

# ESCWA DIGITAL STRATEGY



Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**





Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



## **VISION**

ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

## **MISSION**

Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice. Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.



**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

# **ESCWA DIGITAL STRATEGY, 2021**



Modernizing data systems and processes for  
management and administration at ESCWA

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## Executive summary

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The present digital strategy (2021) aims to advance digital technology deployment internally at ESCWA in line with the organization's longer-term objectives of serving member States and other external stakeholders. It sets the strategic direction to leverage digital technologies during the implementation of the ESCWA internal innovation strategy and the ESCWA data strategy, so that the organization can consolidate digital production for targeted and more effective utilization at the institutional level.

Through a standard SWOT analysis, the document maps the current digital landscape at ESCWA and scopes the path forward in four work components: digitization of knowledge assets; digitization of work processes; digital cooperation; and digital capacity-building with the ultimate objective of realizing a more agile ESCWA in servicing its stakeholders.

To capture the potential of digital opportunities via a structured approach, the strategy also details the following work requirements: structure, people and process. By further detailing the "process" requirement in five stages, the Strategy creates further impetus to enhance implementation with all on board.

The strategy stipulates the formation of a Digital Strategy Action Group to service ESCWA users and a wider user community of stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive action plan and to collaborate in the digital space according to the mandate of the United Nations-wide 2018 High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation.

In consultation with ESCWA clusters and specialized personnel, the present document recognizes the ongoing digital initiatives, including the existing digitization mandate across the organization. It provides a set of recommendations and a framework to track the overall implementation progress. The strategy benefited from relevant United Nations initiatives and work documents and recognized best practices in this domain. The strategy will be implemented by the whole of ESCWA, guided by a time-bound and resource-based action plan.

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## Digital transformation for Agile ESCWA

Slowly but surely, digital technology has become the world's driving engine, affecting almost all aspects of individuals' lives and organizations' operations. Digital technologies have revolutionized the way humans produce, process and utilize knowledge. These technologies have even transformed the very business concepts of many industries and organizations, introduced novel work modalities and approaches and disrupted core areas of business; many of which were beyond the radar of corporate management.

The result then was a complex and dynamic ecosystem composed of technology providers and organizations focusing on finding solutions to discrete business problems with individual digital technologies. The celebrated successes were attributed to the scope, impact and speed of implementation of digital technologies in organizations which proactively improve their capacity and appetite for digital transformation (expounded in the definition and scope section).

However, today's digital success stories no longer come from implementing technologies individually in discrete use cases, but rather stem from the transformative power of technology across entire organizations and how they operate. To that end, digital strategies are instruments that leverage investment in technology to support longer-term objectives and bring about transformations along multiple business dimensions: operational, customer-focused and business models.

This new ecosystem has been recently tested by the exponential rate of progress of technological advancements powered by the current Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which is continually and rigorously disrupting the status quo, bringing with it a new breed of opportunities and challenges that require attention.

**Strategy vision: A digitally powered ESCWA end-to-end, to unleash the wealth of knowledge assets across all platforms and channels, for an agile organization serving all the people**

As a United Nations regional hub, ESCWA recognizes the potential of utilizing digital technologies, such as robots, mobile, analytics and cloud, in the service of transforming how the organization operates internally to eventually create more value for its member States. Even though reductions in costs have contributed to technology penetration in more organizations including United Nations organizations, the successive and rapid proliferation of frontier technologies has surpassed most organizations' ability to respond to the technological change, creating an ad hoc and untamed implementation of digital technologies. Hence, a dedicated strategy is needed to have all of the digital transformation components at ESCWA working collectively and in coordination to achieve technology integration and become a more agile, experimental and collaborative organization.

Therefore, the present digital strategy (2021) aims to support the mandate of ESCWA by using digital technology to digitize knowledge assets, improve current work processes, streamline stakeholder exchange, increase efficiency, enhance decision-making and facilitate innovation. Similarly, as frontier technologies (big data, ICTs, AI, machine learning, etc.) provide countless opportunities to enhance all aspects of organizations' work, this strategy encourages ESCWA to facilitate digital capacity-building to sustain the organization's uptake of technical knowledge and drive the innovative implementation of its mandate.

## Surveying the landscape

### ESCWA digital overview

Technology is no stranger to ESCWA, with several sporadic initiatives already capturing key projects, milestones and some of the major transformation opportunities. Nevertheless, it is observed that the organization recently has an increased appetite to expand its knowledge platforms and tools capitalizing on the potential of digital technologies. It is poised to encourage digital transformation for work operations across the whole of ESCWA; with special attention to administrative processes and digital knowledge management and, in future steps, transfer ESCWA experience and success stories on digital transformation to sister organizations and clients.

Yet, technology is more than a tool that requires utilizing human intellect to ensure proper processing and learning. As such, this strategy recognizes technology as a means to two strategically potent ends within ESCWA: [1] digitizing the stock of knowledge assets and [2] digitalizing internal work processes to translate knowledge products into the digital language prevalent in the digital systems. As elaborated comparatively in annex 1, digitization and digitalization will constitute the basis to orchestrate an effective digital transformation at the organization.

### Literature review

This strategy document was prepared after consulting the United Nations literature in this area including the work of academics and noted organizations.

