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(CSTD)**

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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international  
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 to  
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

**Submission by**

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 27<sup>th</sup> session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

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## ESCWA input to CSTD Report 2023 Follow-up of WSIS

### Part 1: Executive Summary

In spite of the progress made in the Arab region on developing digital technology policies, infrastructure and services, many obstacles still hinder the advancement of digital development in the region. Among those challenges, proper assessment of the status of digital development is not available or institutionalized and not in full practice, lack of national comprehensive digital plans, in addition, conventional problems such as internet connectivity, digital gender gap, science-policy interface, limited entrepreneurship culture, low expenditure on R&D remain.

ESCWA, through its all-available resources and various programmes (RB, regular program for technical cooperation (RPTC), XB, etc), advises its member states on the recommended policies based on best regional and international practices, in collaboration with UN agencies, the League of Arab States, academia and research centres.

ESCWA conducts also capacity-building workshops, as requested by its member states, on up-to-date themes in digital technologies and innovation. Using its convening power, ESCWA serves as a platform to exchange lessons learned among its member states to increase efficiency and reduce duplicated efforts.

ESCWA succeeded to significantly address the challenges of measuring and planning for digital development through the Arab Digital Agenda 2023-2033 and associated products; namely the Arab Digital Development Report (ADDR 2.0), the National Digital Development Reviews (NDDRs 2.0) and the Digital Development Measurement and Monitoring Model (DD-MMM 1.0).

### Part 2: Overview

#### - **Government Electronic and Mobile Service (GEMS) maturity index**

In 2014, ESCWA launched, in cooperation with the Office of the Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, an initiative to develop an index that measures the maturity of electronic and mobile government services, called GEMS maturity index.

In 2023, ESCWA published the results of the 4<sup>th</sup> assessment of this index that took place in 2022 in 18 Arab countries, namely Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Yemen<sup>1</sup>. This year (2023), a new evaluation of the index is still undergoing, and the results are expected to be announced in the first quarter of 2024.

#### - **Technical Assistance in Policy Development in Digital Government and New Technologies**

During the year 2022-2023, ESCWA assisted the Ministry of Digital Transformation, Innovation and Modernization of Administration in Mauritania to develop an action plan of digital transformation in principal education, suggested a regulatory framework of IoT and developed a digital transformation strategy in cooperation with the General Information Authority (GIA) in Libya, and provided assistance to the Ministry of Communication and Technology (MoCT) in Syria to develop their national cloud computing policy and digital accessibility strategy that were both officially adopted in 2023, and suggested a guide for government use of social media platforms. ESCWA also provided assistance to the Ministry of Telecom and Information Technology (MTIT) in Palestine to develop its digital

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/government-electronic-mobile-services-gems-maturity-index-2022>

development agenda, digital accessibility policy and cybersecurity strategy in 2023. In UAE, ESCWA with Telecom Digital government Regulation Authority (TDRA) developed the national digital accessibility policy in 2023. ESCWA also provided assistance to Communication and Media Commission (CMC) in Iraq to develop a national IOT framework that was adopted officially in 2023.

- **Capacity building in Digital Transformation, and New technologies**

During the period 2022-2023, ESCWA conducted multiple capacity building activities that are related to digital transformation and new technologies.

Examples of those activities are: workshop on digital divide policies in Somalia, a workshop on ICT indicators in Mauritania, a workshop on digital transformation in education and a workshop on GEMS maturity index in Morocco.

- **Arab Digital Agenda 2023-2033 (ADA)**

The **Arab Digital Agenda 2023-2033 (ADA)** which is the fruit of multi-year cooperation with the League of Arab States, with the engagement of all Arab countries and several UN and Arab bodies represents a long-term frame of action with 35 strategic goals covering various aspects of digital development. **ADA has been officially adopted** at the level of the Arab Telecom and IT Council of Ministers (ATICM) in January 2023, the Arab ECOSOC in February 2023, and the Heads of Arab States in May 2023.

