

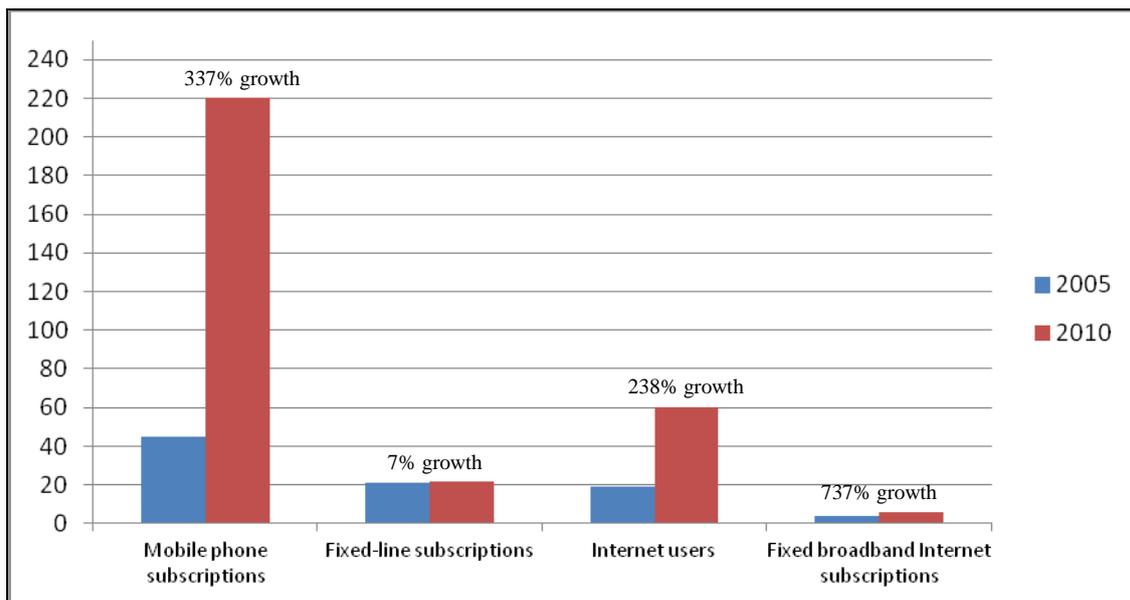
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

LEAFLET ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The development of the information society in the ESCWA region encompasses many different facets and variables. Broad trends are very hopeful. Most countries are performing better now than they were six years ago. The rates of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) adoption and use are higher; costs have gone down; and more attention is being given to the sector.

The Arab region has taken significant steps towards bridging the digital divide and building an information society. The spread of ICTs throughout the region has grown; penetration rates have drastically increased, and the adoption of broadband technologies is on the rise. The region has also witnessed a growing adoption and use of ICT applications and e-services, and a greater participation of Governments and stakeholders in building the information society.

ESCWA Region Growth in ICTs (2005-2010)



Consequently, significant investments are underway to increase integration with regional and global communications networks. These efforts will make it easier for ESCWA member countries to address issues such as access to information and knowledge, capacity-building, regional integration and the increase of digital Arabic content.

The Role of ESCWA

To support ESCWA member countries in their efforts to build the information society, and to address the aforementioned challenges and capitalize on opportunities, ESCWA/ICTD has provided a credible platform bridging national, regional, and global efforts. To realise this role, ESCWA has employed a variety of tools, including meetings, publications, advisory services, online presence and field projects.

1. Portals

ESCWA has created the Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region (ISPER)¹ which aims to track the progress of World Summit on the Information Society implementation in ESCWA member countries. ISPER is a bilingual (English/Arabic), database-driven, open-source application that showcases ESCWA publications, such as the Regional and National Profiles of the Information Society. It contains information society topics championed by ESCWA, such as cyber legislation, Internet governance, and the promotion of an effective and innovative ICT sector in the region. It provides real-time discussion forums that are used by information society stakeholders to discuss relevant topics. During 2012, ESCWA migrated its content management system to Drupal, an open-source platform that improved and simplified the back-end operations of the portal.

2. Meetings²

- During January 2012, ESCWA hosted the final meeting between the Steering Committee of the Arab Top Level Domain project³ and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of the United Arab Emirates.



- ESCWA and the League of Arab States jointly organized the Conference and Public Consultation to Establish the Arab Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which took place at the end of January 2012.



- During February 2012, ESCWA, the Arab Lawyers' Union and the Arab Center for the Rule of Law and Integrity organized a capacity-building workshop on ESCWA Directives of Cyber Legislation in the Arab Region.
- During March 2012, ESCWA organized, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, a workshop on Developing and Harmonizing Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab Region.
- During October 2012, ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates University College of Law, organized a capacity-building workshop on Cyber Legislation in the Arab Region.
- Also in October, ESCWA organized the First Annual Meeting of the Arab IGF in Kuwait, with the theme "Better Internet for a Better Arab World".
- In December 2012, ESCWA organized a seminar on Legal and Regulatory Requirements for a Sustainable Knowledge Society in the Arab Region. The main objective of the seminar was to discuss the legal and regulatory frameworks of a knowledge society in the Arab region.



¹ For more information, please visit: <http://isper.escwa.un.org/>.

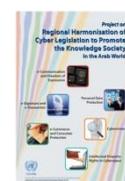
² For more information, please visit: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=ictd>.

³ For more information, please visit: <http://cyberlegislation.escwa.un.org/en/node/1113>.