Most recently, documents utilized in preparing this document include, but not limited to: the Secretary-General Strategy on new Technologies directed toward the increased utilization of frontier technologies; the ESCWA 4IR report stocktaking and exploring such frontier technologies; the UNDP digital strategy articulating digital transformation pathways committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the ESCWA internal innovation strategy deriving the strategic vision of this strategy; the digital transformation annual performance report 2019 of the World Food Programme (WFP) showcasing United Nations-related best practices; and the work programmes being pursued by the ICT board expounding on technological priorities which steered and defined many aspects of ESCWA internal digital transformation.

Figure 1. Resources consulted in drafting the strategy





## Definition and scope

Digitization is the conversion of material knowledge resources into a digital format, so as to be recognized by computer operations and the web and new media channels.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, digitalization is incorporating digital technology for work processes and interactions – either fully or with greater reliance on technology.

The scope of the ESCWA digital strategy recognizes both concepts together as digital transformation. The present Strategy aims to harmonize the activities stemming from the ESCWA Innovation Strategy (2020) and the ESCWA Data Strategy (2021) to align digital transformation with the organization's priorities. To reap the Strategy's benefits, all staff members are to take part of this digital transformation within their mandate of work at both the administrative level (digitalization) and the substantive level (digitization). The strategy prioritizes the five principles of the United Nations Secretary-General Strategy on New Technologies as presented in annex 2. The strategy also addresses digital technology deployment at ESCWA in various approaches – the two main pathways are either through specialized vendors or partnerships – as a tool to streamline pre-defined use cases.

The time validity of the strategy is conceptually open-ended, reflecting the timeframe and deadlines put forward by the suggested action plan.



## SWOT analysis and scoping

A SWOT analysis on the state of the digital landscape at ESCWA was conducted to gain a 360-degree understanding of the opportunities, identify the challenges and properly set the priorities and actions needed to implement the strategy.

According to the SWOT analysis, ESCWA has many strengths that need to be recognized internally and capitalized on by internal stakeholders. Many weaknesses and threats need to be treated and mitigated. Overall, ESCWA digital technology challenges include legacy technologies, databases and infrastructure operated by the Information Communication Technology Section (ICTS), as well as the absence of an ICT committee at ESCWA capable of bringing together various perspectives when approving a technology proposal. This is currently creating a bottleneck for deploying innovative work programmes and results in a cumbersome process for entering into agreements with external technology providers. In particular, the organization must tackle the root causes of challenges constraining the realization of maximum added value from the optimal utilization of digital technology in the four work components below, and not only remedy the symptoms. With this Strategy, several challenges can be transformed into strengths or opportunities as the intricacies of the technology use case dictate, such as the promotion of the digital skills and fluency of staff members through existing training mandates.

Annex 3 shows the current SWOT analysis with a look forward by outlining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of both digitizing and digitalizing ESCWA.

The action plan derived from this strategy will outline how staff members will be engaged to map the SWOT elements within their mandate of work as put forward in the previous Definition and Scope section.

## Work components

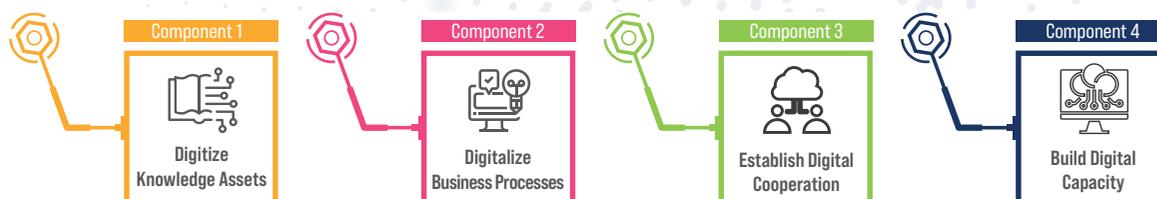
By analysing various types of ESCWA knowledge assets and consulting the work of other United Nations organizations (demonstrated in the following section), ESCWA digital work can be streamlined into four digital strategy work components, as shown in figure 2.

There are several paths to address the abovementioned work components, with many different starting points. Broadly put, this strategy entails the parallel implementation approach among these work components to simultaneously employ the waves of digital initiatives; especially as they all share common elements. There are several paths to address the abovementioned work components, with many different starting points. Broadly put, this strategy entails the parallel implementation approach among these work components to simultaneously employ the waves of digital initiatives; especially as they all share common elements. Probing deeper, this positions ESCWA during implementation in order to close gaps between the various work components; match the current trajectory and organizational cadence with the strategy aspirations; and eventually synergize strategy, structure, people, process and technology.

The first component is converting the stock of ESCWA knowledge assets into digital formats to fit the various storage and dissemination channels. This entails producing multiple formats, sizes and shapes of knowledge assets that would fit multiple purposes. The production process itself needs to be the responsibility of the knowledge owner rather than the knowledge repository or propagator (i.e. the programmer or the webmaster). Some of the digital knowledge is not home-grown, they are rather bought as a subscription to external platforms and databases such as library and journal subscriptions. Details are reflected in the action plan associated with this strategy.

The second work component addresses digitalizing ESCWA work processes, especially those that are home-grown (as opposed to UNHQ operation processes). One of the values of this exercise is to cut down unnecessary work processes, minimize paperwork and remove “sludge” – a set of organizational frictions that separate people (staff members and stakeholders) from what they want. Consequences of sludge include low productivity, job dissatisfaction, longer service queues and corruption. This represents the foundation of a comprehensive digital transformation related to business process engineering and re-engineering. Standards, service-level agreements and standard operating procedures (SOPs) need to be in place to accompany this process. This is highly needed to avoid creating new or modifying existing work processes that may not generate the impact needed or the objectives promised. Both digitizing knowledge assets and digitalizing work processes represent the core of this strategy and its action plan.

