

## **UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

### **1. Describe your agency's overall strategy in using ICT for Development:**

#### ***a) Overall strategy:***

Given its mandate as the regional outpost of the United Nations in Europe (which includes western and eastern Europe, Russia and the CIS countries, the Balkans, Turkey and Israel, and North America), the UNECE focuses on ICT policy development on a regional level and adopts a strategy based on the exchange of national experiences and the promotion of regional and global cooperation amongst UN member states. Further, taking into account that the developing and transition economies wish to bridge the digital divide and use ICT as a tool for economic development, UNECE's comparative advantage lies in linking ICT know-how with its sectoral activities (industrial restructuring, energy, economic analysis, environment, statistics, transport and trade development).

#### ***b) Guiding Principles for use of ICT for Development***

UNECE considers the Information Society to be based on the following set of principles:

- Securing right to information and knowledge
- Promoting universal access at affordable cost
- Promoting linguistic diversity and cultural identity
- Developing human capacity through education, training and skills
- Setting up an enabling environment for ICT development, including legal, regulatory and policy frameworks
- Building security and confidence in the use of ICTs
- Addressing global issues.

These Principles were established and agreed by member governments at the ministerial pan-European Conference on the Information Society in Bucharest in November 2002.

#### ***c) Objectives***

The ultimate objective of implementing ICT policies is the development of an inclusive information society, the commitment of increased resources for technology transfer and the support for physical and technological infrastructure for the knowledge economy. Furthermore, the work of the UNECE aims at bridging the digital divide, reducing poverty, supporting integration in wider Europe and promoting economic and social development through the use of ICTs.

#### ***d) Areas of Application***

The commission focuses on four priority areas of application:

- E-government: ICT tools will indeed make policies more accountable and transparent, and allow greater efficiency in their delivery
- E-Business: enterprises can use ICTs to foster innovation, realise gains in productivity, reduce transaction costs and benefit from network externalities

- E-society: ICTs can be used to promote the involvement and participation of all, irrespective of gender or economic status and in such key areas as education and health, thus improving overall quality of life
- E-learning and education: ICT-enabled access to knowledge is an essential tool to fight against poverty and reduce the digital gap

***e) References and web-links to any relevant strategy document or guidelines***

A comprehensive set of key documents published by the UNECE on preparation of the World Summit on the Information Society is available at:

<http://www.unece.org/etrades/ict/welcome.htm> and

[http://www.unece.org/pub\\_cat/pub2002/ict.htm](http://www.unece.org/pub_cat/pub2002/ict.htm)

**2. Identify the main modalities for ICT integration in your overall development strategy:**

***a) Modalities for ICT integration and programme delivery***

We identify at least three modalities for ICT integration in our development strategy:

- ICT as a tool to streamline and refocus information management aspects in the different sectors and consolidate a cross-sectoral approach;
- ICT as a tool to define targeted and focused development assistance programmes; and
- ICT as a tool to consolidate and extend partnership arrangements with other organizations, business and civil society.

***b) Partnership***

The UNECE is closely cooperating with several governmental, national and regional agencies as well as international organizations in the promotion of ICT-for-development initiatives. Partners include ECE member states' governments, other UN regional commissions, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the European Commission, the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and e-Business (UN/CEFACT), etc...

***c) Participation in joint or multi-donor ICT for development programme***

Recently, the UNECE has jointly organised with the Romanian Authorities the Pan-European Regional Conference in preparation of the World Summit on the Information Society. Other organizations such as the ITU, ISO, IEC, UNDP and the European Commission, as well as several stakeholders from civil society took active part in the process. In addition, several specific events, organized by UNECE, or in cooperation with UNECE, are being planned to take place in Geneva in the context of WSIS. These include: - an event proposed by the UNECE Team of Specialists on Internet Enterprise Development (TSIED); - a round table jointly organized by UNECE and UNCTAD on "Overcoming Obstacles to the Development of the Information Society: Business Solutions"; - an event jointly organized with the ITU Working Group on Gender and ICT and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on gender issues; and - a joint ISO/IEC/ITU and UNECE event dealing with the role of open standards in the information society.

