that lead to the strengthening of knowledge networks and to provide training on the establishment and management of small business ventures. Further activities included workshops in Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic on issues related to the sustainability of the knowledge network beyond the lifetime of the project. An additional meeting included an evaluation exercise that assessed the successes and shortcomings of the project, created a steering committee for the knowledge network and recommended the creation of a follow-up project that will build on the success of the ESCWA project on Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities (KN4DC).

7. In addition, ESCWA organized two complementary workshops that drew an audience of high-level decision makers and experts in science, technology and innovation (STI) methodologies and policies (Beirut, 11-12 November 2009 and 18-20 January 2010). The workshops aimed at developing the capacity of member countries to establish STI observatories. Training was provided on the impact of STI on socio-economic development, the guidelines for setting up national and regional STI observatories, STI indicators, identification of national agencies that could create and manage national STI observatories, the importance of establishing networks and building partnerships between STI policymakers in the region and of partnering with universities on technology research and transfer.

8. During 2009 and 2010, ESCWA organized several workshops that aimed at promoting the importance of statistics and data collection. They included theoretical and hands-on training sessions on the creation and measurement of indicators and the use of various statistical systems with an emphasis on ESIS, a system that was fully developed in-house. The workshops also addressed the role that data collection and analysis could play in the decision-making process and its impact on the socio-economic development of member countries.

9. Recognizing the role that STI can play in the development of the economies of the region, the ESCWA Technology Centre was established in 2010. Situated in Amman, Jordan, the Centre contributes to the strengthening of national STI systems, develops the capabilities of ESCWA member countries in problem solving and policy formulation and fosters synergy and complementarity at the regional level in the application of technology.

10. In carrying out its mandate, the Centre implemented several capacity building initiatives in 2011. Meetings were held in cooperation with the Royal Scientific Society in Jordan and the Federation of Chambers in Lebanon, on the Promotion of South-South Cooperation in Technology Transfer (Amman, 20-21 April 2011 and Beirut, 25-26 October 2011). Participants discussed priority areas of cooperation in technology transfer and shared best practice and successful case studies of matters related to water, energy, agriculture, information, communication, manufacturing, construction, technological innovation and technology for education.

11. In cooperation with the Institute of Physics, the National Council for Scientific Research of Lebanon and the Lebanese Industrial Research Achievements Program, the Centre organized a workshop on Entrepreneurship for Scientists and Engineers (Beirut, 13-16 September 2011). The workshop was hosted by

Berytech in Beirut and attracted participants from universities and small and medium enterprises. It aimed at introducing scientists and engineers to the process of innovation, generation and protection of intellectual property, technology transfer and commercialization of inventions. Discussions focused on scientists and engineers as inventors and entrepreneurs, technology transfer, the concept of intellectual property, basics of patenting, innovation tools and decision-making for start-up companies.

12. In cooperation with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) office in Amman, the Centre organized a Workshop on Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer for Universities and Research Institutions (Amman, 16-17 November 2011). The workshop aimed at enhancing and strengthening the capacity of the region's policymakers in matters related to the development, ownership, management, strategic use and commercialization of intellectual property and technology transfer.

13. To propagate the findings and recommendations of the study entitled *Building Trust in e-Services in the ESCWA Region*, ESCWA held a workshop (Beirut, 25-27 May 2010) aimed at raising the awareness of policymakers and sharing best practice between member countries on building trust, securing data, protecting personal data and individual privacy and developing national policies to protect cyberspace applications from threats. It covered various issues related to building trust in e-services including national and legal frameworks, best practice and experience from the ESCWA region with a special focus on the Lebanese experience in the banking sector. Recommendations concerned the formulation of national strategies and plans of action for trust-building and security in using e-services and called for training for judges and lawyers on the application of cyberlegislation and for launching national and regional awareness campaigns on methods and measures for the ethical use and safety of the digital environment.