Figure 2. ESCWA digital strategy work components



In the third component, ESCWA is to support all offices to review their knowledge production plans and develop processes for digitizing key activities for impactful and innovative sustainable development solutions. This means that ESCWA knowledge producers need to incorporate the production of knowledge assets in the design and implementation of their projects; this includes producing multiple formats of the same knowledge asset.

A by-product of this component is to reduce the silo behaviour among ESCWA work components and engage in partnerships. In future steps, ESCWA experience and success stories may be exported to our partners and clients for their digital transformation efforts.

The fourth component of the strategy aims at synergizing internal digital capacity-building with emerging technologies to inspire digital creativity and the implementation of innovative technology solutions in new areas at ESCWA.

Below is an analysis of how this strategy addresses these work components. This analysis is needed to derive the strategic objective, recommendations and action plan.

## Work component 1: Digitize knowledge assets

Digitizing ESCWA stock of knowledge assets seeks to increase the amount, variability and availability of digital knowledge assets that are customized to fit agile and changing needs. To do so, ESCWA must gain an accurate picture of the two types of knowledge products across ESCWA: currently digitized assets, whether born digitally or converted, alongside the technologies with which they were created; and the traditional paper-based records and archives. To avoid a digital Tower of Babel, annex 4 provides a sample list of ESCWA knowledge assets to prioritize the critical resources to digitize.

A formal process was previously established at ESCWA to ensure harmonized digitization and digitalization. This internal mandate should be updated according to ESCWA reform and reinitiated to continue with the digitization efforts especially the Arabic knowledge assets and archives residing at the library that are yet to be converted into the digital format. In addition to knowledge resources, existing digitization activities at ESCWA reflect immediate programme needs. These random acts of digitization were captured in various formats using different technologies, several of which are now obsolete. Figure 3 reflects a systematic approach to digitize the prioritized knowledge assets via uniform standards.

Another dimension of digital transformation is related to the location of knowledge. In respect to soft copies, such databases are either inhouse within ESCWA premises or hosted at the UNHQ ICT cloud. Hard copies and records are archived locally in the library but also scattered at Division archives. The existing ESCWA mandate on digitizing substantive knowledge products as well as administrative and financial records has been recognized by this strategy and was reflected in the strategy action plan as well. Going forward with the digital strategy, we may need to establish sustainable digital repositories (e.g. scalable

Figure 3. Knowledge content life cycle of digital archives



data warehouse storage) to manage these assets once digitized and then ensure immediate access after integrating them across ESCWA and into the broader online arena. The strategy will address this dimension especially by aligning technology with the novel data sources expected to flow at ESCWA during the implementation of the ESCWA data strategy.

Moreover, ESCWA must implement best practices and standards for capturing, creating, transforming, availing, ensuring accessibility and disseminating data, information and knowledge. For example, newly digitized knowledge items are to be tagged “authoring” with relevant metadata to streamline integration into digital systems, especially specialised data and knowledge platforms. This digital strategy emphasizes the digitization of ESCWA spatial data (e.g. via partnerships with leading United Nations agencies on geographic information systems customized to ESCWA spatial data), as per the recommendations of the Geospatial strategy for the United Nations, and accelerates the statistical data goals of the ESCWA data strategy with greater recourse to technology.

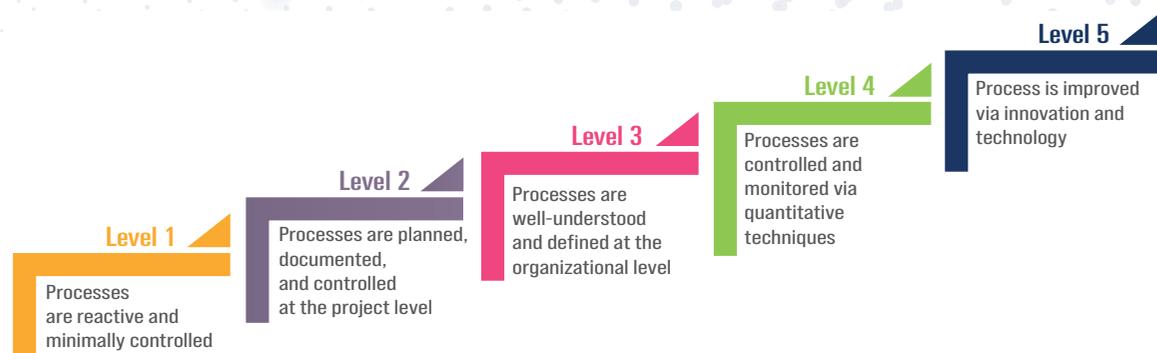
The digital transition goes beyond a list of initiatives underway across the organization. Instead, the impact and added value of digitization must be quantified to progress beyond the pilot phase [small tech teams working with advanced technologies but isolated from the rest of the operational technology solutions, ongoing projects and work priorities]. As such, this strategy consolidates four qualitative metrics to measure digitization progress and impact, as follows:

1. Number of e-publications including the conversion and abandon rates of knowledge assets and the number of newly created digital-native publications
2. Values of active usage of digitized knowledge assets residing on ESCWA systems measuring daily active users, loyalty index and the ratio of new users to repeat users
3. Dashboard of systems reliability recording outages, network, security and service availability
4. Number and percentage of digital transactions both received to and sent from ESCWA

## Work component 2: Digitalize work processes

Similarly, the second workstream is to streamline access to, and manage, this “Digital DNA” and its metadata inter-related with the ESCWA administrative and substantive [SOPs](#). The result resonates well with both the United Nations-secretariat initiative on digital SOPs and ESCWA existing platforms; foremost, the regional knowledge hub.