***d) Lessons learned from your agency's experience***

From the experience of UNECE, it appears that ICT for development is a particularly complex and challenging issue for a series of reasons: - the nature of this topic spans not only many issues of technological development but also the political questions of rights, freedoms and the issues of security; - It is a field where Governments- particularly in transition countries, cannot proceed alone, but have to involve business and civil society; - It is difficult to regulate technical change through legal instruments and formal action plans; - etc...

Moreover, we very much emphasize the need to focus on the regional level as an appropriate framework for assisting member countries in their national efforts for self-assessment, e-strategy and capacity building. It is also an appropriate level for monitoring developments, benchmarking, exchanging experience and identifying best practise. We also recognize the necessity for a cross-sectoral and integrated approach to the various technical, institutional, socio-economic and political aspects of IS policies.

***e) Cases that are particularly illustrative:***

Sixteen out of twenty-eight UNECE economies in transition (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Yugoslavia [Serbia and Montenegro]) participated in a project that was launched by the Commission in 2002, entitled "Towards a Knowledge-Based Economy: Country Readiness Assessment Reports". The project is based on country assessment reports on the utilization and development of ICTs. The reports provided strong evidence that any country, regardless of its size and the initial level of the development of the major components of the knowledge-based economy, can have a decisive impact on bridging the digital gaps. This could be achieved by effectively utilizing internal comparative advantages, complementing them, if necessary, with external factors, which are, however, subject to the availability and accessibility. An instructive example at point is the Latvian case. Latvia has been able to carve a niche in the emerging European knowledge-based economy effectively employing the local reservoir of means, qualified labour force, good schooling system, educational and scientific tradition and potential, desire to join the European Union on a more equal footing, the proximity to and support of the neighbouring Nordic countries. Armenia, in spite of considerable difficulties and delays, is now trying to do the same by focusing on the intellectual determinant of the knowledge-based economy, thus utilizing its highly qualified pool of scientists and engineers inherited from the past. The guidelines for developing these reports are summarized in a special report "Towards a Knowledge-based Economy – Country Readiness Assessment Report: Concept, Outline, Benchmarking and Indicators" (ECE/Trade/311/11).

**3. Institutional arrangements made by your agency for mainstreaming ICT within its development strategy:**

***a) Main agencies involved in ICT for development:***

The afore-mentioned international organizations and governmental bodies (IEC, ISO, UNDP, UNCTAD, ITU, OECD, EU...) have all substantially contributed to developing ICT-related programmes, standards and action plans in cooperation with UNECE.

***b) The agencies' roles in the various stages:***

Capacity building programmes for the development and integration of all countries into the knowledge-based economy, with particular emphasis on transition economies, have been supported through exchanges and partnerships with NGOs, business organizations and governmental authorities. Those projects not only allow the improvement of current processes by using technologies, but also give all stakeholders the opportunity to identify their needs and consequently participate in improving procedures and access to information.

In addition, the UNECE cooperates with the other regional commissions and the whole UN system to develop an integrated approach to ICT policy and appropriate framework conditions. These partnerships proved particularly fruitful in setting relevant norms and standards for regional ICT policies, the development of policy guidelines, the identification of best practise, and the cross-country comparison.

***c) Contact details of your agency's ICT for development focal point:***

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**4. Country/regional focus of the ICT-enhanced development strategy:**

***a) General description of regional and country focus:***

UNECE's activities span Western and Eastern Europe, including Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union, the United States, Canada and Israel; that is a total of 55 member states. However, all interested UN member States may take part in its work as well.

***b) More detailed information on main recipients of your ICT-enhanced development strategy:***

UNECE has been active in promoting the creation of a knowledge-based economy, particularly for countries in transition. Within the framework of the above-mentioned "Towards a Knowledge-Based Economy" project, the commission regularly issues in cooperation with multilateral, regional and national governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations, 'country readiness assessment reports' which are destined to help policy makers overcome the obstacles to the development of the information society. So far, countries which have benefited from this initiative are: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Latvia, Russian Federation, Slovakia and Serbia-Montenegro. The reports are based on the measurement of development indicators to assess the countries' potential with regards to ICT development and identify the challenges they may face in the move to of the knowledge economy. These indicators include:

- Information infrastructure
- Internet availability, speed and quality
- Access by schools to ICTs
- ICT workforce
- Local content
- BEB and B2C e-commerce initiatives
- Etc.