UN-ESCWA

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Expert Group Meeting on Intellectual Property Systems in the Arab Region

UN-House, Beirut, 17-18 April 2019

Preliminary Information Note

1.   Background

Intellectual property rights (IPRs) allow innovators to protect their own works and benefit from them. It goes back to the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property (1883) and the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (1886). It is also outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 27). Intellectual property (IP) is divided into two main categories, namely industrial property, and literature and artistic property. Industrial property refers to patents, trademarks, industrial designs and geographical indications; literature and artistic property refers to copyright and neighbouring rights.[1]

Although all Arab countries have IP laws, and most of them signed many international treaties, while some others are only observers, the enforcement and the applications of the IPRs are still weak in many Arab countries, and this has negative effects on the level of innovation, invention, entrepreneurship and competitiveness of SMEs and hence the economy.

The protection of IP in general and the industrial property specifically, contributes to social and economic development and has an important role in achieving the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has a positive impact on industrial competitiveness, economic growth and job creation through the protection of innovations and entrepreneurs. IPRs are in fact essential for disseminating technical knowledge, which can encourage invention, innovation and creativity. IPRs provide peace of mind to innovators and inventors and encourage them to continue their work, and to make profit through monopoly and licensing. IPRs are a vital element of the innovation ecosystem and should be considered seriously in the formulation and implementation of innovation policies.

The protection of IP is important at the national level as well as the institutional one. Industries and universities might have their own policies and regulation for protecting the industrial and academic inventions and innovations. Ownership of such innovations might be subject of discussion at institution/industrial level especially in the Arab countries. Worth noting that the protection of IP is essential for encouraging technology transfer among universities and industries, and as such technology transfer offices, when exist, can play an important role in supporting innovators and inventors. In fact, the protection of IP constitutes an important role of the national technology transfer offices in many Arab countries.

An IP system/ecosystem is the processes, policies, and regulations used to manage IP rights, from application to administration. Arab countries have made efforts to improve their IP systems and bring it closer to international standards. However, some studies have indicated that the implementation of these systems is lacking across the region with some countries faring better than others. The challenges

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[1] WIPO (n.d.). What is intellectual property? Available at: http://www.wipo.int/about-ip/en

highlighted include complexity of the systems and the registration of industrial property outside the region in developed countries.

Open innovation is a new trend that was pushed recently by technological progress and complexity. More collaboration is needed today in R&D among researchers, academia and private sector to produce innovative solutions. The relationship between open innovation, R&D and IP management is still not quite clear for many institutions and entities, however it is very important for developing countries including Arab countries.

Although some studies and conclusions about intellectual property in the Arab region exist, the main gaps in IP systems/management, and their causes, are still unclear. To fortify these systems so that innovators, countries and citizens can reap the socioeconomic benefits of intellectual property, it is necessary to investigate the systems, understand their strengths and weaknesses, share knowledge and expertise on seizing opportunities and dealing with threats, showcase solutions and examples. Greater understanding and knowledge would help in developing solid IP systems that foster the enforcement of IP laws, support innovation processes and help in advancing inclusive, sustainable development throughout the Arab region.

Having strategies for protecting innovators, inventors and entrepreneurs is a keystone for building knowledge economy in the Arab countries, especially in this 4th industrial revolution era in which the role of technology and innovation is essential for economic growth, social development inclusiveness.

2.   Objectives

The main objective of this meeting is to discuss status, challenges and prospective of intellectual property systems in the Arab region. The discussion will centre on the draft report prepared by ESCWA on IPRs and focus on the IP systems, and the enforcement of IP laws. The report specifies as well, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats provided or faced by the IP systems that affect their efficiency and effectiveness.

The meeting will also discuss the status of IP system in some Arab countries, as well as its role in promoting innovation and competitiveness and its potential positive contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. The meeting will also discuss regulation for intellectual property at institutional level, whether it is at university, industry or SME level, and will explore the role of technology transfer offices in the IP systems. During the meeting selected international, regional and national cases and initiatives will be showcased as examples to stimulate the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned among Arab countries.