14. Over the past few years, ESCWA has worked to help member countries improve their legislative and regulatory frameworks to close the gap between the region and the developed world. Taking into consideration the recommendations of regional legal experts, ESCWA launched a project in 2009 entitled *Regional Harmonization of Cyberlegislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World*. The project aims at bridging regional legislative gaps in ESCWA member countries, preventing the illicit and illegal use of cyberspace and mapping out a course of action that will foster the creation of an enabling environment conducive to the formation of harmonious legislation in the region. During 2010, ESCWA conducted research and compiled reports which presented an up-to-date picture of the status of cyberlegislation in 18 Arab countries.

15. During 2011, ESCWA carried out several activities related to the cyberlegislation project. These included:

- The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Regional Harmonization of Cyberlegislation (Beirut, 16-17 February 2011) aimed at promoting the advantages of the harmonization of cyberlegislation across the Arab region. This EGM reviewed, discussed and evaluated improvements to six directives proposed for the harmonization of cyberlegislation. During this EGM, ESCWA proposed the establishment of a regional network of experts and institutions working on cyberlegislation in the region;
- The Workshop on ESCWA Directives for the Regional Harmonization of Cyberlegislation in the Arab Region (Beirut 13-15 September 2011) aimed at building the capacity of legislators on the application of the ESCWA cyberlegislation directives in the formulation of national cyberlaws, the review and adjustment of existing ones and at promoting the advantages of cyberlegislation harmonization across the Arab region;
- ESCWA staff members participated in international events to promote the project and raise awareness on the importance of cyberlegislation, including the fifth International Conference on Theory and Practice of Economic Governance (Tallinn, 26-28 September 2011), the second Gulf

Cooperation Council e-Government Awards and Conference (Kuwait, 13-15 November 2011), the Arab Women and ICT Summit (Rabat, 6-7 December 2011) and the Fifth Arab Industrial Information Networks Conference (Rabat, 20-22 December 2011).

16. ESCWA organized the EGM on Enabling Environment for the Development of Arabic e-Services (Beirut, 8-9 March 2011) to examine factors that promote an enabling environment for Arabic e-services. It reviewed the key strengths and weaknesses of the region and the available opportunities. The EGM provided a platform for participants to share their experience and best practice, discuss the requirements for catalysing an enabling environment for the development of e-services in Arabic, identify major challenges and raise awareness of the role that native languages can play in socio-economic development.

17. In partnership with the League of Arab States, ESCWA organized an EGM on the Regional Road Map for Internet Governance (Beirut, 25-26 October 2010). The discussions focused on a proposed regional road map for Internet governance, a proposal for an Arab Internet Governance Forum and public consultations on proposed registry policies for two Arab top-level domains (TDLs).

18. ESCWA and the League of Arab States co-organized the Partnership Building Forum for the Implementation of the Arab TLDs “.arab” & “عرب.” (Cairo, 5-6 July 2011). The objectives of the forum were to find prospective partners for the Arab TLDs registry and to enhance awareness of the importance of the domain name industry and of the strategic opportunity posed by the Arab TLDs registry. The forum aimed to engage potential collaborators from the registry, marketing and funding/investment domains and to build related capacity among Internet-related business entities in the region including Internet service providers (ISPs), registry operators, registrars and TLD managers.

19. In accordance with the goal of WSIS to more effectively measure the information society, in 2010 ESCWA provided Arabic versions of key publications including *Core ICT Indicators* and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development *Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Information Economy, 2009 Revised Edition*.

20. During 2011, ESCWA carried out two related activities. The first was the EGM on Standardizing Information Society Measurements in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 3-4 May 2011). Its main objective was to examine the data collection methodologies and measurement models presently available to the ESCWA region, with particular emphasis on regional and transnational comparability. Participants identified difficulties in accurately representing context-sensitive, real-world conditions in a measurement model which can be applied at the global, regional and national levels. The second activity was a workshop on Standardizing Information Society Measurement Models in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 14-15 December 2011). Its main objective was to examine information society measurement models presently available to the ESCWA region with emphasis on the standardization and normalization of methodologies. Participants discussed possible improvements to the currently established measurement models in order to achieve better benchmarking between ESCWA member countries and enhance region-to-region comparability.
