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REPORT

ROUNDTABLE ON INFORMATION SOCIETY INDICATORS AND PROFILES IN WESTERN ASIA BEIRUT, 4-5 OCTOBER 2004

Summary

The Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia was organized by the Information and Communication Technology Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and held at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut on 4 and 5 October 2004. The Roundtable was the third in a series of meetings organized by ESCWA in 2004 as part of ESCWA preparatory activities for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), to be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005.

The following issues were discussed during the Roundtable: (a) the compilation of indicators and indices on the information and communication technologies (ICTs) used throughout the world and in the ESCWA region in particular; (b) a set of core indicators and indices for measuring and monitoring the basic dimensions of the information society (IS) in the ESCWA region and the Arab world; (c) the responses of national statistics offices (NSOs) to the questionnaire on the status in their countries of IS statistics; (d) the ESCWA database and the global database on ICT statistics and indices; (e) the building of NSO capacities.

The Roundtable compiled a list of proposed core ICT indicators and indices that are in keeping with global trends and of interest to the region and the Arab world; formulated a joint strategy; and suggested appropriate methodologies for the compilation of the indicators and indices necessary to evaluate ICT. A regional working group on ICT indicators was established. The outcomes of the meeting will be presented for adoption to the Second Regional Preparatory Conference for WSIS, to be held in Damascus on 22 and 23 November 2004, in preparation for submission to the Thematic Meeting on Measuring the Information Society, scheduled to be held in Geneva in February 2005.

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Introduction

1. The building of an information society (IS) requires the continuous monitoring of a set of indicators that make it possible to measure the progress made towards that goal. The Plan of Action that was the outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the first phase of which was held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003, urged that the indicators selected should assist decision makers in monitoring and analysing the progress made in building an IS, with respect to evaluating national and regional capacities to reap the benefits of ICT, identifying indices with comparable countries and avoiding a new type of economic alienation and social isolation, known as “the digital divide”. The Plan of Action requires that priority should be given to the setting up of coherent and internationally comparable indicator systems, taking into account different levels of development.
2. Given the need for improved data on IS indicators, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at its eleventh session, held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, from 13 to 18 June 2004, announced a global initiative in response to universal demand for the formulation of IS statistics. The Plan of Action that was the outcome of the first phase of WSIS states that all countries and regions should develop tools so as to provide statistical information on the Information Society, with basic indicators and analysis of its key dimensions. Priority should be given to setting up coherent and internationally comparable indicator systems, taking into account different levels of development. The aim of the initiative, in which ESCWA and the other United Nations regional commissions are playing a major role, is to bring together the key stakeholders in ICT statistics measurement, with a view to establishing a global partnership for the measurement of ICT statistics for development and narrowing the digital divide at the international level and, in particular, in developing countries. The partnership includes the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, ESCWA, the United Nations ICT Task Force, UNCTAD, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS), the World Bank, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in addition to a number of national statistics offices (NSOs).
3. Against this background, the Information and Communication Technology Division of ESCWA held the Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia in Beirut on 4 and 5 October 2004. The Roundtable was the third meeting in a series of activities to be implemented by ESCWA at the regional level in 2004 in preparation for the second phase of WSIS, which will be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005.
4. The aim of the Roundtable was to increase the use of ICT indicators in the economic and social development process; to propose and adopt a set of core indicators and indices appropriate for ESCWA member countries that are consistent with those used internationally; to discuss appropriate methodologies for the collection and analysis of statistics; to identify the role of the NSOs and other institutions involved in developing IS statistics collation programmes and consider ways of strengthening their capacities; and to broaden ESCWA activities relating to the development of regional and global databases on ICT statistics.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. The following recommendations were adopted at the conclusion of the Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia, held in Beirut, during 4-5 October 2004.
 - (a) Adoption of the proposed list of core information and communication technology (ICT) indicators, as attached;
 - (b) Formation of a regional technical working group on ICT indicators, the tasks of which include:
 - (i) Facilitating dialogue between all stakeholders in the Arab countries, concerned with the collection of data related to measuring ICT indicators, in order to standardize the ICT definitions, the required data for the calculation of each indicator, and the methodology used;

