



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2021/WG.1/INF.1
10 March 2021
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

First ESCWA-League of Arab States Joint Workshop on Developing the
Arab Digital Agenda/Information and Communications Technology Strategy
A Standalone Side-Event in Parallel to the 32nd Arab Working Group on the Arab ICT Strategy

Online Meeting, 23-24 March 2021

Day one: Tuesday, 23 March 2021 **12:30-15:30 Beirut time**

Day two: Wednesday, 24 March 2021 **12:30-15:30 Beirut time**

Information Note

I. BACKGROUND

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) launched the Advancing Digital Cooperation and Development Arab States Action Programme (ADCD-ASAP) in 2020, comprised of eight tracks, which aims among others, to produce Regional/National Digital Strategies/Agendas that would enable policymakers to bring change in policy, thinking and/or practices that respond to the needs of their countries towards harnessing ICTs for development, and accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. This project is a natural extension of several efforts that ESCWA has exerted in the field of digital development for a number of years.

Within the overall framework of ADCD-ASAP, and in the context of the joint technical cooperation between ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS) on the Arab Digital Agenda/ICT Strategy, preparations have been initiated and resources mobilized to develop the intended unified **Arab Digital Agenda/ICT Strategy (ADAICTS)** in line with ESCWA's proposal entitled "**ESCWA's vision on the work modalities for producing, developing and implementing the Arab Information and Communication Technology Strategy (The Arab Digital Agenda)**"¹ or shortly the "ESCWA Vision on Work Modalities (EVWM)", which was submitted to, and presented during the LAS working group on the Arab ICT strategy's 30th meeting (via VC) on 28 July 2020, revised, re-submitted and adopted during the LAS WG 31st meeting held virtually on 29 September 2020, and endorsed by the Council of Arab ICT Ministers on 18 December 2020, in accordance with the WG31st recommendations.

In this context, **the First ESCWA-LAS Joint Workshop on Developing the Arab Digital Agenda / ICT Strategy**, will take place as a **Standalone Side Event in Parallel to the 32nd Arab Working Group on the Arab ICT Strategy**.

The first joint ESCWA-LAS workshop will set the stage for a series of events to elaborate and discuss successive versions of the ADAICTS, expected to be finalized by the end of 2021, endorsed by the Arab ICT ministers and launched soon after.

The ADAICTS structure will build on the five (5) clusters of the updated guiding template for the National Digital Development Reviews/Arab Digital Development Report (NDDRs/ADDR) for 2021, and guided by

¹ (E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/TP.7), <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/arab-information-communication-technology-strategy-arabic.pdf>.

the EVWM document and deliberations of the **Joint Technical Committee (JTC)** to be established by LAS Working Group in response to the recommendations of the 31st meeting on 29 September 2020.

This collaborative work will invest on all UN and Arab existing expertise in the field of ICT for development in the Arab region, it will take into consideration common and important comments received from the focal points of the participating countries and partnering organizations, through the Core Research & Technical Cooperation Mechanism (CRTCM) that will comprise members of the ESCWA team, as well as researchers appointed by regional organizations and Arab countries, to further enhance its content and ease the process of developing it following a participatory approach under the joint umbrella of ESCWA and LAS and in close cooperation & coordination with other regional and international bodies.

Furthermore, the workshop will also shed light on existing partnership between ESCWA and number of Arab countries, to design and develop National Digital Development Agendas (NDDAs), (following dual parallel or sequenced tracks, based on demand driven technical cooperation requests addressed to ESCWA technical cooperation services through the official ESCWA Ministerial Focal Points at the country level), and how can such national level efforts synergize with the regional effort to develop the ADAICTS.

The workshop will benefit from the experience of other regions in developing regional digital agendas, such the European, African and/or Latin America digital development agendas.

II. OBJECTIVES AND FOCUS OF THE MEETING

The First ESCWA-LAS Joint Workshop on Developing the Arab Digital Agenda / ICT Strategy (ADAICTS) is the first in a series of similar joint ESCWA-LAS workshops/events that will review the successive versions of the Arab Digital Agenda / ICT Strategy and culminate in the production of the unified ADAICTS, expected to be finalized by end 2021, and to be adopted by the Arab ICT Ministers soon after.

