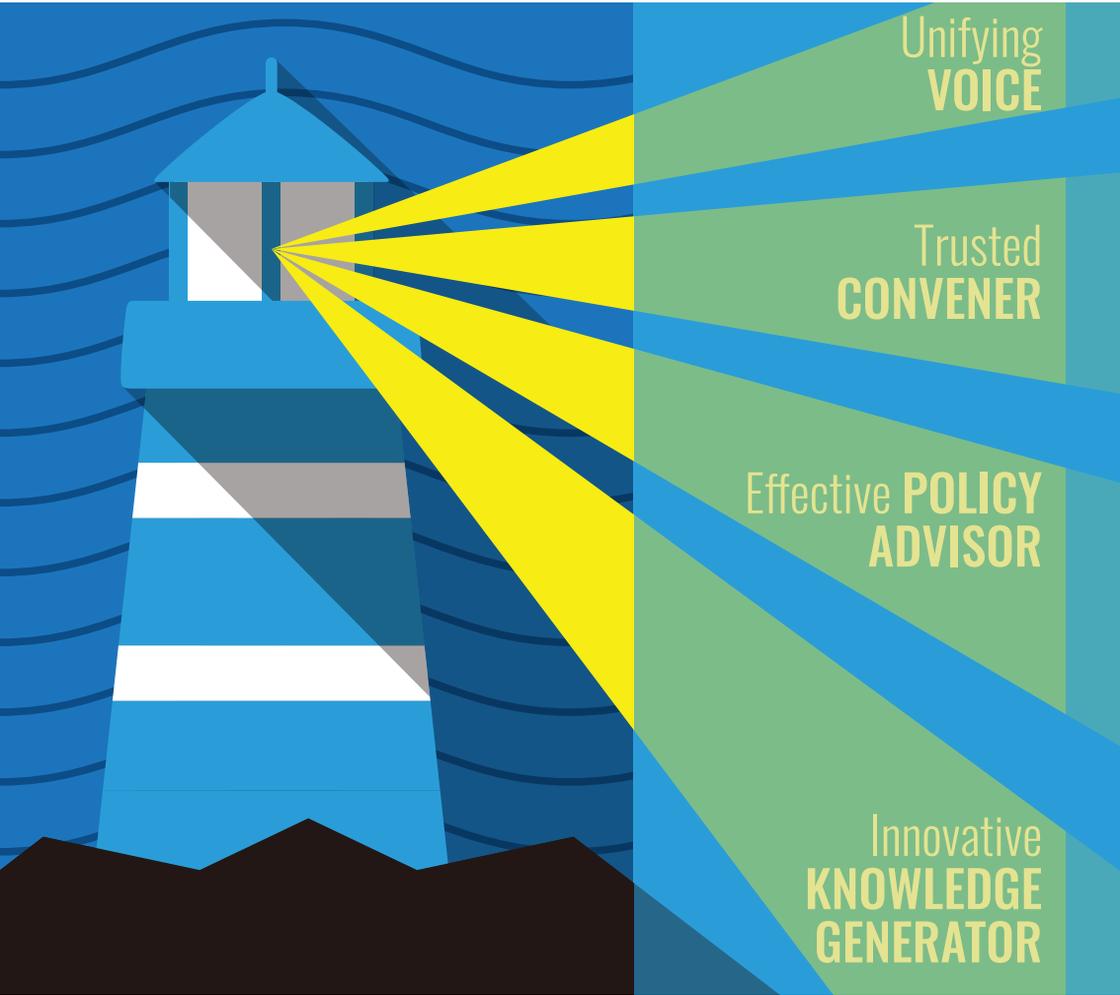


# A Brief Guide to **ESCWA REFORM**



Unifying  
**VOICE**

Trusted  
**CONVENER**

Effective **POLICY**  
**ADVISOR**

Innovative  
**KNOWLEDGE**  
**GENERATOR**



UNITED NATIONS

الأمم المتحدة  
**ESCWA**

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.



**R**eform at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is about creating a smarter and more agile organization, which delivers and generates more value and impact with available resources. The aim of the transformative change is five-fold: to improve the operations of ESCWA, making it more dynamic, vibrant, efficient, impactful and responsive to member States; to significantly empower employees; to create a culture of continuous learning and collaboration; to improve morale and ownership within the organization; and to advance the vision of ESCWA through knowledge and energy.

