



world summit  
on the information society  
Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005



# Information Society

## Regional Initiatives and Activities



Africa  
Europe & North America  
Latin America & Caribbean  
Asia & Pacific  
Western Asia



## REGIONAL DIMENSIONS

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an increasingly important tool for social and economic development and is the driving force behind the transition towards economies and societies based on information and knowledge. For developing the transition economies, ICT can provide a means to leapfrog some long and painful stages in the development process, and help to stimulate growth and prosperity.

The United Nations Regional Commissions - the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) – are playing a leadership and catalytic role to provide digital opportunities and harness the growth potential of ICT. They provide an interface between different ICT layers and the development community, bringing together public and private sectors, foundations and donors to develop initiatives and modalities aimed at building ICT capacities for developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

The regional perspective is an indispensable intermediate stage in bringing together national particularities and global requirements for the Information Society. This has been demonstrated during the Geneva 2003 WSIS process, especially by the regional consultations and negotiations that resulted in the Declarations of Bamako (Africa), Bavao (Latin America and the Caribbean), Beirut (Western Asia), Bucharest (Europe and North America) and Tokyo (Asia Pacific), which provided major inputs for the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action.

This has continued with the preparation of the second phase of WSIS as a result of the regional conferences held in Brazil (Latin America and the Caribbean), Ghana (Africa), Greece, (Europe), Iran (Asia Pacific), and Syria (Western Asia), with concrete Regional Action Plans and Roadmaps.

As the world prepares for Tunis, the role of the Regional Commissions will be critical now more than ever in the implementation of the Regional Action Plans that will be adopted in Tunis, where the work on building the Information Society will gather momentum.

The post-Tunis phase will require technical assistance, capacity building and training, facilitating peer dialogue, exchange of experience and promoting good practices; and in the implementation of national and regional Information Society strategies and roadmaps.



## Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

ECA, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, is the regional arm of the United Nations Secretariat, mandated to support the economic and social development of its 53 member States, foster regional integration, and promote international cooperation for Africa's development.

### Implementation of WSIS Geneva Action Plan:

As part of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) framework, ECA has been mobilizing member States for their active participation in the WSIS process, starting with the first regional conference held in Bamako in 2002, in preparation for the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The Second Africa Regional preparatory conference held in Ghana under the theme of "Access: Africa's key to an inclusive Information Society " from 2 to 4 February 2005 brought together over 2000 delegates, including governments, civil society, private sector, media and academia as well as representatives of the international community, to prepare an African Regional Plan of Action (ARPoA) for the second phase of the Summit (WSIS II) scheduled in November 2005 in Tunis. Among the high-level delegates were His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, His Excellency Mohammed Ghounnushi, Prime Minister of Tunisia, and His Excellency Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), as well as ECA's Executive Secretary KY Amoako. The event was supported by ECA's key partners and the outcome was the Accra Commitments, which is serving as a roadmap for Africa for the Tunis phase and beyond, focusing on development orientations, resource mobilization including human resources, and international cooperation, with concrete operational aspects.

### The Africa Information Society Initiative (AISII):

ECA is a key pioneer in the area of ICT for development, implementing AISII-an action framework for promoting Africa's digital agenda adopted by the Conference of Ministers of Planning and Economic Development in 1996 and subsequently endorsed by African Heads of State. Major activities include the development of national e-strategies for socio-economic development and current activities include:

**e-Policies/e-Strategies:** ECA has been assisting some 28 African countries in developing national e-strategies through the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans, to address MDGs and national Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS). ICT strategies have been introduced at sector-wide levels including support for public administration (e-government), commerce/trade, agriculture as well as health

and education. At the sub-regional level, activities are underway to facilitate the harmonization of national strategies and regulatory frameworks in collaboration with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Measuring the impact of the Information Society is being undertaken through the SCAN ICT initiative to build statistical capacity of member States and the use of ICT indicators for development.

**Information and Knowledge Resources:** This entails building the capacities of African policy makers, Civil Society Organizations, private sector and institutions through workshops, training and exhibitions led by the Information Technology Centre for Africa. Through VarsityNet, ECA is supporting the R&D capacity of African universities and research institutions for applications to serve African interests. A WSIS African Academia Research Network (ARN) was launched in 2003 where leading researchers are working on four themes: ICTs and Industrialization; African Languages and Cyberspace; the Enabling Environment; and, Measuring the Information Society. The African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN) provides Internet-based information and knowledge resources and services to assist member States and their institutions. The Commission's Geo-information Programme is increasing its work to promote geo-spatial data sharing; and integrating geo-information policy into e-strategies and plans; as well as fostering public participation in geo-information management.