Figure 4. Process maturity level according to CMMI



Yet, innovative technology adoption in ESCWA must not be a pro forma action driven by United Nations strategies without considering internal priorities and needs. Instead, ESCWA should apply behavioural science to underlying administrative support systems, incentivizing innovative, analytical and evidence-based approaches to business process improvement.<sup>2</sup> This includes greater reliance on automation as a priority for improving administrative processes to identify and realize reductions in existing administrative burdens and reduce manual paperwork requirements and response times. The first step is identifying existing administrative processes both common for the whole organization and those intricate to the work modalities of the clusters to assess which processes will be enhanced significantly by digitalization. This step is critical because this digital strategy is not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive as there are processes that are dormant, small or owned externally by the United Nations work systems such as UNHQ and other United Nations entities. Such processes need to be outside the scope of this work.

According to the Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) presented in the below diagram, maturity levels are well-defined foundation layers that evolve over time and undergo continuous improvement process. As such, it should be noted that the maturity level of a process at ESCWA shall determine the need to introduce new ones that are less bureaucratic, agile and technology-influenced, adjust existing ones via digital technology, or discard legacy processes.

As ESCWA progresses steadfastly in its reform, new processes and work modalities will start to settle and mature according to level 2. This is an opportunity for ESCWA to infuse digital technologies into the current processes and even suggest new ones. As outlined in the ESCWA data strategy, ESCWA is not a technology provider expected to develop the technology solutions inhouse. Yet, moving forward to level 3, this strategy recommends ESCWA offices and project coordinators to develop our unique IT solutions only when the intricacies of a digital initiative address unique and defined ESCWA processes such as cross-organizational processes.

Fundamentally, such endeavour must be implemented in compliance with the United Nations Secretariat standards by working closely with ICTS via a pragmatic and structured approach as discussed in Implementation Requirements. This consolidates the digital product for its sustainability at an institutional level.

Moreover, it is crucial for ESCWA to remain vigilant when reaching level 4 as digitalized processes and work modalities grant the ability to track and quantify user activity. ESCWA must be primed to the non-intrusive embrace of data analytics to only service real-time business intelligence. The final level 5 continually improves the agility of the organization through incremental technological and innovative improvements. These improvements include the digital streamlining of non-critical programme components that do not contribute to the “big picture”. In turn, sludge will be reduced without increasing risk to programme integrity, thus freeing the collective knowledge and individual creativity of ESCWA staff members from being concentrated in predefined procedures or sets of activities. Therefore, level 5 will be the implementation arena of the ESCWA internal innovation strategy, especially its target 4 encouraging technology adoption. The result is then a set of interoperable ESCWA system processes optimized for handling digitized assets and work modality. These systems can stem from digital channels soliciting clients' requests, automating re-iterative processes and introducing self-service management platforms. These distinct yet collaborative systems ensure the free exchange of ESCWA digital assets, regardless of the systems in which these assets reside.

Out of the approximately 168 ESCWA processes, take, for example, the work process related to clearance of leaving staff members. The current process cuts off all knowledge related to exiting staff members one day after they leave the organization. The organization loses all the knowledge associated with staff members residing on the computer hard disk, or email and other online storage services. Even though several teams at ESCWA do transfer files to a shared drive when a staff member leaves, this good practice is not a standardized institutional process. As such, knowledge retention during handover needs to be transformed for the betterment of the organization's knowledge stock and business continuity.

## Work component 3: Establish digital cooperation

Digitizing an organization is not performed in closed offices or a solitary manner. It is rather a participatory effort. It benefits from a large community of users and beneficiaries. Digital assets are not produced by one assembly line but rather a several ones. Knowledge management is rather a group effort. As such, digital cooperation is important within ESCWA and with the rest of the knowledge producers in the United Nations community.

In July 2018, the Secretary-General convened a High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation to advance proposals to strengthen cooperation in the digital space among Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, academic institutions, the technical community and other relevant stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

Among this broad array of stakeholders, ESCWA can enhance information-sharing and build effective partnerships to drive internal digital transformation at all phases of our knowledge production. For example, ESCWA could experiment with new digital development partners to define project proposals, identify human resources, implement activities and monitor progress. The following organizations from the United Nations system, member States and the private sector are potential partners in implementing a sound digital strategy.

To effectively learn from – and utilize the collective intelligence of – those partners we work with, ESCWA should:

1. Establish baselines as to when seeking external partnerships is justified and feasible
2. Develop cooperation guidelines
3. Seek partnership only for initiatives with explicit mutual goals, targets and metrics

Identifying such baselines for the digital co-creation of solutions, in coordination with the SPARK section at ESCWA and with the flexibility to update them as necessary in the light of technology changes, will encourage ESCWA personnel to seek digital partnerships by streamlining the requirements for successful digital cooperation. In turn, this will

Table 1. Possible United Nations partnerships and collaborators for digital strategy implementation