The proposed transformative change of ESCWA, as described in the present document, aligns with the need to focus the organization's work and resources on providing regional public goods, to keep pace with rapid regional and global developments, to become an innovative catalyst for positive change in the Arab region, to help build entrepreneurial and knowledge societies, to transition towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and to create a new reality of stability, justice and prosperity.

The goal is to establish ESCWA as a beacon of knowledge in the region and beyond, and as a harbour for stimulating and insightful debate. *ESCWA shall become a valued source of policy advice, a platform for discussion and consensus, a hub for cutting-edge research and knowledge, and an assembly for stakeholders of equitable and sustainable development.*

“

*The United Nations needs to be nimble, efficient and effective. It must focus more on delivery and less on process. More on people and less on bureaucracy.*

**António Guterres**  
Secretary-General of the United Nations

*We must be bigger than ourselves. We must become the lighthouse we aspire to be, and the one the region demands we become.*



# Basis for Transformation



**ESCWA** has proved itself capable of implementing its programme of work, fully utilizing the resources provided to it. It has successfully fulfilled its commitments to the United Nations General Assembly. However, is the Commission serving its member States and stakeholders as well as it can? Is it producing the added value that the region requires?

**ESCWA** produces valuable research, provides policy advice, and facilitates various policy changes

by Arab Governments. However, the organization is often not recognized for the value of the work it has produced, or awarded the standing it deserves as a regional institution.

The current operating structure creates obstacles to performance at the level required to achieve ESCWA goals, and has led to the following:

Stymied innovation by staff members	Established siloes, leading to ineffective and inefficient use of human and financial resources
Created unnecessary opaque spheres of influence	Trapped talent and expertise in corners
Generated a lack of accountability for delivering results	Reduced the impact that ESCWA programmes should have

**ESCWA** is therefore an organization that risks becoming stagnant should it maintain its current value proposition and structure.

The proposal to shift to a more agile, flexible, dynamic and decentralized organization addresses the above-mentioned challenges and intends to undertake the following:

- Expand the horizon of ESCWA staff members beyond their current restricted areas of work
- Enhance collaboration, build trust, and encourage behavioural change among all staff members
- Improve staff members' work experience
- Optimize the use of talent and expertise
- Create innovation and entrepreneurship incentives for all staff members
- Develop processes to free substantive projects from administrative burdens, thus enabling them to focus on what they do best
- Increase openness and transparency in decision-making at all levels
- Change the working modality to produce the levels of excellence needed to enhance the organization's value proposition in the region
- Create broad opportunities for value-added change through regional public goods, using national policy as a tool at the regional level

*The transformation will empower, motivate and energize staff members, and increase the regional recognition, impact and effectiveness of ESCWA work*

# Guiding Principles

A more dynamic ESCWA is premised on the following guiding principles:

## Strategy

A shared purpose and vision for staff to feel personally and emotionally invested

## Network of teams

A network of empowered, cross-functional and autonomous teams, which are empowered to identify their own solutions and deliver exceptional results

## Feedback loops

Rapid decision and learning cycles that embrace uncertainty in evolving environments

## People-driven

A dynamic people model that encourages innovation, promoting a people-centred culture that engages the workforce and creates added value

## Enabling technology for innovation

Employing technology to seamlessly integrate all aspects of the organization, thus increasing its speed and flexibility in response to stakeholder and business needs



New

# Work Modalities

ESCWA is shifting its operational model to a strategic, visionary, results-based and demand-driven approach, delivered by multidisciplinary teams and centred around a diverse portfolio of projects.

## 01. DEFINITIONS



### What is a project?

A project is a temporary endeavour undertaken with identified implementation milestones to create a result. It seeks to produce immediate and/or intermediate results that address an identified challenge or need, by combining various outputs/deliverables (**products/channels**) to effect change in policy, regulation, thinking, practice, skills and circumstances, or to produce flagship knowledge products.



### What is the project portfolio?

The project portfolio is the totality of the organization's projects. It aims to make tangible contributions to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region, address member States' development needs, promote regional collaboration, realize the organization's vision and goals, and effect the desired added value and change.



