Promoting the Knowledge Society and Information, Communication and Technology in the Arab Region

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has, with the help of the Development Account, provided support to countries in the Arab region to foster an enabling environment for the knowledge society and to develop the Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) sector. These efforts have contributed to enhancing legal frameworks on the information society, national cyber laws as well as to building capacity on ICT for Development to facilitate the transition toward a knowledge-based economy.

With the objective of enhancing regional integration and strengthen the capacity of Member States in drafting and enacting comprehensive cyber legislation, ESCWA implemented the 6th tranche Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World (0809AF) project from 2009 to 2012. ESCWA further implemented the 8th tranche Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders in the ESCWA Region (AIGLE) (1213AL) project between 2013 and 2016, with the aim of strengthening knowledge and expertise to help civil servants, policymakers and government leaders in the ESCWA region effectively plan and implement ICT initiatives.

Regional harmonization of cyber legislation

During the first project ESCWA developed and published Cyber Legislation Directives, the first of their kind to be published in the Arab region in terms of scope and completeness. The directives cover six main themes: electronic communications, e-signature and e-transactions, e-commerce and consumer protection, cybercrime, personal data protection and intellectual property in the cyber space. Each directive includes a research paper with background and justification for the directive, an introduction with explanatory notes, and a cyber law model to assist governments in drafting national laws.

Through the project, assistance was provided to eleven member countries on the review and analysis of legal gaps and on proposing new draft laws. Two regional and five national (in Algeria, Bahrain, Lebanon, Sudan and United Arab Emirates) capacity development workshops on cyber laws and the application of the directives were organized and attended by more than 350 participants including government representatives, lawyers, judges, and legal academics and researchers. The capacity building activities continued beyond the duration of the project, with ESCWA organizing and contributing to national workshops in Jordan and Bahrain and a regional workshop in Oman collectively attended by more than an additional 150 participants.
ICT for Development (ICT4D)

During the course of the second project a needs assessment survey covering 19 Western Asian countries was conducted to identify the topics of priority in the area of ICT4D. For each identified priority topic, a high quality training module was produced in Arabic with an associated Arabic-English glossary of terms and selected and adapted case studies and exercises. The project trained 104 experts from fourteen countries to become Trainers of Trainers on the AIGLE modules. The project also resulted in the preparation of eleven national training plans for the AIGLE training modules, and the adoption of these modules by several training institutions in their curriculum. Nine Western Asian countries have effectively started implementation of their national AIGLE deployment plans which are set to train an estimated 6,000 public sector employees, leaders and decision makers.
“The ICT Academy is one of the most important initiatives of ESCWA. It has a major impact on building the capabilities of public sector leaders in the Arab region and enhancing the understanding and recognition of the difference that technology makes in the development process of the various sectors of the economy.

We in Oman recognize the importance of this initiative and were able to train 150 people from various government agencies through several monthly training courses. Work is now underway on developing the national training plan for the next stage of 2016, which is expected to target different segments of the public sector.”

- Testimonial from e-Transformation Director, E-Services Division, Information Technology Authority, Oman (Source: ESCWA Annual Report 2015)

Read more about the work of ESCWA in this area:

Regional Profile of Information Society in the Arab Region, 2003-2015 (chapters 5 and 6):

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