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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2025 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 29th 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.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the UN Trade and Development.

Contribution to the annual report on "Progress made in 2025 in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels"

CSTD-WSIS-2025 – ESCWA Input

Part One: Executive Summary

ESCWA, as the United Nations Regional Commission for Western Asia, continues to play a leading role in advancing the implementation of the WSIS outcomes and aligning them with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its contribution is driven by the Arab Digital Agenda (ADA) 2023–2033, which serves as the overarching regional framework for WSIS implementation in the Arab region (digital development, digital cooperation, digital economy, digital transformation for sustainable development across the Arab region).

Mandate and Regional Role:

ESCWA supports Arab countries in implementing the WSIS process through strategic knowledge production, consensus building, policy advice, regional cooperation, and capacity development. Acting as a facilitator for digital development and digital cooperation, ESCWA ensures that WSIS implementation remains regionally relevant and responsive to local development priorities.

Main Frameworks and Mechanisms:

Implementation is driven through several interlinked mechanisms — the Arab Digital Agenda (ADA), the Arab International Digital Cooperation and Development Forum (DCDF), the Arab Digital Development Reviews/National Digital Development Reviews (ADDRs/NDDRs), the Digital Development Measurement and Monitoring Model (DD-MMM), and the Arab Digital Development Observatory. These platforms jointly strengthen policy coherence, data-driven governance, and cross-sectoral coordination.

Highlights 2024–2025:

During this period, ESCWA has:

- Advanced the WSIS+20 regional consultations process in the Arab region, as well as of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) in relation to the WSIS process.
- Supported ADA implementation across member States.
- Strengthened regional digital measurement through the DD-MMM platform.
- Fostered policy coordination through the DCDF as a regional dialogue mechanism.
- Supported the enhancement of e-government services and digital inclusion and digital accessibility through the Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) Framework and the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform (ADIP).

Challenges:

While some Arab nations boast thriving digital ecosystems and progressive policies, the region faces persistent digital infrastructure and financing gaps, as well as limited coordination among national and regional stakeholders. Political turmoil and regional conflicts deter foreign investments that are crucial for fostering

innovation and sustainable growth. Instabilities and inequalities in digital readiness, affordability and literacy, digital inclusion and accessibility remain significant obstacles, particularly for least developed countries and vulnerable groups. Additionally, emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, and AR/VR, while promising, risk reinforcing exclusion if not designed with inclusivity in mind.

Part Two: Analytical Overview

This section presents an analytical overview of progress in WSIS implementation in the Arab region, reflecting ESCWA's programmatic work under ADA and related projects to advancing WSIS goals.

1. Digital Policy and Governance

ESCWA, through the ADA and DCDF, has strengthened regional policy coordination and multi-stakeholder cooperation. The National Digital Development Reviews (NDDRs) help countries assess progress and align national strategies with WSIS and SDG targets.

ESCWA has provided direct support to member States including:

- **Libya**, where ESCWA helped the General Information Authority (GIA) develop the **national digital accessibility policy and digital development agenda**.
- **Iraq and Mauritania**, which received support to draft **national cloud computing and AI strategies/policies**.
- **Jordan**, where ESCWA contributed to the **2025 Digital Inclusion Policy**.
- **Djibouti**, supported in developing its **National Cybersecurity Strategy**.
- **Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen**, which received support to draft their National Digital Development Reviews Reports and National Digital Agendas (NDDRs/NDDAs).

2. Digital Infrastructure and Public Services

Under ADA and the ENACT2 project, ESCWA advances Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiatives to promote connectivity and interoperability. The GEMS project (Government Electronic and Mobile Services) continues to serve as a key instrument to measure and improve e-government services.

In 2024, the regional GEMS maturity index rose from 43% (2023) to 45% (2024), indicating improvement in service quality and institutional efficiency. However, the gap between certain group of countries has widened, calling for enhanced technical cooperation and experience-sharing.

3. Access to Information and e-Services

Through ADA and the ADIP project, ESCWA promotes universal access to digital services and information resources, focusing on inclusion for persons with disabilities, older persons, and marginalized communities.

ESCWA assisted **Libya and Morocco** in developing **national digital accessibility policy** and **national action plan on digital accessibility**, respectively, to ensure that e-services comply with universal design standards.

4. Measurement, Monitoring, and Data Ecosystems

ESCWA's ADA, NDDRs, DD-MMM, and the Arab Digital Development Observatory serve as regional instruments for data-driven policymaking and progress monitoring on WSIS indicators and SDGs. These platforms enable countries to evaluate policy performance, identify bottlenecks, and share best practices in digital measurement and governance.

5. Digital Content

Through ADA and the DAC project, ESCWA promotes Arabic digital content, linguistic diversity, and cultural identity online, contributing directly to WSIS Action Line C8 (cultural and linguistic diversity). Efforts are also directed toward inclusive AI adoption, ensuring equitable participation in the digital economy and safeguarding cultural representation.