### What is a product?

> A tangible deliverable that brings value to a defined client or group of

*No transformation accomplishes its goals unless it is revolutionary at its core*

clients, and to the organization that provides it

- > Solves a challenge or provides a benefit to clients
- > Used in the short- to medium-term to address client needs
- > Produces cutting-edge policy recommendations and analysis
- > Develops innovative policy tools to support policymakers
- > Provides policy solutions

*A product may be a publication, training programme, toolkit, policy tool or methodology that has life beyond the project that produced it. It can be used by ESCWA or clients for many years, and new projects can be launched to build on existing products.*

### What is a channel?

- > A way of communicating with people or getting something done
- > A way of making a product or information available to clients
- > A way of guiding or supporting the organization's work and products towards a result
- > A way of disseminating a product or information to the public
- > A way of confirming or ascertaining conclusions drawn from research, and empowering follow-up

*A channel may be a website, an expert group meeting, an intergovernmental meeting, a regional network, an online platform, or the provision of in-person technical advice.*

### What is a milestone?

Important achievements or events during the implementation of a project, which can be measured to track progress in implementation.

### What is a result?

- > **Immediate result:** change in knowledge, skills, attitudes or ways of working
- > **Intermediate result:** change in conditions, policies or structures
- > **Development result:** impacts people's lives, affects country development paths, promotes structural transformation, and/or

establishes a new approach to development.

### What is a project team?

A project team consists of a maximum of nine staff members, built around the human resource needs of a project. A project team is disbanded upon project finalization. All staff members should be a member of at least two project teams. A project team is composed of the following:

- > A project team coordinator
- > Substantive team members (individuals from various cluster areas experienced in the project topic and focused on statistics/ data support)
- > Corporate services teams, which include one or more members from:
  - Information systems: focused on platform, tool or application development
  - Logistics: focused on administrative, financial, and service support for the project implementation

The project team is supported by:

- > Talent Management Team (TMT)
- > Strategy, Planning, Accountability, Results and Knowledge Section (SPARK)
- > Resource Management and Service Development (RMSD)
- > External Relations and Communication (ERC)



**ESCWA PROJECT COMPONENTS**

DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS IS CRUCIAL FOR ACHIEVING SHARED UNDERSTANDING AND CONSISTENT IMPLEMENTATION



**2. PROJECT WORKFLOW**

**Creating a new project**

Any staff member can develop a project proposal by making use of the project canvas/format, which includes the most critical elements of the idea. The project canvas includes the project's purpose, expected results, proposed activities, internal HR requirements, institutional partnerships, proposed budget, and outlines the series of products, channels and milestones that capture:

**> Impact**

- relevance to the SDGs, clients' needs and/or the ESCWA vision and objectives
- related to the vision and strategy of the key results area (KeyRA)

- support to member States in achieving the SDGs and/or national development goals
- Identifies results with strong measurable indicators and a clear baseline to measure impact
- > Return on investment**
  - optimization of resource use
  - relevant to multiple key result areas (cross-KeyRAs)
  - demonstrates a clear regional dimension or scalability
  - leverages in-house expertise and existing products
- > Time criticality**
  - project responds to an urgent need
  - linked to other ongoing projects

- needed to respond to a time-bound mandate
  - linked to upcoming/ongoing global or regional review/processes
- > **Potential for new opportunities**
- involves new clients
  - brings new funding, or existing donor interest in funding
  - engages new partners
  - demonstrates innovation, exhibits strong partnerships, and/or advance the visibility/relevance of ESCWA

### Decision-making on projects

New project proposals will be submitted by the project sponsor to the Executive Action Team (EAT) via the project canvas platform. Project proposals will be reviewed for their strategic fit in the existing ESCWA portfolio, and will be assessed against the above criteria. Projects that meet the criteria-passing threshold will be considered for approval by EAT, which may request changes to the proposal before final approval is given. A positive decision by EAT triggers the completion of required information in the project canvas platform by the project sponsor, with the assistance of SPARK and the Financial Management

Service (FMS) Section, if needed. EAT may make its own cost estimate and assign a budget it deems appropriate for the project.

During this process, the project sponsor will coordinate with the talent management team (TMT) to identify staff members and staff-time allocation based on staff roles and engagement within the project. Any disagreement on the selection of the project team members and team allocation will be brought for arbitration to EAT, without separate recourse.<sup>1</sup> A staff member will have the ability to opt-out of maximum one assignment per e-pas cycle (yearly). In such a case, the second assignment will be mandatory.

Once a project is approved, the project sponsor becomes the project coordinator. However, if the project sponsor has limited substantive abilities and/or inadequate experience to carry out the technical and coordination responsibilities of the project, EAT can assign an alternative project coordinator. The project sponsor will be credited on their e-pass for project initiation and approval.

1. In certain instances, and in the interest of the organization, the Executive Secretary will assign teams to undertake specific projects.



The following graphic illustrates the workflow within project structures, from project conception to project implementation.