Organization/entity	Possible cooperation
CEB	Act as the steering body for high-level strategy governance and oversight to deliver as one across the United Nations
OICT	Assist ESCWA in technology adoption and technical innovation
UNU	Utilize their research and training institute for capacity-building and as an incubator for digital initiatives/ideas, as well as for advice on digital topics when needed
ICTB	Provide technology infrastructure and superstructure; and enhance connectivity and resilience
UNSSC	Provide custom-tailored learning solutions for ESCWA during the implementation of the digital strategy
ITU	Participate in AI4Good summit and solicit digital success stories to inspire/influence the trajectory of ESCWA digital transformation
DOS	Offer tangible recommendations at the entity level
DMSPC	Offer advisory to the implementation of United Nations digital documents (e.g. roadmap for digital cooperation)
UNOPS	Assist with the development and delivery of complex digital projects

contribute to the ESCWA internal innovation strategy, target 2: “Implement out-of-the-box solutions” by tapping the potential of digital cooperation to import original technology ideas, best practices, initiatives and success stories. Similarly, ESCWA can utilize the partnership tools (e.g. the Prepare to Partner tool) provided by the United Nations Innovation Toolkit developed and operated by the United Nations System Staff College.



## Work component 4: Build digital capacity

The digital strategy is one of the key pillars of the ESCWA reform. It is influenced by the United Nations-wide digital agenda. As such, in future projects and programmes, the current trend of developing web-applications and interactive online reports is expected to grow and consequently encompass frontier and other digital technologies.

To accommodate this digital growth, ESCWA first needs to identify existing internal digital skills needed. Moving forward, substantive staff members are expected to be pro-active in the ESCWA digital transformation journey and derive impactful and innovative technology-based or -supported projects. This digital agenda requires leaders having digital literacy. However, digital literacy doesn't demand mastery of the technologies. Instead, it requires the ability to articulate the value of digital technologies to the organization's future.

In addition to leadership, this strategy requires ESCWA personnel at the junction of the digital transformation activities, such as administrative staff members and analysts, to also deepen their understanding of new technologies, acquaint themselves with the myriad possibilities of organizational technology use cases, and eventually collaborate closely with ICTS to realize the strategy's overall vision.

Similarly, since most of ESCWA digital activities are constrained to a particular kind of already existing digital technology (supply-driven) and few seek to incorporate new digital technology to innovatively realize a strategic goal (needs-based), the organization must bridge the gap between skills needed and skills available to simplify the deployment of both current and new digital technology for strategic goals. This is achieved by building the digital capacity of relevant staff members, foremost those in the ICTS, to eventually create the foundation necessary for the upcoming digital initiatives.

The ESCWA reform also promotes learning by doing; having colleagues engaged in cross-functional teams around various initiatives. The target is to raise awareness on the digital topic and create a unified digital language across all ESCWA. Hence, the Action Plan of this strategy will recommend such concrete actions.

Therefore, both technical and non-technical staff members must enhance their capacity in this field by completing technology training and online courses. For the prior, it is observed that the technical staff members of ICTS should consider key issues such as privacy, cybersecurity and ethical risks. For the latter, it remains the choice of the non-technical staff members to select training in line with their scope of work. The six clusters can even go further and develop a custom-made learning curriculum encompassing, for example, learning content from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), learning tracks from subscribed e-learning vendors (e.g. LinkedIn Learning), ESCWA online courses and seminars sponsored by ESCWA (e.g. Technovation Talks).

To sustain the process of digital transformation at ESCWA and prevent it from being a solitary or silo effort, more stakeholders need to be involved. Thus, digital capacity-building becomes a critical prerequisite, as a large number of knowledge producers at ESCWA must be adept at handling the breadth and scope of digitization and digitalization and different approaches involved and must be active players in the continued adoption of digital technologies at ESCWA.

As such, the digital capacity of knowledge producers and knowledge managers is a requirement to reap the benefits from technology deployment in the workplace. The action plan of this strategy will set forth the action needed in this regard.



## Implementation requirements

Certain requirements need to be secured for this Strategy and its action plan to be executed successfully and effectively. In line with McKinsey and Company, capturing the potential of digital opportunities at ESCWA requires consideration of three fundamental pillars.



### Structure

To begin with, each ESCWA office and work unit needs to identify its role in contributing toward the implementation of a robust digitization program. These offices are expected to populate the non-exhaustive list of annex 4 with their knowledge assets. This stocktaking exercise of knowledge assets is the steppingstone for ICTS – the main stakeholder in implementing this strategy. The specialized role of ICTS ensures the utilization of the suitable digitization approach and technology for the identified knowledge asset(s) toward realizing the full potential of the digital activity. To succeed, this requires they possess the appropriate tools, skills and understanding of their role in the bigger picture (to meet programme goals). However, this should not override the section's ability to maintain the reliability of their core business services.

ESCWA must enhance digital literacy across the clusters and bolster the digital skill to support the projected digital transformation needs. An ad-hoc technical activities assessment is already undertaken to streamline on-going digital activities thus identifying and mapping future competencies focus areas.



### People

Top management buy-in is needed to support the implementation of this strategy which will create organization-wide digital awareness and drive the enthusiasm for digital behaviour among ESCWA knowledge workers. Leadership are encouraged to explicitly endorse the potential power of digital technologies by showcasing short-term projects with demonstrable impact and leverage them toward achieving the strategy's digital objectives.