**Partnership and Networking:** Under the broad framework of "the Partnership for ICTs in Africa" (PICTA), ECA works with partners such as the Finnish Government, Industry Canada, European Commission, German Technical Cooperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, International Development Research Centre, International Institute for Communication and Development, and Ford Foundation. Other partnership mechanisms and activities include implementing the regional node of the Global ePolicy Resource Network (ePol-Net Africa) – a collaboration between ECA, Industry Canada and the Canadian ePolicy Resource Centre (CePRC) - for ICT policies. ECA is also the regional focal point for the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) in building multi-stakeholder partnerships for the Information Society, and provides secretariat support for the African Stakeholders Network of the United Nations Information and Communication Technology Task Force (UN ICT TF). ECA is also working with the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC), Global Spatial Data Infrastructure Association (GSDI), EIS-Africa, and the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG), to name a few, in implementing the Geo-information programme.

Outreach and Communication entails a series of activities to promote AISI goals, involving key stakeholders, including academia, civil society, media, MPs, private sector, women's groups and youth. Information outputs produced to promote and create awareness include the ICT4D video documentary Africa Goes Digital and the award-winning AISI Radio Series, newsletters (iConnect Africa, PICTA bulletin), Briefing Papers and web resources.

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## Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

UNECE provides a regional forum for cooperation among its 55 member countries in Europe, North America and Central Asia. Working to forge tools of economic cooperation, it brokers international agreements to define standards for trade, transport and environment; supplies statistics as well as economic and environmental analysis; promotes sustainable energy, industry and enterprise development

**In support of the WSIS process,** UNECE brought together all stakeholders at the Pan European Regional Ministerial Conference on WSIS in November 2002 in Bucharest, Romania. UNECE was instrumental in developing a Ministerial Declaration, which was adopted by the meeting, as well as a set of principles and priorities for the Information Society providing a substantive input to the WSIS process. UNECE also played a lead role in organizing a round table on gender and ICT, which contributed to strengthening the gender perspective. The Information Economy Report, E-Policy Development in Transition Economies 2002-2003, was also launched at WSIS Geneva to assist member States in developing and implementing e-strategies, e-policies and e-regulatory frameworks for a knowledge-based economy.

throughout the pan-European region; and raises awareness and promotes a dialogue on mainstreaming gender into economic policies and ICT. The UNECE also provides related capacity building and technical assistance, where high priority is given to assisting its member countries with economies in transition.

In November 2004, UNECE, jointly with UNESCAP, UNDP and the Secretariat of the UNICT Task Force, supported the organization of a Conference on the Information Society in Central Asia and Regional Cooperation in ICT for Development, which was hosted by the Government of Kyrgyzstan. To address the gender digital divide, a publication on Access to financing and

ICT for women entrepreneurs was prepared. It includes good practices and policy recommendations to be considered by Governments and other stakeholders in the process of mainstreaming gender into ICT policies for SMEs.

In early 2005, to promote public participation in environmental decisions, the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention adopted Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools to provide public access to environmental information, which give practical effect to the conclusions of the first phase of the WSIS relevant to the promotion of environmental democracy. In May 2005, the theme of ICT for Development was included in the UNECE-UNESCAP Work Plan in Support of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). Then, on 30 June and 1 July 2005, the UNECE, together with the Greek Government, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and UNDP held a WSIS Thematic Meeting and South-East Europe Ministerial Conference as part of the joint preparations of the countries of South-Eastern Europe for the WSIS meeting in Tunis.

Implementation strategies to exploit the benefits of ICT are being developed by UNECE in areas such as:

- Trade, where standards and tools for electronic business and trade facilitation are being developed including a project for UN electronic trade documents (UNeDocs) and standards for the electronic exchange of administrative and trade data;
- Electronic data reporting and dissemination, management of statistical information systems, statistical metadata, statistical data editing, disclosure control, registers for business demographic and social statistics;
- Environmental governance, where electronic tools are being developed to strengthen public access to environmental information and encourage digital democracy;
- Intelligent transport systems, vehicle safety devices and computerized transport documents;
- Support for SMEs on the efficient use of ICTs and their participation in the Information Society;
- Measures to support a gender-sensitive Information Society.