### 03. ESCWA COORDINATION MECHANISM

#### Team coordination

A team delivering a project will follow the agile team methodology<sup>2</sup>, holding stand-up meetings and regular planning, review and retrospective meetings. Teams will make use

of the Kanban methodology to visually monitor the project progress and jointly celebrate the project achievements.

#### Key result area coordination

KeyRA meetings serve as coordination platforms for the respective projects within a key result area. Project coordinators will meet at least once a month to exchange information about the project progress, review achievements and discuss impediments and obstacles to the

project advancement. It is their joint responsibility to ensure that KeyRA projects are integrated and contribute towards achieving the objectives of the key result area.

These meetings will be organized by the KeyRA coordinator. KeyRA coordination will be carried out by

2. The document entitled "Working as an Agile ESCWA" provides detailed information on Agile teams and the Kanban methodology.

project coordinators on a rotational basis every six months. The cluster

leader should frequently participate in these meetings.

### Cluster coordination

Cluster meetings serve as a coordination platform for KeyRA coordinators to meet regularly with the cluster leader to present KeyRA progress, discuss obstacles

and issues confronting KeyRA achievement, and ensure that the cluster goals are met and implementation is on target.

## 04. ESCWA OPERATIONAL ROLES

### Executive Action Team

EAT<sup>3</sup> plays a critical role in the direction and oversight of the ESCWA project portfolio. EAT ensures that projects are aligned with the ESCWA vision and mission, and with the overall direction of the United Nations development system's efforts regarding the 2030 Agenda. It will also assist in leveraging ESCWA expertise and human and financial resources more effectively and efficiently. EAT is responsible for the following:

- > Setting the overall strategy of the ESCWA substantive project portfolio

- > Reviewing the existing portfolio to ensure its consistency, complementarity and alignment with the goals of the organization
- > Receiving, assessing, and deferring/approving/rejecting project proposals in accordance with overall ESCWA priorities. It may request changes to the proposals before final approval is given
- > Assigning budgets for approved project<sup>4</sup>
- > Approving final project staffing in the event of project staff disputes between the project sponsor/coordinator and talent manager

3. EAT shall meet monthly or as often as needed. The presence of 50 per cent of its members is required to achieve quorum; and it convene in any number to decide on previous meeting items. Decisions made on projects without quorum must have the approval of the Executive Secretary. Decisions shall be made by majority. In case of a tie, the vote of the Executive Secretary or alternate chair shall break the deadlock. Only project proposals that have fulfilled and satisfied the required evaluation criteria will be forwarded to EAT.

4. FMS has the right to reallocate resources during the project implementation depending on the ESCWA fiscal budget and cashflow availability, with the approval of the Executive Secretary.

- > Reviewing progress of all projects in the substantive clusters
- > Deciding on exceptional extensions and amendments, or closing of projects
- > Requesting evaluation of projects when needed
- > Overseeing projects' impact and results, and serving as ultimate arbiter of progress towards the results established for the key results areas
- > Providing guidance to cluster leaders on specific aspects of the cluster portfolio

### EAT secretariat

The duties of the EAT secretariat will be carried out by the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES), as follows:

- > Maintaining the EAT schedule, holding regular meetings and preparing relevant documentation, organizing ad-hoc meetings, and drafting project proposal evaluations
- > Previewing project proposals
- > Assisting in project proposals evaluation
- > Keeping an inventory of ongoing projects, and monitoring their progress and upcoming milestones
- > Reporting any important incidents, delays or deviations from project plans to EAT if these are not highlighted by respective cluster leaders

The Office of the Executive Secretary will be supported by SPARK, which will undertake the following:

### Cluster leaders

Cluster leaders are members of the Executive Action Team. They work with their cluster teams and guide the project coordinator or team members. They are responsible for the following:

#### Contributing to the ESCWA vision, strategy and programme plan

- > Driving transformational change within ESCWA
- > Actively contributing to organization-wide strategic decisions through EAT
- > Participating in the development of the ESCWA strategic plan
- and supporting the preparation of the ESCWA annual programme plan
- > Leading discussions within a cluster and between clusters, guiding the formulation of strategic priorities and key result areas, and accordingly informing ESCWA-wide strategic directions
- > Proactively ensuring the smooth flow of communication and promoting the coherence of ESCWA messages, strategic outcomes and policy positions on key issues relevant to the cluster's projects and areas of work

- > Providing ESCWA senior management with insight and creative approaches to foster innovation, effectiveness and efficiency