Moreover, this strategy stipulates re-establishing the ICT committee composed of specialized members regardless of grade. To that end, ESCWA is encouraged to capitalize on the collective experience and knowledge of its diverse talent pool constituted from both staff members and others, such as individual contractors and volunteers. As discussed in the complementary ESCWA data strategy, this committee is to evaluate proposals related to technology procurement costing greater than \$50,000. Moving forward with the strategy, the committee should also outline the process for staff members as to how portal proposals are submitted and evaluated and leverage the United Nations Project Management Platform for inhouse ESCWA project lifecycle.

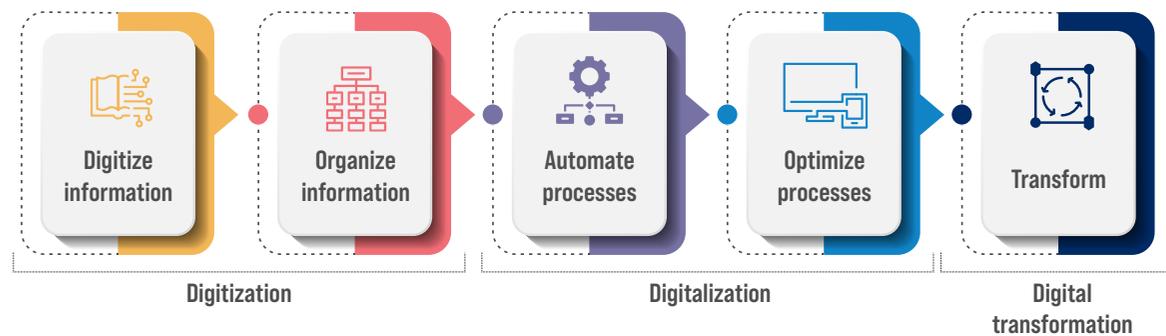
ESCWA needs to commit to continuous progress on work component 4 enhancing the digital growth of all staff members.

## Process

The process pillar refers to the steps required to bring together the requirements of the previous pillars (structure and people) simultaneously.

ESCWA needs to secure sufficient resources beyond training and software subscriptions to facilitate progress and sustainability across the three dimensions (structure, people and process). The Executive Action Team (EAT) will ensure the allocation of these resources by considering the digital footprint of each project at the project approval stage to support the goals of this strategy. A high-level overview of the process is demonstrated in the figure 5.

Figure 5. High-level process for the ESCWA digital strategy



The organization will determine whether to opt for internal training, build on an external digital ecosystem of talent and partners or a combination of both. This strategy encourages the third option and suggests clear institutional guidelines for partnerships and sponsorships to govern work component 3 while considering special attention to the recommendations of the ICTS on the initiatives and strategy matters.

Besides, it should be highlighted that digitalization of a single process requires on average six to eight weeks. This period follows the business tasks of identifying the candidate process, framing the added value from incorporating technology, mapping the technology requirements and promoting buy-in from stakeholders.

## Next steps

To realize this strategy effectively and efficiently, the following actions need to be taken:

- Disseminate the strategy document
- Form the Digital Strategy Action Group and commission it with the task of overseeing implementation of the Strategy
- Securing resources (human and financial) to implement the strategy and its action plan

- Successful assigning tasks prescribed in the action plan to stakeholders
- Establishing a strategy implementation team
- Establishing dedicated repositories for long-term preservation and seamless integration with new digital services and processes
- Seeking partnership with relevant partners working with digital knowledge management
- Raising awareness about the importance of ESCWA digitalization
- Planning periodic training on digital tools for staff members
- Periodically reviewing and updating the strategy and its action plan
- Ensuring the digital footprint in all ESCWA projects, activities and programmes (e.g. a question in the project canvas: How will this initiative build on technologies ESCWA is subscribed to?)
- Articulating the strategic orientation and merits of ESCWA digital transformation


 A graphic element for the 'Action plan' section. It features a stylized hexagonal icon on the left, composed of concentric lines in blue and orange. A thick blue horizontal bar extends to the right from the icon, with the words 'Action plan' written in orange text on it. The background of the page is decorated with a pattern of light blue dots of varying sizes.
 