These actions are aimed at encouraging and providing opportunities for people to participate more fully in the knowledge-based economy and promoting an enabling environment of legislation, regulation and policies throughout the North American and European region.

Website: [www.unece.org](http://www.unece.org)



# Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

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**In preparation for WSIS:** two major intergovernmental meetings have taken place in the region: Regional Technical Preparatory Meeting for WSIS, 4-6 May 2005 in Quito, organized by the government of Ecuador, UNESCO and ECLAC; and the Regional Preparatory Ministerial Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean for the second phase of WSIS, convened by Brazil and supported by ECLAC, from 8-10 June 2005. As a result, the Rio de Janeiro Commitment and a Plan of Action for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, eLAC 2007, were agreed on. Together with other international and non-governmental organizations in the region, ECLAC is committed to support governments to implement eLAC 2007 and assess its outcome.

ECLAC is the UN Regional Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, dedicated to promoting economic, social and sustainable development in the region, reinforcing relationships among countries and with other nations of the world. Founded in 1948, ECLAC (CEPAL in Spanish) has 42 member States and 7 associate members. Its Information Society Programme counts on the financial support of the European Commission, through its LIS programme and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), especially ICA-Panamericas. ECLAC's activities in the area of Information Society include:

**In-depth analysis of public policies:**

Research priority is on national strategies

for the Information Society and the socio-economic impact of ICT on development. Work is focused on institutional building and coordination mechanisms and financing and regulatory instruments that may facilitate and expand ICT access and infrastructure; e-government and public information and production of ICT based goods and services.

**Technical cooperation:** ECLAC has set up technical cooperation projects with various countries in the region, especially in the field of national strategies for Information Society, public spending on ICT, universal access and alternative technologies, open source software in the public sector and ICT measurement.

**Observatory on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC):** In close cooperation with the regional statistical community and contributing to the global Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, OSILAC collects ICT indicators, with the aim of centralizing data, normalizing and harmonizing ICT related indicators and methodologies, and thus generating new indicators through technical assistance and workshops. OSILAC is also producing frequent benchmarking reports, such as the Benchmarking of the WSIS Plan of Action and the eLAC 2007 Benchmarking Report.



# Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

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## **In preparation for the Tunis phase of WSIS:**

ESCAP in cooperation with other international/regional organizations established the Regional Interagency Working Group on ICT (IWG) in August 2001, with a view to strengthen cooperation and coordination at the regional level, and to promote mutually complementary and coherent strategies and programmes which would ensure synergy of efforts in achieving MDGs. The IWG played an instrumental role in developing regional consensus in the regional preparation for WSIS. Members of IWG made substantial contributions to the organization of the Regional Preparatory Conferences and other regional events. They also participated in the formulation of the Regional Action Plan towards the Information Society.

A High Level Asia-Pacific Conference for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was held from 31 May to 2 June 2005 in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. The Conference was organized jointly by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and ESCAP in cooperation with the UNDP, Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The objectives of the Conference were to define a regional course of action towards building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in Asia and the Pacific as stipulated in the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action adopted by the Geneva phase of WSIS and contribute to the preparatory process of the Tunis phase of the WSIS. The Conference adopted the Tehran Declaration and the Regional Action Plan – Programmes/Projects and Methodology for Regional Cooperation. The Action Plan pays special attention to the promotion of the use of ICT for empowerment of women, young and senior people as well as people with disabilities.

ESCAP is the regional headquarters of the United Nations Secretariat in Asia and the Pacific, dedicated to promoting economic and social development in the region. Founded in 1947 in Shanghai, China, it moved to Bangkok in 1949. It consists of 53 members and nine associate members.

The focus of ESCAP's work is on three key areas: reducing poverty; managing globalization; and addressing emerging social issues. The divisions within ESCAP are organized according to the thematic area they serve. The Information, Communication and Space Technology Division serves the "Managing Globalization" thematic area.

## **Information, Communication and Space Technology**

Recognizing the importance of information and communication technology in the knowledge economy and its impact on economic and social development, ESCAP established the Information, Communication and Space Technology Division (ICSTD) in July 2002. It comprises three sections—the ICT Policy Section, the ICT Applications Section and the Space Technology Applications Section. The Division was established to

assist ESCAP members to apply information, communication and space technology to the tasks of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development by building capacity, formulating sound policy and creating a regional platform for the exchange of knowledge, skills and experiences.