### Leading the implementation of the cluster's vision and workplan

- > Leading the overall implementation of the cluster's workplan
- > Guiding the conceptualization of projects and ensuring a consultative process is in place for project development
- > Supporting project sponsors to ensure that the project canvases and products are aligned with the ESCWA vision and expected accomplishments
- > Ensuring alignment and coherence of the regional advisors' support to member States with the cluster's work programme, projects and deliverables
- > Providing substantive feedback/guidance to project teams to ensure the quality of the cluster's products; encouraging and empowering staff members; providing technical and logistical support; resolving impediments; and establishing dialogue with other teams and/or resources
- > Ensuring harmony, alignment and coherence within and across clusters
- > Identifying and managing risks within the cluster portfolio and taking appropriate action

### Supporting the roll-out of ESCWA organizational reform and the agile approach to management

- > Fostering a work culture of communication, transparency, collaboration, and mutual support within the cluster and across project teams and clusters
- > Promoting and facilitating teamwork, empowering staff, recognizing merit and operating with integrity, transparency and fairness
- > Assessing needs in terms of competence and expertise, and overseeing the recruitment of the cluster's middle-management staff
- > Carrying out, in collaboration with project coordinators, a review of project staff roles, assignments and time allocation prior to the project implementation
- > Serving as first reporting officer to project coordinators in their clusters

### Enhancing engagement, influence, outreach, resource mobilization and partnership-building

- > Contributing to the development of ESCWA partnerships, resource mobilization and communication strategies
- > Maintaining continuous dialogue with member States at the substantive level through ESCWA committees and networks of specialists from government offices
- > Leading the cluster's efforts to build a network of strategic partnerships

around key priority areas, and helping with situational analysis, messaging, communication and problem-solving

- > Engaging in resource mobilization and funding for the cluster's projects
- > Promoting and supporting regular and effective engagement, dialogue and interaction with clients and with key traditional and non-traditional partners, including governments, United Nations and non-United Nations organizations, civil society, parliaments and academia
- > Expending all necessary efforts to carry out senior-level representation and advocacy functions on behalf of the cluster and of ESCWA management, as required
- > Promoting a culture of collaborative work with United Nations entities at the regional and national levels, going beyond traditional organizational boundaries, in line with the United

Nations regional review and mechanisms for collaboration and joint accomplishments

- > Ensuring a swift, relevant and high-quality response to requests related to supporting member States, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams
- > Ensuring a renewed and up-to-date network of external top experts in the Cluster's areas of work to serve as referees for knowledge products, partners in knowledge production, and overall inspiration for higher-quality products
- > Developing and enhancing partnerships with leading universities, research centres, and think tanks to identify exchange programmes, sabbatical leaves and other continuing education opportunities
- > Supporting the implementation of the ESCWA communication strategy in accordance with the cluster's priorities and areas of work

## Project coordinators

Project coordinators are usually project sponsors and have the clearest idea what its products/channels should be to achieve maximal effectiveness and value for clients. They are the most authoritative resource to the team for answering questions around products/channels and milestones to be achieved. Their responsibilities

include the following:

- > Supporting cluster leaders in the preparation of the cluster annual programme plan and ESCWA strategic plan
- > Reporting to the cluster leader on project challenges, progress and results, and to EAT when needed
- > Coordinating with other project

- coordinators to ensure cluster vision and KeyRA objectives are met
- > Coordinating and identifying synergies between products and channels with other project coordinators
  - > Representing their team in KeyRA meetings and liaising with the cluster leader
  - > Delivering cutting-edge knowledge and added policy value to clients
  - > Keeping the project on track and ensuring agreed milestones are met
  - > Creating a performing environment where team members can thrive
  - > Motivating and empowering team members to perform at their best
  - > Developing project outcome messages
  - > Managing a project's allocated budget
  - > Calling upon BIT and TMT teams as needed to support project implementation

### Team members

Team members are non-hierarchical and operate autonomously. They are staff members whose skills and expertise are needed for approved project implementation. Project team members commit to jointly delivering milestones. They jointly

set their project plans and timelines, and determine the delivery date of the results. Team members succeed or fail as a group and carry a collective responsibility for achieving the set milestones and project results.

## 05. ESCWA PROJECT ABBREVIATIONS

EAT	○	Executive Action Team
C	○	Cluster
CL	○	Cluster leader
KeyRA	○	Key results area
KeyRAC	○	Key results area coordinator (rotational)
PR	○	Project
PRC	○	Project coordinator
TM	○	Team member
PRD	○	Products
CH	○	Channels
MS	○	Milestones
RS	○	Results