ESCWA and partners started the deployment and implementation support towards achieving the ADA vision, renewing regional integration around shared regional ambitions, goals, targets, and indicators. A steering and sustainability framework is put in place to support the implementation, monitoring and building partnerships to attract necessary investments. A dedicated Collaboration and Partnership Framework is currently being developed to optimize resources and steer efforts for this particular purpose, and will be unveiled in early 2024.

In this context, ESCWA, UNDP, ITU, GSMA, Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO), IsDB, Bahrain, co-convoked a joint UNGA-78 side event in September 2023, to launch a collective Call for Action on Digital for Sustainable Development at the regional and national level in all Arab countries, that will lead to speeding-up the implementation of the ADA and expedite the attainment of SDGs. ESCWA, ITU and UNDP will closely work towards developing supporting joint channels, products and platforms to create synergies and pool resources for optimized impacts in line with each entity added value.

- **Arab and National digital development reviews**

ESCWA succeeded to enrol twelve Arab countries to produce their national digital development reviews which triggered requests for developing national digital development agendas that take into consideration national priorities and needs in this area for advancing SDGs and closing the digital divide leaving no one behind.

- **Arab International “Digital Cooperation and Development Forum (DCDF 2024)”**

ESCWA is closely coordinating with one of the Arab countries; namely the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in their preparations for convening the global IGF 2024.

- **Digital Cooperation Process and Global Digital Compact (GDC)**  
ESCWA contributed significantly to the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on the **Global Digital Compact (GDC)** throughout diligent work for more than three years in consultation / collaboration with its global partners, ESCWA-LAS Arab IGF community and ESCWA member states; and in liaison with the **Office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Technology**. ESCWA managed to ensure a **footprint** of the **Arab region** in particular, as well as to emphasize the role of the regions and of the UN **Regional Commissions per se** in the **Digital Cooperation process** spearheaded by ESCWA in the region since 2019, as a natural derivative of the global/Arab WSIS and global/Arab IGF processes.
- **ESCWA's Digital Development Conceptual Framework**  
ESCWA is working on widening its Digital Development conceptual framework to include the climate change, the Peaceful Use of Outer Space (PUOS), and new and emerging technologies.
- **WSIS+20 preparations**  
ESCWA closely coordinates and cooperates with CSTD for convening consultative meetings in the Arab region in preparation of the global WSIS +20 review process.
- **ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award 2022-2023**  
To bridge digital divide in content, ESCWA in collaboration with the WSA launched in 2021, the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award for Sustainable Development that aims to highlight best practices on digital Arabic content and disseminate those practices in the Arab region and globally. In 2022, ESCWA received 215 projects from 19 Arab countries and three non-Arab countries. The jury evaluated 197 eligible projects, including 118 in the institutions category and 79 in the young entrepreneurs category, and selected the best eight projects as winners of this award for 2022-2023.

### Part 3: Future actions

ESCWA will continue its work programme and technical assistance activities in the upcoming years in the following suggested areas:

- Implementation and upgrade of the Arab Digital Agenda 2023-2033 and follow-up and review of its implementation in the region
- Deploying the ADA collaboration and partnership framework as a digital interactive collaborative platform for digital development in the Arab region
- Convening the Arab International Digital Cooperation and Development Forum (DCDF) as a policy dialogue platform on WSIS and internet governance
- Continuous update of the ESCWA digital development conceptual framework to include areas of climate change, environment and new and emerging technologies
- Developing National Digital Development Agendas (NDDAs) and deploying Digital Development Observatories to advance digital technology for sustainable development in the Arab region
- Capacity building in Digital Development Assessment Methodologies for evidence-based policies on digital development for sustainable development
- Support the convening of the global IGF 2024 in one of the Arab countries, namely the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

- Facilitating the Arab contribution to the current global processes; mainly, in preparations for the Summit of the Future and the Global Digital Compact
  - Digital Economy
  - Digital infrastructure and Internet Exchange Points (IXPs)
  - Measurement of ICT and digital for Sustainable development
  - Peaceful use of outer space
  - Digital inclusion
  - Digital government transformation and cybersecurity;
  - New technologies, such as IoT, AI and cloud computing;
  - Innovation and entrepreneurship.
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