ESCAP's previous work in the area of information, communications and space technologies has shown that the Asia-Pacific countries are in need of support related to the development of cross-sectoral policies that enable them to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by these technologies. We view such policies to be critical to determining the ability of our member countries to fully participate in, manage, and benefit from, the process of globalization, as well as to overcome key development challenges in a cost effective manner.

At the same time, there is not enough awareness of the real and positive impacts that the application of these technologies can have in key areas of economic and social development, including inter-alia, commerce, effective and transparent governance, disaster reduction and efforts towards sustainable development and poverty reduction.

ESCAP is therefore focusing on supporting the development of cross-sectoral policies and strategies, and on promoting ICST applications in key sectors, through support for key national institutions. ESCAP is also promoting regional cooperation aimed at making the expertise of the many relatively advanced countries of the region available to the less advanced countries, and at addressing critical issues which require regional cooperation, such as cyber crime and information security.

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# Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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## **Implementation of WSIS Geneva Action**

**Plan:** Through intergovernmental conferences, expert group meetings, regional workshops, advisory services and technical assistance, ESCWA is supporting member States and coordinating their preparation for WSIS, while working towards building the regional Information Society. The Second Regional Preparatory Conference for WSIS, under the motto "Partnership for building the Arab Information Society", was held in preparation for the Tunis Summit and culminated with the Damascus Call for partnership to provide strategic support for the implementation of projects which should establish solid foundations for the Arab Information Society. The Conference also led to the development of a Regional Plan of Action for Building the Information Society (RPoA) addressing a range of issues for building the Information Society in Western Asia while taking into account Arab regional specificities. Partnerships are being forged by ESCWA to fulfil the objectives of the Damascus Call and to pave the way for the implementation of the RPoA, such as increasing community access with emphasis on the marginalized and disabled. Within the framework of the global Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, ESCWA organized a roundtable and a regional workshop to agree on a common set of core indicators for measuring the Information Society and to build capacities of national statistics offices and ICT units in this domain.

ESCWA promotes regional cooperation and integration among its 13 Arab member States and serves as the main development forum within the United Nations system for the region. The objective of ESCWA is to accelerate the pace of economic, social and technological development in the region and to minimize the unsustainable exploitation of its natural resources.

## **Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD)**

ICTD, which was established in mid 2002 through ESCWA restructuring, aims to increase the capabilities of member States in harnessing information and communication technologies (ICT) for their development, including achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. In this respect, it provides support with regard to the development of ICT policies, infrastructure, and applications, and raises awareness with regard to the potential of ICTs in promoting sustainable development and enabling ESCWA countries to integrate into the global economy.

**Developing the ICT sector and Arab content industry:** ICTD's launching of the Arab Content Initiative to build up

an Arab content industry and promote and disseminate digital Arabic content was followed by collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS) and initiating projects to construct needed tools. This should make the Internet of interest to the non-English speaking Arab populations. An Arabic Domain Names Task Force under the auspices of ESCWA laid the groundwork for using the Arabic language to access the Internet. ESCWA and LAS are jointly tackling the deployment of an Arabic Domain

Names System, which should facilitate the use of the Internet among Arabic speaking communities. ESCWA is also promoting regional ICT sector development by providing expertise on related policies and strategies and supporting incubation schemes for nascent ICT enterprises.

**ICT for sustainable development:** Within the framework of its Initiative on “Technology, Employment and Poverty Alleviation (TEPA)” ESCWA is implementing a number of programmes and projects with a view to piloting concepts and modalities aimed at harnessing new technologies, including ICTs, for socio-economic development. Through training on ICT and other modern technologies, these projects are creating new job opportunities among the remote and rural communities. A number of modalities have been identified and implemented for delivering new technology inputs at the local community level, including, ICT community centres and smart community projects. Partnerships have been established with municipalities, civil society institutions and enterprises involved in activities targeted by TEPA.

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UNITED NATIONS

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The regional perspective is an important intermediate stage between national particularities and the global requirements of the Information Society. Regional integration efforts contribute to the development of the global Information Society and make strong cooperation within and among regions indispensable. Regional dialogue is contributing to capacity building and to the alignment of national strategies with the goals of the World Summit on the Information Society.