

## Main activities of the project

The activities planned for this project are the following:

- **A1** Produce a report that will: (a) Identify major areas of concern to ESCWA member countries; (b) Update the status of cyber legislation in the Arab region (c) Propose a framework for the regional harmonisation of cyber legislation in the Arab World;
- **A2** Taking into account past international experience, mainly the European Commission's, to produce a set of directives which: (a) Comprise text models of cyber laws that may easily be implemented at the national level; (b) Cover 6 areas; (c) Include a set of coherent definitions of all legal terms used within; (d) Include a detailed introductory statement of their fundamental purposes and guiding principles;
- **A3** Organize an expert group meeting, involving professionals from governmental entities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to review the directives that were proposed for the enhancement and harmonization of cyber legislation in the Arab region;
- **A4** Organize two regional workshops to provide hands-on training to policy- and decision-makers on the ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives and their applications at national and regional levels;
- **A5** Provide advisory services to ESCWA member countries and - upon request - other Arab countries on the drafting of legislation that would be in harmony with the ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives;
- **A7** Promote and assist in the establishment of a virtual network of governmental, private sector and NGO institutions concerned with the promotion of the ICT sector. This activity will set a strong basis for the sustainability of the project by helping various stakeholders interact and exchange knowledge during the implementation and after the completion of the project;
- **A6** Organize a seminar on the legal and regulatory requirements for a sustainable knowledge society in the Arab Region to review the results of the harmonization process at the regional and sub-regional levels and provide recommendations for sustainability.



# Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World



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## Background

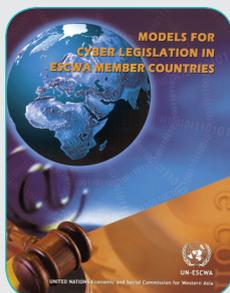
High technology sectors do not flourish if they are left to market forces alone. These sectors need a proactive and favourable environment in which to grow. An essential component of a favourable environment is the creation of a reliable legal and regulatory framework. Governments, the private sector and NGOs need to coordinate their efforts and to work together on the establishment of this framework. Most developed countries, as well as some developing countries, have already updated their legal and regulatory frameworks in line with the needs created by the adoption of new technologies, an example being the “e-Europe Initiative” which included directives for the regional harmonization of legislations to encourage regional integration. A similar effort is needed for the ESCWA region in particular and the Arab world in general.

The development of regional directives that promote the harmonization of ICT legislation and regulations sets the foundation of an enabling environment by facilitating and accelerating the use of ICT applications. In turn, this will lead to growth in the ICT sector by:

- (a) Fostering the generation of small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in the region;
- (b) Minimising problems relating to ICT market segmentation; and
- (c) Promoting the use of ICT applications in social and economic activities.

By promoting competitiveness and economic diversity, these improvements will help remedy serious problems affecting the economies of the region, namely brain drain, capital drain, unemployment and low productivity.

## Past ESCWA activities in cyber legislation



ESCWA's past efforts in cyber legislation have included a study entitled “Models for Cyber Legislation in ESCWA Member Countries”. The study reviewed the status of regional and international cyber laws and used examples of legislative principles to illustrate the benefits and challenges of enacting more comprehensive and more regionally integrated cyber legislations. Additionally, ESCWA produced a template aimed at evaluating the status of cyber legislation in member countries. ESCWA then applied this template on two member countries and prepared reports summarising the findings

The aforementioned study and the template for cyber legislation were discussed during an expert group meeting and a capacity building workshop. Experts, lawyers and judges participated in these meetings and concluded that additional efforts are needed to encourage the development of cyber regulatory frameworks in the Arab region.

## ESCWA's current cyber legislation project

ESCWA's Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) is currently carrying out a project that aims at the enhancement and harmonization of ICT legislation and regulations in the Arab region.

To facilitate the creation of an enabling environment for the ICT sector in the ESCWA region and the Arab World, with potential benefits for 22 countries, ESCWA prepared a set of directives and guidelines aimed at helping the countries of the region enhance and harmonize their legislative framework. The set includes model laws and regulations for the following areas: e-Communication and freedom of expression, e-Signature and e-Transaction, e-Commerce and consumer protection, cyber crime, personal data protection and intellectual property.

ESCWA is leading the implementation of this project in coordination with regional and international organizations working on the development of cyber legislation which include the League of Arab States, the North Africa Office of the Economic Commission for Africa and others. In addition, ESCWA is collaborating with high level experts and interacting with government organizations - mainly ministries of communication and information technology and ministries of justice - and specialized partners such as national and regional ICT societies and lawyer syndicates.

## Objective of the project

The objective of the project is to enhance regional integration and strengthen the capacity of member countries to develop the information society and build a strong and sustainable ICT sector through the development of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks.

This will lead to growth in the region's economy, particularly in the ICT sector, by:

- (a) Promoting the use of ICT applications in governmental, economic, social and cultural activities as users become more confident conducting online transactions;
- (b) Facilitating e-transactions between the countries of the region with the removal of legislative contradictions that may otherwise hinder their completion;
- (c) Enhancing regional and cross-border business and trade as extra-national consumers will be less concerned about falling into legislative vacuums;
- (d) Minimizing ICT market segmentation problems and increasing cross-border competitiveness by enabling access to wider markets for businesses which would otherwise find it difficult to sell and expand outside of their national borders.