UNIDO BRUSSELS *Focus*

A Europe – and a world? – Fit for the Digital Age

Priorities and activities of the *European Union* in the field of digital transformation for sustainable development

& Possible synergies with UNIDO

*April 2021*
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Co-authors: Flora Demaegdt and Hyunjeong Jin

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Executive Summary

This report aims to identify which priorities, policies, and activities are put forward by the European Union with regards to digital transformation for sustainable development. The objective is two-fold:

1. Share information on recent updates from the EU, taking into account the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak
2. Identify synergies where UNIDO can support the work of the EU on digitalization

It first introduces the context in which digital policies are being developed at the EU level. Then, it describes the Digital Strategy of the European Commission (EC) ‘A Europe fit for the Digital Age’ and the ‘2030 Digital Compass’, highlighting both internal and external considerations. There is a specific focus on the international dimension of the European Digital strategy and on how digitalization is being mainstreamed in EU development policies.

Finally, it puts forward some of the implications for UNIDO and suggests possible interactions with the EU. It presents a few channels of engagement for UNIDO to share its expertise, support the current work of the EU, and create synergies for greater impact of digital transformation on sustainable development in the EU and beyond.
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<td>DTI</td>
<td>Department of Digitalisation, Technology and Innovation</td>
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<td>Multiannual Financial Framework</td>
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<td>NDICI</td>
<td>Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument</td>
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<td>eIDAS Regulation</td>
<td>Regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market</td>
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1. Context

1.1. COVID-19 implications

Under the context of COVID-19, technologies and artificial intelligence have gained critical importance. The European Commission has deployed digital tools to monitor the spread of the virus, research and develop vaccines and treatments, and ensure that Europeans stay connected and safe online. With movement restrictions and social distancing, social and economic activities have temporarily been moved to the digital realm.¹ Some digital solutions include Data, supercomputers and artificial intelligence, Fighting disinformation, staying safe online, online learning, etc.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, digital is one of the pillars of the EU recovery strategy. The EU’s long-term budget, coupled with NextGenerationEU, the temporary instrument designed to boost the recovery, will be the largest stimulus package ever financed through the EU budget. A total of €1.8 trillion will help rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe. It will be a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe.²

In its roadmap for recovery, the European Council calls for action to ensure the strategic autonomy in the EU in a post-pandemic context and stressed that investing in digital capacities, infrastructures and technologies will be a key element of the recovery effort.³ With 20% of the Next Generation EU Recovery Plan dedicated to the digital transition, in the framework of the next MFF, the EU will scale up its investments in digital partnerships with partner countries.⁴

1.2. Time of geopolitical stress and increasing global competitiveness

The new European Commission is a “geopolitical” one, as described by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.⁵ This geopolitical banner can be interpreted as a recognition that the EU inhabits a more hostile world defined by competition between states, less multilateralism, and a world in which issues previously belonging to the realm of low politics (transport, telecoms, etc), have come to characterise great power rivalry and can define the international position of the EU.

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¹ European Commission, Digital Coronavirus Responses
² European Commission, Recovery Plan for Europe
³ EPRS Ideas Paper, Digital Sovereignty for Europe, July 2020
⁴ Europost, EU launches its global digital for development hubs, 8 December 2020.
⁵ Von der Leyen, President elect speech, Strasbourg, 27 November 2019.
This new positioning will strengthen the EU’s external action by mobilising its soft power instruments for harder power projection.\(^6\) In other words, the EU intends to actively shape the global order with ‘strategic autonomy’, and in digital matters as well.\(^7\)

At the heart of these geopolitical considerations lies the «\textbf{digital sovereignty» debate. The notion of « technological (or digital) sovereignty » has recently emerged as a means of promoting the notion of European leadership and strategic autonomy in the digital field. It refers to Europe’s ability to act independently in the digital world, through both protective mechanisms and offensive tools to foster digital innovation.\(^8\)