- (ii) Participating in the development of an Arab list of core ICT indicators for measuring and monitoring the main areas of the information society, which will be presented to the Second Regional Preparatory Conference for WSIS, to be held in Damascus, in November 2004, and later to a global conference that will take place in Geneva, in early 2005;
 - (iii) Conveying the Arab views in international forums and conferences on statistics and measurements related to information society indicators;
 - (iv) Specifying the needs of National Statistics Offices (NSOs) and other bodies working in the field of statistics and measurement of information society indicators, and formulating the necessary capacity-building plans for strengthening their capabilities, including training of technical staff, and securing the financing needed for the implementation of special censuses for data collection, compilation, analysis, and dissemination;
 - (v) Formulating databases specifications for ICT indicators, to constitute guidelines for building regional and international databases.
- (c) ESCWA is to design, implement, and manage an electronic forum, through which the above-mentioned technical working group can meet for group consultations and exchange of views;
- (d) Addition of a programme, to the Regional Plan of Action for Building the Information Society, which is related to information society indicators and measurements, and includes the following projects:
- (i) Development of a list of core ICT indicators for measuring and monitoring the information society and its main areas in the Arab region;
 - (ii) Development of an Arab ICT indicators database, and merging it with the international database;
 - (iii) Strengthening the capabilities of NSOs in the Arab region to be able to collect and analyse the required data for calculation of these indicators.
- (e) The recommendations made by the Roundtable should be submitted to the sixth session of the Statistical Committee for the approval of the heads and representatives of member country NSOs and of international institutions that are members of the global Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development.

II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

6. In the course of the Roundtable, various issues were considered. Set forth below is a brief review thereof.

A. THE COMPILATION OF INDICATORS AND INDICES ON THE ICTS USED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND IN THE ESCWA REGION IN PARTICULAR

7. The ICT Division presented the study that it prepared on ICT indicators in the ESCWA region, which will be published in Arabic and English. The study sets out standards for measuring and monitoring progress towards the goals that were identified in the WSIS Plan of Action, and the indicators and indices necessary to measure and monitor the principal IS dimensions. The study also covers ICT indicators and indices. It concludes by identifying a core set of indicators and indices for measuring and monitoring the principal IS dimensions in the ESCWA region.

B. A SET OF CORE INDICATORS AND INDICES FOR MEASURING AND MONITORING BASIC IS DIMENSIONS IN THE ESCWA REGION AND THE ARAB WORLD

8. In the course of the Roundtable, a number of suggested core indicators and indices for measuring and monitoring principal IS dimensions were considered. The proposals included the UNCTAD list of core

indicators in the business sector, and the UNESCO set of core indicators in the field of education and scientific research. OECD presented a list containing core indicators in the business, commercial, readiness, household and ICT sectors, while the ESCWA ICT Division put forward a list of core indicators and indices for measuring and monitoring the principal IS dimensions in the ESCWA region.

9. Furthermore, the ESCWA Centre for Women proposed a list of indicators for measuring women's IS empowerment. In view of the importance of those indicators, and given the fact that the global questionnaire contains no indicators or indices relating to women, a questionnaire was distributed during the meeting to NSO representatives, with a view to taking an inventory of existing and planned indicators.

C. NSO RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE STATUS IN THEIR COUNTRIES OF IS STATISTICS

10. The questionnaire constitutes one part of the global initiative relating to ICT measurement for development. That initiative was prepared by the United Nations regional commissions with the following main aims: to collect data on ICT statistics; to formulate the core IS indicators; to make available technical assistance; and to promote the interchange of knowledge.

11. The questionnaire, which was divided into four sections in order to facilitate completion, was designed to be completed electronically by NSOs with varying levels of ICT statistics sophistication. The first section contains three general questions about ICT statistics; the second part focuses on ICT statistics in household surveys; the third relates to business and enterprise surveys; and the fourth includes additional questions about ICT in such other sectors as production, education and health.

12. The data that were collected by means of the questionnaire will contribute to the coordination of IS measurement at the global level. The data will be accessible to all the participating NSOs and analysed and discussed at a series of regional capacity-building meetings that will be held in cooperation with interested institutions. It was recommended at the first phase of WSIS that such regional meetings should be held, with a view to providing input on IS measurement for a global summary meeting which is scheduled for February 2005.

13. The report (CES/SEM.52/1) issued on 16 January 2004 on the Joint United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)/UNCTAD/UIS/ITU/OECD/Eurostat Statistical Workshop on Monitoring the Information Society, which was held in Geneva on 8 and 9 December 2003, recommends that the United Nations regional commissions should, in cooperation with competent regional organizations, commit themselves to organize, within each region, one ICT-related meeting on the monitoring of IS issues. Both users and producers of official statistics should work together in organizing those meetings, which are intended to provide input for a global summary meeting in February 2005 in order to prepare an action plan for the next WSIS Summit in Tunis.