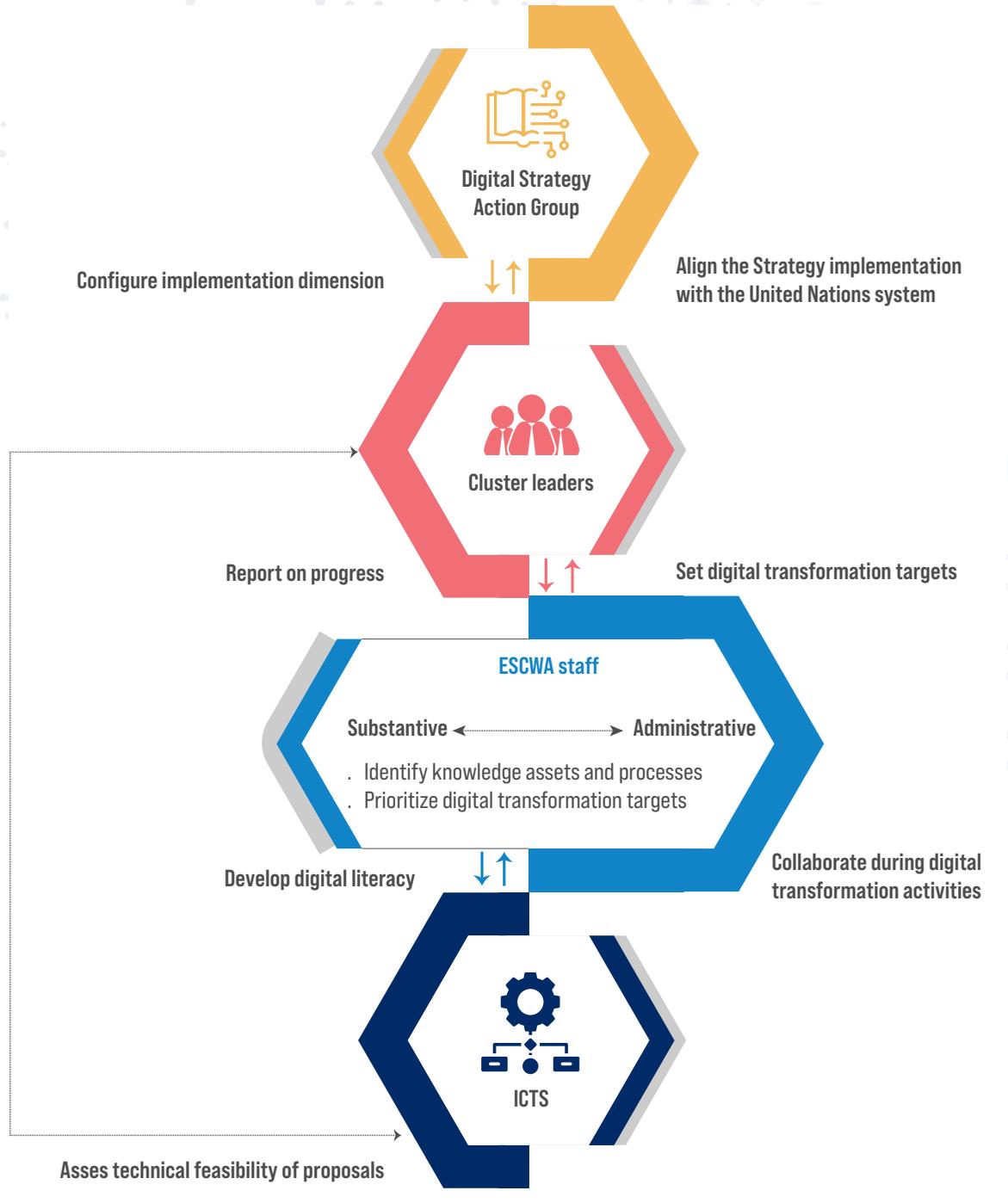
## Action plan

A key instrument of the ESCWA digital strategy is a high-level operational action plan that translates and articulates the vision and aspirations of this strategy into practical implementation tasks with assigned resources and personnel. The implementation plan will undergo a comprehensive assessment by the Digital Strategy Action Group, which will outline concrete and tangible steps toward realizing this strategy.

The operational action plan, acting precisely at the strategic and functional levels, will be approved by the Digital Strategy Action Group after this strategy rollout. The governance framework of the operational action plan is presented in figure 6 below.

The action plan will be approved and executed after the strategy rollout. It will outline concrete steps and actions with assigned players to reflect the aspirations of this strategy document and act as a baseline to track progress during implementation of the Strategy. Also, the Action Plan should be drafted in a projects approach to match the new work modalities of the ESCWA reform. Similarly, it complements the ESCWA innovation strategy action plan element on the architecture development framework.

Figure 6. ESCWA governance framework for digital strategy implementation





## Annex 1. Comparison between digitization and digitalization

	Digitization	Digitalization
<b>Definition</b>	Converting analogue information into a digital form.	Incorporating digital technologies into business processes and interactions.
<b>Deals with</b>	Information and knowledge	Processes and interactions
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scanning a document into a PDF</li> <li>• Scanning a photograph into a digital image file (e.g. jpg or png)</li> <li>• Converting a paper form into a digital version</li> <li>• Turning a VHS recording into a digital file (e.g. mp4)</li> <li>• Capturing printed or handwritten notes via OCR</li> <li>• Converting typed or handwritten reports into usable data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sending messages via email instead of by post</li> <li>• Chatting to someone in real-time via instant messaging instead of by phone</li> <li>• Meeting up with someone via video conferencing instead of face-to-face</li> <li>• Monitoring equipment using digital sensors instead of visual inspection</li> <li>• Assembling products with a robot instead of by hand</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faster access to information</li> <li>• More permanent storage of information</li> <li>• Access to historical data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficiency and productivity gains</li> <li>• Greater accuracy of information</li> <li>• Enhanced visibility</li> <li>• Better decision-making</li> </ul>
<b>Possible tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scanner</li> <li>• Digital camera</li> <li>• Online forms and software</li> <li>• Storage and retrieval systems</li> <li>• OCR software</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ERP software</li> <li>• Messaging and conferencing software</li> <li>• Predictive maintenance systems</li> <li>• Robotics and controller systems</li> <li>• Computers, servers and networks</li> </ul>

**Source:** Next Service Field Mobility, Digitize vs Digitalize: Why You Need to Know the Difference, August 11, 2020. Available <https://bit.ly/204HyZJ>.



## Annex 2. Mapping ESCWA digital goals with the Secretary-General's Strategy

In the below matrix, the third goal of 'digital cooperation and inclusion' is removed as it is mentioned explicitly in the Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies, principle 2: foster inclusion and transparency.