The EU is a heavy user of technologies but not a leading producer, meaning it is highly dependent on external competitors – especially the US and China. Taxation and regulations are therefore needed to support the competitiveness of EU industries threatened by global trading partners and ensure a level playing field. In fact, Europe aims to strengthen a \textbf{single digital market} by harmonizing the levels of connectivity, improving digital skills, strengthening the supply chains of digitalized industries, and ensuring the right level of protection and trust. The director for the Digital Transformation in Directorate-General "Communications Networks, Content & Technology" (DG CONNECT), Gerard de Graaf, advocates for « One Market, one rule », and ambitions that “We (the EU) need to develop a regulatory framework that is the best in the world”.\(^9\)

In this context, where geopolitical tensions are exacerbated by the need to recover from the global pandemic, and times are ever more uncertain, the \textbf{European Digital strategy} and the \textbf{new European industrial strategy} are designed to enhance Europe’s strategic autonomy. They aim to raise awareness about technological competition and offer more precise guidance to the European Union’s efforts in determining the outcomes of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

As a work in progress, it is therefore important that UNIDO stays informed on more recent updates and uses current policy discussions in Brussels as windows of opportunities to spread messages related to the ISID mandate. UNIDO should ensure that the digital transformation put forward by the EU also serves the interests of EU partner countries, promotes the SDGs, and leaves no one behind.
2. A “Europe Fit for the Digital Age”: internal considerations

- With its **Strategy on Shaping Europe’s Digital Future**, the Commission set out its vision 2019-2024 for how Europe can retain its technological and digital sovereignty. It was adopted on 19 February 2020, and Margrethe Vestager, the Executive Vice President of the European Commission, is leading its implementation.

- There are **3 pillars** of the digital strategy:
  - Technology that works for people
  - A fair and competitive digital economy
  - A digital, open and sustainable society

- The **Digital Compass** was set to translate the EU’s digital ambitions for 2030 into concrete targets and to ensure that these objectives will be met.

- The **new industrial strategy for Europe** will contribute to shaping Europe’s digital future.

“Europe Fit for the Digital Age” is one of the key priorities of the European Commission, showing its determination to make 2020-2030 Europe’s “Digital Decade”. From an economic perspective, the EU wishes to gain competitiveness vis-à-vis large international players. To do so, it intends to develop a **single digital market** with a focus on data, technology, and infrastructure, while regulating the security and ethical risks of new technologies and retaining government control over internet giants.

The EU’s digital strategy aims to make a digital transformation that works for **people** and **businesses**, while helping to achieve its target of a **climate-neutral Europe** by 2050. It also aims to encourage businesses to work with, and develop, these new technologies, while at the same time making sure that they earn citizens’ trust.

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10 European Commission website, *A Europe Fit for the Digital Age*. 
2.1. Three pillars of EU Digital Strategy

The **European Digital Strategy** follows 3 main goals:

1. **Technology that works for people**: Development, deployment and uptake of technology that makes a real difference to people’s daily lives. A strong and competitive economy that masters and shapes technology in a way that respects European values.

   **Key actions**: White paper on artificial intelligence, European strategies on Quantum and blockchain, Action plan on 5G and 6G, Digital Education Action Plan, Skills Agenda, EU governments interoperability strategy, etc.

2. **A fair and competitive digital economy**: A frictionless EU single market, where companies of all sizes and in any sector can compete on equal terms, and can develop, market and use digital technologies, products and services at a scale that boosts their productivity and global competitiveness, and consumers can be confident that their rights are respected.

   **Key actions**: European Data strategy, fitness of EU competition rules, Industrial Strategy Package, Communication on Business taxation for the 21st century, new Consumer Agenda, etc.

3. **An open, democratic and sustainable society**: A trustworthy environment in which citizens are empowered in how they act and interact, and of the data they provide both online and offline. A European way to digital transformation which enhances the EU’s democratic values, respects our fundamental rights, and contributes to a sustainable, climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy.

   **Key actions**: deepen the Internal Market for Digital Services, revision of eIDAS regulation, Media and audio-visual Action Plan, European Democracy Action Plan, Destination Earth, a circular electronics initiative, a European Health data space, etc.

