



**UN-ESCWA**  
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

## **EGM on Enabling Environment for the Development of Arabic e-Services**

Beirut, 8-9 March, 2011

### ***Preliminary Information Note***

#### **1. Background**

e-Services have consistently shown a significant, positive impact on social and economic development. Throughout the world, there are many examples of advances in improvement of living conditions, efficiency, and productivity. In many ways, the ability to successfully create and deploy e-services is vital to modern growth. In order to have a broad-based, individually empowering and community-centric growth, e-services must be well adapted to the needs of the people they serve.

High technology sectors, including e-services, do not flourish if they are left to market forces alone. To prosper, these sectors need a proactive and favourable enabling environment which, in turn, requires the creation and maintenance of a reliable technical and regulatory framework. The International community and national governments have recognized the important role of an enabling environment for the development of the Information Society as well as the need for building confidence and security in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) dedicated action line “C6” for the improvement of the enabling environment and it dedicated action line “C5” for building confidence in the secure use of ICT. On a regional level, ESCWA discussed a subset of these issues during the EGM on ICT Applications and e-Services in the Public Sector held in 2009, and has raised awareness of these topics in its recent publications and at events such as the Workshop on Building Trust and Confidence in Arabic e-Services in the ESCWA Region. These activities highlight the importance of these issues in the ESCWA region and around the globe.

In several key areas of Information Society development, progress has been achieved in the region. Generally speaking, ICT usage is spreading, telecommunications costs are decreasing, e-services are becoming more available and ICT literacy is increasing. In some cases, the growth has been large enough to reduce the digital divide. Of particular note is a growing trend towards user-generated content, as these metrics show more people capable of, and interested in using ICTs. However, e-services such as e-learning, e-commerce or e-government are still at an earlier stage of deployment compared to developed countries.

In order to promote and foster the growth of e-services, they must be linguistically appropriate and reflect the cultural and business practices of the sponsors, stakeholders, users and beneficiaries. For the ESCWA region, many of these factors take a unique form. Simply from a linguistic perspective, complexities in proper representation of accessible domain names represent important issues. Internet governance and regional and national domain names in Arabic are all significant components to e-services. In addition, as standardization is essential block for building the Information Society, governments, in collaboration with the private sector and international organizations should ensure the adoption and the use of open, interoperable, non-discriminatory and demand-driven standards.

The above technological systems must be integrated with a robust, modern cyber legislation framework to provide the type of environment necessary to encourage growth. Security frameworks, e-signatures, cross-border enforcement, harmonized legislative approaches and the capacity to rapidly respond to emerging issues are all vital to creating the atmosphere of trust necessary to create an Information Society and promote

bottom-up innovation among the people of the region. Because trust in the institutions which underpin these tools is so important, there is a strong inter-relationship between cyber legislation, creating trust, and establishing an enabling environment for growing e-services.

Properly enabled e-services have shown the capacity for rapid growth in impact and penetration. Uptake of new services and the momentum of crowd-sourced innovation consistently push the development of new technologies and efficiencies in ways that are difficult to predict. Particularly in under-served regions such as ESCWA, this vast untapped potential can become focused and effective very quickly. In order to maintain this momentum and growth in a manner consistent with the unique linguistic and cultural character of the region, appropriate bandwidth must be present in the telecommunications infrastructure. As the backbone of regional and international communications capacity, a robust telecom network, including Wi-Fi, 3G, LTE and national and regional Internet Exchange Centres must be available. Otherwise, the technical capacity of the system will restrict the creative capacity of the people and restrict growth.

While there are many relevant factors to consider when creating an enabling environment, this meeting will focus on the regional aspects of these issues and will take into consideration the current state of affairs as well as the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities available to promote an enabling environment for the development of e-services in the ESCWA region.

## **2. Objectives**

The main objective of the EGM is to examine the factors which should be made available to promote an enabling environment for the development of Arabic e-services. Focusing on infrastructure, regulatory framework, content, user trust in e-services, and the use of open and interoperable standards the meeting will examine the key strengths, weaknesses and opportunities facing the region and make recommendations for further enhancement and propose new field projects.

The EGM will also aim at providing a platform for sharing experiences and best practices of the participants as well as discussing the requirements for catalyzing a culturally appropriate enabling environment to develop e-services including infrastructure, legal framework, security, building trust, standards and other issues.

## **3. Topics**

Following a list of proposed topics of the EGM for the creation of an enabling environment for e-services in the ESCWA region:

- A. Telecommunications infrastructure, with special attention to regional connectivity including broadband and advanced wireless technology;
- B. Domain Names System, including the use of Arabic in Domain Names as part of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs), and Registry policy and conditions;
- C. The development and use of national and international open, interoperable, and demand-driven standards;
- D. Cyber security including needed resources to detect and respond to threats to the information infrastructure, including data access, security and privacy;
- E. Necessary aspects of the legal and regulatory framework including ethical issues of the cyber space;
- F. Building trust in e-services among the user community in the region;
- G. National/regional versus international solutions for e-payment, e-signature, PKI, and others.

## **4. Outcomes**

The EGM's expected outcomes are:

- A. A framework including a set of recommendations for promoting an enabling environment for the development of Arabic e-services in the ESCWA region, with focus on the above mentioned areas.

- B. Increased awareness and shared knowledge of best practices within the region for addressing issues including regulatory framework, cyber security, building trust in e-services, standards and interoperability for e-services.
- C. Identification of the major challenges facing the creation of an enabling environment for the development of Arabic e-Services.

#### **4. Participation and Registration**

Participants in the meeting will include experts from government ministries, authorities, and selected public institutions and the private sector in the ESCWA region who have been engaged in enhancing the enabling environment for the development of ICT applications or e-services.

Participants are requested to register for the meeting by filling a downloadable registration form and returning it by email, to [escwa-ictd@un.org](mailto:escwa-ictd@un.org) and [idlebi@un.org](mailto:idlebi@un.org) before 15 February 2011.

A limited number of fellowship grants to attend the EGM are available for participants of this EGM. Special attention will be given to participants located in least developing and post conflict countries to support their travel and/or subsistence expenses.

#### **5. Organization, venue and dates**

The EGM is organized by UN-ESCWA and will be held during 8-9 March, 2011 at UN House, Riad El Solh Square, Beirut, Lebanon.

It will include a number of general presentations and case studies from selected ESCWA member countries on the above topics as well as discussion sessions focusing on the enhancement of the enabling environment for e-services in the ESCWA region. A session dedicated for the recommendations of the EGM will conclude this meeting.

#### **6. Working language**

English and Arabic are the working languages of the EGM. There will be no simultaneous translation between languages.

#### **7. Travel and Accommodation**

All participants are expected to inquire on their visa requirements to Lebanon and secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date. In this regard, ESCWA can provide assistance to Palestinian and Iraqi participants upon request.

#### **8. Additional information**

Further information and documentation is available at the following URL:  
<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1429E>

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