6. Regional Dialogue and Partnerships

ESCWA's Arab International Digital Cooperation and Development Forum (DCDF) serves as the main intergovernmental platform for regional digital policy coordination and cooperation.

In support of the ADA implementation, the second edition of the DCDF was convened during February 2025 in Amman, encompassing the first ADA-High-Level Partners Conference (ADA-HLPC) in addition to two other segments; namely, the Arab WSIS and the Arab IGF mirroring the global WSIS and IGF. Furthermore, in preparation for WSIS+20, and within DCDF and other For a, ESCWA led the Arab Regional Consultations, promoting collaboration among governments, private sector actors, and civil society. These activities strengthen also interregional engagement with other UN Regional Commissions.

7. Capacity building

Through its Technical Cooperation Programme, ESCWA has continued to deliver **advisory services and capacity-building activities to member States, tailored to their specific requests and national priorities**. These interventions helped enhancing National Digital Policies in the Arab Region in three areas: Digital Government Transformation Policies, Digital Inclusion and Digital accessibility Policies and Emerging Technologies Policies.

On the capacity development front, ESCWA organized a series of Expert Meetings on Emerging Technologies and Pressing Issues related to the 2030 Agenda, including on AI, Peaceful Use of Outer Space, Environment, Postal Services.

Furthermore, ESCWA co-organized with the ADD in Morocco **two specialized workshops: one on Artificial Intelligence and Education, and another on Technology Transfer**. Additionally, a **national workshop on Digital Transformation and Emerging Technologies Strategies** was held in collaboration with the MDENI in Djibouti.

Part Three: Innovative Policies, Programmes, and Future Actions

(a) Innovative Policies and Programmes

ESCWA's innovative contributions to WSIS implementation in Western Asia are reflected in its major frameworks and initiatives:

- **WSIS+20 Process:** Coordination of the Arab regional consultations on WSIS+20 review process and participation in the 2025 High-Level Event in Geneva.

Furthermore,

- **Arab Digital Agenda (ADA):** Regional umbrella framework endorsed by the Heads of Arab States in 2023, guiding WSIS implementation and digital development and cooperation in the Arab region.
- **Arab Digital Cooperation and Development Forum (DCDF):** ESCWA's Platform for intergovernmental and multi-stakeholders regional dialogue and policy coordination.
- **Arab Digital Development Reviews (ADDR/NDDR):** Analytical reviews/tools for evidence-based policymaking aligned with WSIS targets.
- **DD-MMM:** Regional system for monitoring digital development and WSIS and SDG alignment.
- **Arab Digital Development Observatory:** Central monitoring hub under ADA for tracking indicators and policy progress.
- **Digital Development Cooperation and Partnership Framework (DD-CPF):** to boost the implementation of the Arab Digital Agenda and achieve its goals/targets.
- **GEMS Project:** Strengthening e-government and cross-sectoral digital public services (Action Line C7).
- **ADIP Project:** Promoting access to information and digital inclusion (Action Lines C3 and C7).
- **ENACT2 Project:** Supporting the development of digital public infrastructure and service delivery (Action Lines C2 and C7).
- **DAC Project:** Promoting / Advancing digital Arabic content and cultural identity online (Action Line C8).
- **TIMEPS:** Technology & Innovation Measurement for Evidence-based Policies & Strategies (for measuring STI, ICT, WSIS&GDC indicators)

(b) Future Actions and Regional Initiatives

1. Continue implementing and monitoring ADA and its associated projects in line with WSIS Action Lines.
2. Enhance the Arab Digital Development Observatory for automated ADA/WSIS progress tracking.
3. Strengthen interregional coordination among UN Regional Commissions for WSIS+20 follow-up.
4. Expand ADA partnerships through DCDF to accelerate Action Line implementation and foster innovation in the Arab region.

Annex – Mapping ESCWA Framework/Project to WSIS Action Lines

WSIS Action Line	ESCWA Framework / Project	Relevant Focus Area
C1. Role of governments & stakeholders	ADA, DCDF, WSIS+20 Conference	Regional digital governance and multistakeholder cooperation
C2. Information and communication infrastructure	ADA, ENACT2	Digital Public Infrastructure and connectivity initiatives
C3. Access to information and knowledge	ADA, ADIP	Digital inclusion and access to information resources
C4. Capacity building	ADA, ADDR/NDDR, TIMEPS	Measurement, digital skills, and policy capacity development
C5. Building confidence and security in ICTs	ADA	Trust, cybersecurity, and enabling policy environment
C6. Enabling environment	ADA	Legal, regulatory, and institutional frameworks for digital transformation
C7. ICT applications	ADA, GEMS, ADIP, ENACT2	e-Government, e-Services, and cross-sectoral digital applications
C8. Cultural and linguistic diversity, local content	ADA, DAC Project	Arabic digital content and cultural representation
C10. Ethical dimensions of the information society	ADA	Ethical and responsible digital transformation frameworks
C11. International and regional cooperation	ADA, DCDF, WSIS+20 Process	Regional coordination, partnerships, and cooperation mechanisms