For each pillar, the EC will resort to both legislative and non-legislative tools to introduce ambitious and innovative measures in the digital sector.
2.2. Digital Compass 2030

To build on the overall framework of the strategy on *Shaping Europe's Digital Future*, the European Commission adopted the Communication “Digital Compass 2030” on 9 March 2021. It sets out a **vision for 2030**, a robust **governance mechanism**, clear **milestones**, and **practical tools** to facilitate the implementation of the EU ambitious goals.\(^\text{11}\) The Compass is based on an enhanced monitoring system to measure the progress of the EU against the key targets for 2030.

Clear and concrete objectives are clustered along **four cardinal points**:

1. Digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals
2. Secure and performant sustainable digital infrastructure
3. Digital transformation of businesses
4. Digitalisation of public services

The Communication proposes to agree on a set of digital principles and digital rights, as stated below:

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### Digital rights

- Freedom of expression, including access to diverse, trustworthy, and transparent information
- Freedom to set up and conduct a business online
- Protection of personal data and privacy
- Protection of the intellectual creation of individuals in the online space

### Digital principles

- A secure and trusted online environment
- Universal digital education and skills
- Access to digital systems and devices that respect the environment
- Accessible and human-centred digital public services and administration
- Ethical principles for human-centred algorithms
- Protecting and empowering children in the online space
- Access to digital health services

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### 2.3. The Digital Europe Programme & further initiatives

The **Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)** is the first EU programme that aims to accelerate the recovery and drive the digital transformation of Europe. Its budget amounts to **€7.5 billion**. DIGITAL is not a stand-alone programme as it will complement other EU programmes such as the **Horizon Europe** for research and innovation, and the **Connecting Europe Facility** for digital infrastructure.

It will support projects in five crucial areas:

- Supercomputing (€2.2 billion)
- Artificial intelligence (€2.1 billion)
- Cybersecurity (€1.6 billion)
- Advanced digital skills (€580 million)
- Ensuring a wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society, including through Digital Innovation Hubs (€1.1 billion)

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More specifically, it seems that EU policymakers are concerned about the influence of non-EU tech companies and especially with regard to their impact on EU data economy and innovation, EU privacy and data protection, and the establishment of a secure and safe digital environment. To enhance Europe’s strategic autonomy in the digital field, a range of initiatives have been proposed or are already under discussion around 3 building blocks:

i) Building a data framework: to facilitate data collection, data processing and data sharing
ii) Promoting a trustworthy environment: foster new standards and practices that ensure that products and services are trustworthy and controllable in line with EU values and principles
iii) Adapting competition and regulatory rules: more defensive and prudential governance mechanisms, including new rules to address foreign state ownership and large tech companies’ distortive practices

See in Annex 1 for more details on further EU initiatives.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) EPRS Ideas Paper, Digital Sovereignty for Europe, July 2020.
2.4. Industry shaping Europe’s Digital future

The Commission Work Programme 2021 features the Industrial Strategy as one of the key actions to achieve a “Europe Fit for the Digital Age”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Europe Fit for the Digital Age</th>
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<td><strong>5</strong> Europe’s digital decade</td>
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| **6** Data package | **Data Act** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Article 114 TFEU, Q3 2021)  
**Review of the Database Directive** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Article 114 TFEU, Q3 2021) |
| **7** Digital levy | **Digital levy and a proposal for digital levy as own resource** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Q2 2021) |
| **8** A trusted and secure European e-ID | **A trusted and secure European e-ID** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Article 114 TFEU, Q1 2021) |
| **9** Platform workers | **Improving the working conditions of platform workers** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Article 153 TFEU, Q1/Q4 2021) |
| **10** Industrial strategy for Europe | **Updating the new industrial strategy for Europe** (non-legislative, Q2 2021) |
| **11** Foreign subsidies | **Follow-up to the White Paper on foreign subsidies:**  
**Levelling the playing field** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Article 207 TFEU, Q2 2021)  
**Public procurement** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Article 207 TFEU, Q2 2021) |
| **12** Civil, defence and space industries | **Action plan on synergies between civil, defence and space industries** (non-legislative, Q1 2021) |
| **13** Design requirements and consumer rights for electronics | **New design requirements and consumer rights for electronics** (legislative, incl. impact assessment, Article 114 TFEU, Q4 2021) |