14. In July 2004, ESCWA sent to NSOs in each member country a questionnaire in Arabic and English, with an explanatory attachment in both languages, requesting that each section should be completed by the most appropriate, officially designated representatives of those offices. The questionnaire was to be completed and returned by the end of August 2004. Responses were received from the relevant offices in 10 countries, namely, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Discussion of the questionnaire constituted one of the main activities of the Roundtable: responses were analysed and ways considered of strengthening NSO capacities in the light of its outcomes.

15. The ICT Division team designed and established a relational database by means of which summarized data on ICT indicators and indices as given in the completed questionnaires can monitor and retrieve. The database was so designed as to have distributive connectivity, allowing Arab NSOs in general to periodically update their data via the Internet.

16. During one Roundtable meeting, the team demonstrated how the database is used, presented the preliminary, summarized results of countries' responses to the questionnaire, and explained their implications.

D. THE ESCWA DATABASE AND THE GLOBAL DATABASE ON ICT STATISTICS AND INDICES

17. The ICT Division team presented a study on the foundations of an ICT Indicators Database which considered the design and establishment of the ESCWA ICT indicators database, including the classification of indicators and indices in the light of modern scientific systems theory. The study also identified the specifications that may be used as a basis for building both the United Nations regional commissions databases and a global database, and designs for establishing such databases. This study is available in English on the Roundtable web site.¹

E. THE BUILDING OF NSO CAPACITIES

18. NSO heads and representatives discussed the summarized outcomes of the questionnaire and the best way of building the capacities of their institutions. Issues relating to the collation of statistics were discussed, including the quality, storage and dissemination of data, methodologies for data collection, survey operations, the ideal questionnaire for ICT indicators and indices, the statistical treatment of data, relevant tools and programmes and the technical and financial support that was available or needed for those purposes.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE OF THE MEETING

19. The Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia, was held at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut on 4 and 5 October 2004.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

20. The Chief of the ESCWA ICT Division made the inaugural address on behalf of Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and ESCWA Executive Secretary. In addition to considering the subject and aims of the Roundtable, the speaker mentioned the general global trend towards remedying the digital divide and the importance of classifying that divide and expressing it as a quantity. Also noted were the relationship between those goals and the Millennium Development Goals; the global initiative to produce revised data on IS indicators; and the partnership that had been established with a view to achieving the goals of the WSIS Plan of Action that had been the outcome of the first phase, held in Geneva in 2003.

C. PARTICIPANTS

21. The Roundtable was attended by the heads and representatives of ESCWA member country NSOs; representatives of the regional and international organizations which, together with ESCWA, form the global partnership for measuring ICT; and experts in the ICT and statistics field. Annex I contains the list of participants.

D. THE AGENDA

22. The agenda for the Roundtable was as follows:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Setting the stage: overview; the global partnership initiative.

¹ The document may be accessed at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/wsis/meetings/oct04/agendaReport ICTIndicatorsDB.pdf>.

3. Contextual perspectives.
4. Towards a common set of ICT indicators.
5. NSO capacity-building.
6. Towards an international database on ICT indicators.
7. Modality of implementation: regional working group on ICT indicators and on-line communication venue.

E. DOCUMENTS

23. Annex II contains the list of documents that were submitted to the Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia.²

² The documents may also be accessed on the ESCWA web site, at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb.wsis/meetings/main.html>.

Annex I

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title
No Symbol	Information note
No Symbol	مذكرة توضيحية
No Symbol	Agenda
No Symbol	Information Society Indicators for Western Asia
No Symbol	Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development
No Symbol	الشراكة في قياس أثر تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصالات من أجل التنمية
No Symbol	OECD Methodology for Measuring the Information Society
No Symbol	OECD Methodology for Measuring ICT
No Symbol	UNCTAD - Measuring ICT usage in enterprises
No Symbol	The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Communication Statistics Programme
No Symbol	Questionnaire on Status of Information Society Statistics in National Statistics Offices in ESCWA
No Symbol	A list of core indicators of household/individual and business use of ICTs
No Symbol	Suggested Core ICT Indicators for the ESCWA Region
No Symbol	E-readiness/E-Learning assessment Report
No Symbol	Foundations of ICT Indicators Database
No Symbol	ESCWA ICT Indicators Database (time and space series)
No Symbol	البيانات والمؤشرات المختصة بمجتمع المعلومات في سلطنة عمان
No Symbol	The role of ICT in Qatar's socio-economic development
No Symbol	Women Empowerment Index in the ICT Sector
No Symbol	التوصيات المقدمة إلى الدورة السادسة للجنة الإحصائية في الإسكوا
No Symbol	Agreed list of core ICT indicators