3.   Topics

The following list of topics will be discussed during the meeting:

(1) IP systems in the Arab region based on the ESCWA report on this subject and which includes the SWOT analysis.

(2) The status of intellectual property systems in some Arab countries, and enforcement of IP laws: challenges, opportunities and mechanisms.

(3) Challenges, regulation and impact of Intellectual Property at institution level: Universities, SMEs, and Start-Ups.

(4) Impact of IPR on promoting innovation and fostering the achievement of the 2030 SDGs.

(5) The gender gap in Arab IP systems, its status and impact, and suggestions to resolve it.

(6) International and regional experiences as well as national case studies on IP systems from the region and beyond.

(7) Open innovation phenomena and its impact on proper management of IP.

4.   Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the meeting are:

(1)   A common understanding on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of intellectual property systems in the Arab region;

(2)   Greater awareness about intellectual property, the types and related concepts as well as the status of intellectual property rights in the Arab region including gender gap;

(3)   Greater understanding on issues related to the management, administration and enforcement of intellectual property rights, and their impact on socioeconomic development and role in the achievement of the SDGs in the Arab region considering gender aspect;

(4)   Proposals for enhancing and complementing the ESCWA study on Intellectual Property Systems based on the regional needs;

(5)   Proposed policy recommendations for enhancing the IP systems in the Arab countries;

(6)   Linkages, networking and the sharing of best practices between experts from the Arab region as well as those located abroad.

5.   Previous and related work by ESCWA

- *Innovation Policy for Inclusive Sustainable Development in the Arab Region,* 2017. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/publications/innovation-policy-inclusive-sustainable-development-arab-region.

- *The Innovation Landscape in Arab Countries: A Critical Analysis,* 2017. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/publications/innovation-landscape-arab-countries-critical-analysis.

- *Fostering Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises in the Arab Region*, 2018. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/publications/study-innovation-small-business-arab-region.

- *Perspectives of Digital Economy in the Arab Region*, 2017. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/publications/perspectives-digital-economy-arab-region.

- *Improving Arab Regional Development Planning: An Assessment of Good Economic Governance Tools to Support Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy-Making*, 2018. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/publications/improving-arab-regional-development-planning-assessment-good-economic-governance-tools.

- *Assessing Arab Economic Integration: Trade in Services as a Driver of Growth and Development*, 2018. Available from https://www.unescwa.org/publications/assessing-arab-economic-integration-trade-services-growth-development.

6.   Participation and registration

Participants will include government officials from the ministries of trade, technology transfer offices and in-country intellectual property authorities, experts from civil society, academia, the legal sector, international organizations and individuals. Participation is by invitation only.

Participants should register for the meeting online at http://reg.unog.ch/e/egm-intellectual-property-systems-arab-region by **8 March 2019**. A guideline for online registration is attached to the invitation, and should you require any assistance, please send an email to Maya Hammoud (hammoudm@un.org) or Lize Denner (denner@un.org).

7.   Organization, format, venue and dates

The EGM organized by the Technology for Development Division (TDD) at ESCWA, will take place from 17 to 18 April 2019 at UN-House in Beirut, Lebanon.

It will include several specialised and general presentations on intellectual property and international and regional case studies from selected countries, as well as discussions.

8.   Working language

Arabic and English are the working languages of the workshop.

9.   Travel and accommodation

All participants are to inquire about their visa requirements from Lebanon and secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date.

ESCWA will cover the travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of one participant from invited organizations in selected countries, especially those coming from least developed countries, according to the UN rules and regulations.

10.   Additional information

Further information and documentation will be available at the following URL:
- Arabic: https://www.unescwa.org/نظم-الملكية-الفكرية-فى-المنطقة-العربية-اجتماع-فريق-خبراء
- English: https://www.unescwa.org/events/egm-intellectual-property-systems-arab-region

Address inquiries and requests for additional information to:

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