- During October 2012, ESCWA organized, in partnership with the Jordanian Royal Scientific Society, an expert group meeting that examined the mechanisms of partnership between various digital Arab content stakeholders, such as ICT ministries and regulatory authorities, innovation funds, business and technology incubators, ICT associations, and international and regional organizations.
- During April 2013, ESCWA organized an expert group meeting on the role of ICT in socio-economic development.
- During May 2013, ESCWA organized a conference on Investment and Finance of the ICT Sector in the Arab Region.
- Also during May 2013, ESCWA organized an expert group meeting on Investment, Research, Development and Innovation in the ICT Sector.

3. Projects

- In 2009, ESCWA began implementing a project entitled “Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World”.⁴ Its main objective is to enhance regional integration through the harmonization of national cyber legislation in the Arab region.



- ESCWA is implementing a project entitled “Digital Arabic Content Industry in the ESCWA Region”.⁵ The project aims to support the growth of the digital Arabic content (DAC) industry by promoting the development of DAC applications in ICT incubation facilities.



- ESCWA is executing a project entitled “The Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders (AIGLE) in the ESCWA Region”. The goal of AIGLE is to help ESCWA member Governments build enhanced capacities among policymakers to narrow ICT human resources gaps, reduce barriers to ICT adoption and promote the application of ICT to accelerate socio-economic development and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

4. Studies⁶

- ESCWA published a study entitled “Status of the Digital Arabic Content Industry in the ESCWA Region” that describes and assesses the DAC industry.
- ESCWA prepared a study titled “Business Models for Digital Arabic Content” that updates previously developed business models for start-ups and SMEs in the DAC industry and reflects the most recent innovations, whether in mobile applications or social media.
- ESCWA published a study entitled “Status of the Digital Arabic Content Industry in the Arab Region” to shed light on developments in DAC, the global digital content industry, the latest technology trends, and a numbers of success stories from the region.

⁴ For more information, please visit: <http://cyberlegislation.escwa.un.org/en/node/2087>.

⁵ For more information, please visit: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/projects/dac/>.

⁶ ICTD studies and publications can be downloaded from the ESCWA website: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pubdetails.asp?division=ICTD>.

- For over nine years, ESCWA has actively promoted and supported cultural diversity on the Internet by encouraging and facilitating the use of the Arabic language in top-level domains. ESCWA believes that Arabic Internet domain names will help overcome the barriers that keep a large segment of the population, namely unilingual Arabic speakers, from being active in cyberspace. Within this context, ESCWA cooperated with the League of Arab States to apply for two generic top-level domain names, “.arab” and its equivalent in Arabic, “.عرب”. It is worth noting that ESCWA has also played a valuable role in developing standards for the use of Arabic in domain names.
- In 2013, ESCWA prepared a study, Competitiveness of the ICT Sector in the Arab Region: Innovation and Investment Imperatives, which sheds light on innovation and investment in the ICT sector and explores policy measures that could be adopted to improve its competitiveness in the Arab region.
- Also in 2013, ESCWA prepared a study entitled “Impact of Selected e-Services on Socio-economic Development in the Arab Region” which assesses selected indicators and frameworks for measuring the impact of e-services on socio-economic development. This assessment is needed both to evaluate what can be measured, and more importantly, to serve as a tool for policymakers in the region in order to recommend initiatives, leading to the development of better e-services with enhanced socio-economic impact.
- ESCWA prepared the “Regional Profile of the Information Society – 2013” which aims to depict the status of information societies in the Arab region, measure the progress made in building these societies and evaluate the current status of each member country.

5. International and regional cooperation

Many of the above-mentioned ESCWA initiatives were carried out in partnership with regional and international organizations. Collaborative efforts are coordinated primarily with the Governments of ESCWA countries, non-governmental organizations, a host of stakeholders from the private sector, other United Nations Regional Commissions, specialized United Nations agencies and programmes, and the League of Arab States. Below is a sample of activities that ESCWA co-organized with regional and international partners.

- With the Government of Jordan: the establishment of the ESCWA Technology Centre (ETC).⁷
- With the League of Arab States: a regional workshop on “Developing and Harmonizing Cyber Legislation in the Arab Region” (Cairo, 14-15 March). Throughout 2012, ESCWA and the League of Arab States worked extensively to establish, launch and lead the inception phase of the Arab Internet Governance Forum process (see section “MT1: Internet governance” for details).
- With the private sector: The ESCWA Technology Centre, an ESCWA offshoot, partners regularly with national and regional innovation hubs and financial institutions to organize commercialization tours for technology investors in order to help them identify suitable investments and to help inventors develop their ideas into profitable products and services.
- With UN-DESA: In November 2012, ETC and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a regional consultation process in support of the 2013 annual ministerial review on innovation, science and technology for sustainable development.

⁷ <http://etc-un.org/pr/default.aspx>.

- With UNODC: During April 2012, ESCWA and UNODC organized a workshop aimed at collecting data on the state of cyber crime and cyber legislation in the Arab region. Through its participation in this event, ESCWA ensured that this vital data collection exercise was well-adapted to the needs of member countries.

Main ICTD work themes

The following are the most important thematic areas that ICTD is currently working on:

1. Follow-up on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Tunis Agenda and Geneva Plan of Action
2. Beyond WSIS+10 and the post-2015 development agenda (2015-2025)
3. Digital Arabic content
4. Building trust and confidence in cyberspace
5. Profiling and measuring the Information Society
6. Internet governance/Internet Governance Forum
7. Internet Arabic domain names system: Promoting the ICT sector for the transition to a knowledge economy
8. E-government, smart government, and public administration reform
9. E-governance, e-participation and e-democracy
10. Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders in the ESCWA region
11. Space and Satellite Technologies for Development
12. Innovation systems
13. Technology transfer and commercialization
14. Production partnerships