**ROUNDTABLE ON INFORMATION SOCIETY INDICATORS AND PROFILES FOR WESTERN ASIA
AGREED LIST OF CORE ICT INDICATORS: 5 OCTOBER 2004**

GLOBAL CORE		OECD list	Available	Possible sources
ESWA list				
Basic infrastructure and access				
1	Main fixed telephone lines per 100 inhabitants	✓	ITU	
2	Mobile telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants	✓	ITU	
3	Residential fixed line telephone monthly subscription costs	✓	ITU	
4	Local fixed line call costs for three minutes	✓	ITU	
5	Business telephone monthly subscription costs	✓	ITU	
6	Mobile telephone subscription costs	✓	ITU	
7	Local mobile call costs for three minutes		ITU/UIS	
8	Televisions per 100 inhabitants	✓	ITU	
9	Number of PCs per 100 inhabitants	✓	ITU/ISC	ISP surveys
10	Internet hosts per 10,000 inhabitants	✓		
11	Number of Internet subscribers per 100 inhabitants	✓		
12	International bandwidth per capita		ITU	
13	Broadband Internet subscribers per 1,000 inhabitants		ITU	
ICT sector				
14	Percentage of total workforce involved in ICT sector*	✓		Business surveys
15	ICT imports and exports as percentage of total imports and exports	✓	Trade databases (UN COMTRA DE)	
16	Value added in the ICT sector (as a percentage of total value added)			Business surveys

READINESS

ESCWA list		OECD list	Available	Possible sources
Household				
17	Household Internet access cost per month	✓	ITU	Household surveys/census
18	Percentage of households with Internet access	✓		Household surveys/census
19				Household surveys/census
20	Households with a PC			Household surveys/census
21	Individuals accessing the Internet by primary access point**			Household surveys/census
21	Individuals using the Internet by activity			Household surveys/census
Business				
22	Percentage of businesses with PCs	✓		Business surveys
23	Percentage of businesses with Internet access	✓		Business surveys
24	Percentage of businesses with a web site	✓		Business surveys
25				Business surveys
26	Percentage of employees using PCs			Business surveys
27	Percentage of employees using the Internet			Business surveys
27	Percentage of businesses receiving orders over Internet			Business surveys
28	Percentage of businesses placing orders over Internet			Business surveys
29				Business surveys
30	Value of orders received over the Internet (as a percentage of total value of orders)			Business surveys
Education				
31	Enrolled student to PC ratio in primary and secondary schools			Ministry of Education
32	Percentage of primary and secondary schools having Internet access for students for study purposes			Ministry of Education
33	Percentage of students enrolled in tertiary education in an ICT field or an ICT-dominated field (of the total number of students)**		UIS database	Ministry of Higher Education
34	Percentage of ICT-qualified teachers in primary and secondary schools (of the total number of teachers)			Ministry of Education
35	Percentage of tertiary education institutions with e-learning courses (of the total number of tertiary education institutions)			Ministry of Higher Education

INTENSITY (USAGE)

REGIONAL SUPPLEMENT

ESWA list		OECD list	Available	Possible sources
READINESS	1	Cost of PC relative to average individual income		Household / business surveys
	Policies/Regulatory frameworks			
	2	Existence of official ICT policy and related strategies in one or more sectors		Government surveys
	3	Number of active or completed Government-sponsored initiatives in ICT with national scope		Government surveys
INTENSITY	Local content			
	4	Number of Arabised software applications written locally		Business surveys
	5	Volume of local data available online (number of Web pages)		Business and Government surveys
	Government			
	6	Percentage of Government agencies with online (interactive) services		Government surveys
	7	Volume of governmental information available online (in megabytes)		Government surveys
	8	Percentage of online Government services (of a total number of services)		Government surveys

* Disaggregated by gender.

** Disaggregated by age and gender.

*** Disaggregated by gender.