### Mapping the Secretary-General's principles with ESCWA digital goals

SG principles	ESCWA goals	Digitize knowledge assets	Digitalize work processes	Build digital capacity
Protect and promote global values		Increase outreach of ESCWA digital flagship knowledge products in the region		
Foster inclusion and transparency			Define digital delivery platforms unrestricting data and knowledge	Enhance digital co-creation and collaboration models
Work in partnership		Facilitate ESCWA digitization by specialized partners		
Build on existing capabilities		Transform existing records and archives to digital format	Automate standardized and re-iterative internal work processes	Promote awareness on technology ethical challenges (e.g. ethical hacking, inequalities)
Be humble and continue to learn			Update digitalized processes to increase cost-effectiveness and efficiency	Identify possible opportunities from deploying emerging technologies



## Annex 3. SWOT analysis of the ESCWA digital landscape

### Digital landscape at ESCWA

#### Strengths

- Senior management is supportive of the widely-adoption of digital technologies in ESCWA
- Staff are digitally equipped and technology enthusiasts
- Several technology infrastructure updates are already underway at ESCWA
- Previous digitization OES mandate still employed
- Strong ties with United Nations digital policy and ICTB

#### Weaknesses

- Staff rely on the Shared drive to store files, personal data which should not happen
- Lack of publications taxonomy
- Lack of up-to-date digital and technical skillset at ICTS
- During the building project, records have been destroyed without following the IN-records management process
- Staff morale amid several organization-wide changes
- Loyalty to classical methods of retaining ESCWA knowledge
- Limited human and financial resources to develop solutions
- Time and efforts spent by staff on routine tasks
- Several ad-hoc developed systems that are not always interoperable

#### Opportunities

- Staff started to use one drive and MS teams filing option
- The willingness of United Nations-sister organizations to share success stories
- Reach a new breed of readers
- The growing number of ESCWA clients utilizing digital outlets for knowledge and services
- OICTs at sister United Nations organizations assist ESCWA during its digital transformation
- ESCWA reform already introducing new processes and allowing for changes (early CMMI model level [levels 1 and 2] allowing for modular amendments to processes)
- Digital transformation gaining momentum for increasing number of staff members due to United Nations and private sector trends and marketing
- United Nations reform asking to simplify procedures and deploy adequate tools to implement United Nations mandate efficiently

#### Threats

- Digital assets may be vulnerable to cyber threats
- Duplicating other digitization efforts by other sister United Nations organizations
- Rapid change of technology might make the developed tools obsolete



## Annex 4. Sample taxonomy of ESCWA knowledge assets

The following list is a sample and will be extended as part of a large asset inventory to be done by the digital action group.

ESCWA has several knowledge assets already digitized and the remaining are currently under processing. The below table showcases several examples and will be extended as part of a large asset inventory to be performed by the digital action group. The examples of knowledge assets are as follows.

### Sample of ESCWA knowledge assets

Type	Record owner	Notes	Status
1. Publications	CSS: On the ESCWA website Library: On ODS and UNDL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital ESCWA publications stored on the online repository the Digital Library</li> </ul>	Completed
2. Documents and records (e.g. correspondence)	ESCWA mail and archiving unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To follow United Nations retention plans</li> </ul>	Initiated
3. Digital correspondence (e.g. emails and fax)	Administrative Assistants and all staff members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer to ESCWA Records Management Policy</li> </ul>	Initiated
4. Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)	SPARK and ASD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Originals to be stored in the main archive</li> <li>All previous agreements to be digitized and stored online</li> </ul>	Ongoing
5. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Mapping internal processes	RMSDD (ASD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All SOPs to be posted on iSeek</li> </ul>	Initiated
6. Reports, resolutions, documents and circulars	RMSDD (ASD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be posted on iSeek</li> </ul>	Initiated
7. Evaluation reports and internal policies	SPARK- OL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Made available on ESCWA website and iSeek</li> </ul>	Ongoing
8. Multimedia, photos, infographics and videos	ECIU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All photos to be added to <a href="http://multimedia.unescwa.org">http://multimedia.unescwa.org</a></li> <li>Infographics to be added to Infographics repository</li> <li>Videos are shared publicly on ESCWA YouTube channel</li> </ul>	Initiated
9. OES speeches	OES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Added to ESCWA website</li> </ul>	Initiated
10. Event documents, presentations and reports	Event owner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Added to ESCWA website</li> </ul>	Initiated

<b>11. Statistics</b>	Cluster 4	• Shared publicly on the Data Portal	<b>Initiated</b>
<b>12. Media materials: News and press releases</b>	ECIU	• Disseminate online via the ESCWA website	<b>Initiated</b>
<b>13. Mission reports</b>	Head of missions	• Store electronically with OES official records	<b>Initiated</b>
<b>14. Regional advisors' reports</b>	Regional advisors	• Store electronically in clusters' database domain(s)	<b>Initiated</b>
<b>15. Library assets</b>	Library	• Added to the library resource management software	<b>Completed</b>
<b>16. Journal subscriptions</b>	Knowledge Management Team	• Newsletters and subscriptions pushed thru vendors (e.g. ProQuest) via email upon users' subscription	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>17. Spatial data</b>	SPARK and Cluster 4	• To be added in a dedicated sub-page in the Data Portal and MANARA	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>Traditional and Paper Records (Backlog)</b>			
<b>18. OES old official records</b>	OES	• OES old official records have been digitized and stored electronically	<b>Completed</b>
<b>19. HR records</b>	HRMS	• HR records have been digitized and all newly produced records to be added to the HR filing structure	<b>Initiated</b>
<b>20. Old VHS tapes</b>	Library	• 120 VHS videos have been migrated to DVDs	<b>Completed</b>



## Endnotes

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