The workshop aims to kick-off the process for shaping and developing the ADAICTS as a joint regional public good, under the umbrella of the League of Arab States, and the leadership of ESCWA and agree on the way forward with prospective partners.

It will introduce ADAICTS rationale, principles, modalities and the way forward, following a participatory multi-stakeholders approach, where UN and Arab concerned organizations working in the region as well as all Arab countries will come together and participate in the ADAICTS design and respective stages. The joint effort aims to help LAS and ESCWA plus Arab countries and other regional and international bodies to co-produce a tailored evidence-based digital development and digital cooperation agenda that addresses the Arab region priorities and devise pertinent strategies for advancing digital development and digital cooperation at the regional level for the next ten years.

The initiation and details of this process will be further discussed with the different partners in dedicated informal meetings planned to take place between April and the last quarter of 2021, whereby the CRTCM and the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) will play a critical and active role for finalizing the details of ADAICTS by the end of 2021.

III. STRUCTURE AND THEMES OF THE 1ST ESCWA-LAS JOINT WORKSHOP ON DEVELOPING THE ARAB DIGITAL AGENDA AND ICT STRATEGY (ADAICTS)

The First ESCWA-LAS joint workshop, guided by the outcome of the virtual meeting titled “ESCWA-LAS Workshop on Strategic Partnerships to Develop the Arab Digital Agenda/ICT Strategy (ADAICTS) - Collaborating UN Bodies and Arab Organizations”, held on 21 December 2020, and informed by several background documents², and bilateral pre-consultation meetings with UN and Arab partners conducted during February and March 2021, as well as earlier several bilateral research interview meetings with the ten

² (E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/TP.7), <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/arab-information-communication-technology-strategy-arabic.pdf>;
E/ESCWA/TDD/2019/TP.4, <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/arab-digital-agenda-arab-information-communication-technology-sustainable-development-arabic.pdf>

participating Arab countries in the NDDRs/ADDR first round (2019) held during August-November 2020, will comprise of the following main blocks:

- Arab Digital Cooperation and Development - Arab States Action Programme (ADCD-ASAP), and the Joint Project to Co-Develop the Arab Digital Agenda/ICT Strategy (ADAICTS);
- Perspectives on Regional Digital Development Agendas in different parts of the World (European, African and/or Latin America Digital Development Agendas);
- Current and upcoming efforts for developing National Digital Development Agendas/Strategies (Countries' experience/peer learning, technical cooperation for designing parallel or subsequent NDDAs and Arab countries participation in the CRTCM/JTC);
- Partners' perspectives and contributions to ADAICTS (Arab bodies: AFDE, AICTO & ARADO) and (UN organizations: ITU-ARO, UNCTAD, UNESCO Cairo Office and UNDESA) (based on the matrix developed on the subject);
- A glimpse on the proposed structure of the intended Arab Digital Agenda/ICT Strategy, as well as on major regional tracks that are taking place during 2021, touching on how these can reflect on the intended ADAICTS, leading to a discussion on the way forward and next steps.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL AND LOGISTICAL DETAILS

A. PARTICIPANTS

The meeting is expected to gather ICT Ministries from Arab countries, UN sister organizations and concerned Arab organizations active in ICT for development in the Arab region. Participation of the National Focal Points who participated in the NDDRs first round (2019) is encouraged to contribute to this collaborative work.

B. LOGISTICAL ISSUES

Date and venue: The First ESCWA-LAS Joint Workshop on Developing the Arab Digital Agenda / ICT Strategy will take place as a Standalone Side Event in Parallel to the 32nd Arab Working Group on the Arab ICT Strategy via Internet using Microsoft Teams Platform, on Tuesday & Wednesday 23-24 March 2021, from 12:30-15:30 Beirut time. Participants will be provided with the link to access the workshop in due time.

Language: English and Arabic are the official languages of the Meeting.

C. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence related to technical preparations should be directed to:

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