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# Regional Profile of the Information Society in Western Asia – 2009

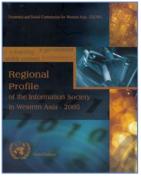
## **Background**

The Regional Profile of the Information Society in Western Asia - 2009 is published by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) within the framework of follow-up activities to the outcomes of the World Summit on the



Information Society (WSIS). It describes the current situation and the progress made in the region towards building the information society. The 2009 edition is the fourth in a series of such profiles, the first published in 2003 and thereafter in 2005 and 2007, respectively.

## **Objective**



It is crucial for ESCWA member countries to build information societies if they aspire to lay the foundations for sustainable economic development and promote the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Accordingly, this report

aims to depict the status of information societies in the ESCWA region, measure the progress made in building these societies, examine the current status of member countries and provide a comparative evaluation with other regions and the rest of the world.

The report also provides essential information on the status of the information society in the ESCWA region, thus assisting decision makers in their planning and enhancing national capacities for realizing such society. Moreover, it allows national authorities to compare their status with that of other countries in the region, thereby promoting opportunities for cooperation and regional integration in an increasingly knowledge-based economy.

# Information society areas addressed by the report

Aspects of the information society profiled by this report are mainly based on the WSIS action lines, in addition to other areas of special interest to the ESCWA region. Each of its chapters is dedicated to a specific theme, providing a comprehensive analysis, evaluation, and recommendations covering all **ESCWA** member countries, substantiated by case studies and best practices from the region.

Comprehensive analysis is provided on the following:

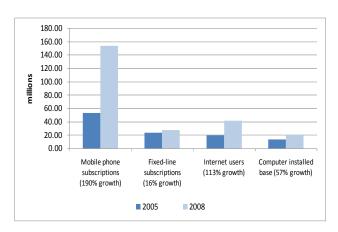
- The role of Governments and all stakeholders;
- ICT infrastructure;
- Access to information and knowledge;
- ICT capacity-building;
- Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs;
- Enabling environment;
- ICT applications;
- Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content;
- Media;
- Regional and international cooperation;
- Millennium Development Goals;
- · Building the ICT sector;

## **Findings**

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 four years ago. Information Communications Technology (ICT) adoption and use rates are higher, costs are lower and more attention is being focused on the sector.

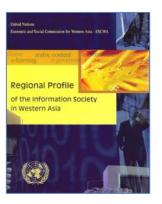
According to the 2009 edition, the ESCWA region has taken significant steps towards bridging the digital divide and building the information society. The prominence of ICTs throughout the region has grown; telecommunications penetration rates have drastically increased; and adoption of broadband technologies is on the rise. Consequently, the region has witnessed a growing adoption and use of ICT applications and e-services, and a greater participation of the Governments and all stakeholders in building the information society.

### ESCWA Region Growth in ICTs (2005 – 2008)



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

### Recommendations



While bright spots have been observed realizing the information society in the region, the report latest clearly indicates that GCC have made countries greater strides than the rest of the ESCWA member countries this regard. Nevertheless, all ESCWA

member countries, including the most advanced ones, have still to exert considerable efforts before reaching the levels attained by developed countries in this regard.

Besides the traditional applications of information and communications technologies for socio-economic development, creative solutions are necessary to achieve the MDGs. For many reasons, including armed conflicts and high population growth, the percentage of people living in poverty has increased in the ESCWA region over the past fifteen years. While ICT has a key role to play in creating job opportunities and alleviating poverty, the difficulties of development in conflict-prone areas preclude any role for ICT for development, and require different priorities and focus. While much remains to be done, realistic options exist for making concrete improvements throughout the ESCWA region.

Based on the analysis and findings of the report, several initiatives and projects may be launched to reduce the existing digital divide between rural and urban areas, among ESCWA member countries, and between the region and the more developed regions of the world. Within this context, ESCWA is fostering support for important regional projects through its Regional Plan of Action (RPoA). The RPoA has been signed by ESCWA member countries, cognizant of the vital need to collaborate and synchronize efforts in order to reduce the digital divide and press forward towards the information society.