**Industrial policy must help make this digital ambition a reality.** Europe’s industry must lead the twin ecological and digital transitions. Europe aims to be a globally competitive and world-leading industry that paves the way to climate-neutrality and shapes Europe’s digital future.14

To support the digital transition, and in addition to developing regulatory frameworks and rules for competition policy, the EC has laid the foundations for a **New Industrial policy**. Presented in March 2020, it aims to make the European industry more competitive globally and enhance Europe’s strategic autonomy through 7 fundamentals: 1) a deeper and more digital single market; 2) upholding a global level playing field; 3) supporting industry towards climate neutrality; 4) supporting industry towards climate neutrality; 5) building a circular economy; 6) embedding a spirit of industrial innovation; upskilling and reskilling; and 7) investing and financing the transition.

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The fact that the very first fundamental for Europe’s industrial transformation is framed as “creating certainty for industry: a deeper and more digital single market” reveals how high digitalization is on the EU industry agenda.

In fact, many initiatives outlined in the **European Digital Strategy also appear in the New Industrial Strategy**, such as the European Data Strategy, the Digital Services Act, the Digital Education Action Plan, Action plan on 5G, Circular electronics initiatives, and others. This shows how intertwined the digital and industrial objectives are.

Realistically, Europe faces critical industrial policy questions regarding how to create the next start-ups, increase digital skills among EU workers, or chose where to invest in global value chains. The question of putting manufacturing back to Europe is at the heart of EU’s considerations to complete the digital single market. To lead the technology race, Europe is aware that it must build on its **strengths** including a robust industrial base, high quality research, skilled workers, a vibrant start-up ecosystem, mature infrastructure and a leading position in the use of industrial data.

The EU recognizes however that many of the levers are in the hands of others. This is why it calls for an essential **partnership approach**.15

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3. Europe as a global player: external considerations

- Digital & Development in the EU: External/Development considerations are included in EU digital policies, and digital considerations are included in EU development policies.
- The EU wishes to build a digital society that can “inspire the rest of the world”.
- A world-leader in exporting goods and services around the world, the EU also exports its way of managing the digital transformation, in line with European values.
- The EU is open to international partnerships and agreements with international bodies such as the UN.
- Under the global context, a strong digital presence in the EU’s enlargement, neighbourhood and development policy will enable growth and drive sustainable development, in accordance with Europe’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The EU calls for a “wider coalition of like-minded partners” and international digital partnerships for a coordinated approach that is defending a use of technology adherent to the UN Charter and the UNDHR.

The EU is also willing to export its way of managing the digital transformation and unlock the benefits of digital transformation around the world. Therefore, it is open to shape global interactions through “agreements reached in international bodies such as the United Nations”, as stated in the communication “Shaping Europe’s Digital Future” (February 2020). In accordance with EU’s commitment to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, the Commission wishes to ensure a level playing field in the digital sector throughout the world.

Internationally, the EU intends to be a trendsetter in the global debate, promote its model of safe an open global Internet, lead the adoption and standardization of the new generation of technologies, build trust-worthy data alliances, pursue ambitious goals in terms of market access, and build a digital society that can “inspire the rest of the world”.
In terms of **standards, trade and investment, and data protection**, the EU wishes to be at the forefront in addressing digital transformation and will “continue to work closely with its international partners” to find common approaches for concrete actions.

The EU also plans to incorporate digital more strongly in the **enlargement, neighbourhood and development policy** to enable growth and drive sustainable development, including the uptake of green ICT in partner countries and regions, in accordance with EU’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

Highlights of the EU external strategy for digitalization:

**The EU-Africa Union Digital Economy Task Force**

The [Digital Economy Task Force](#) (DETF) proposed concrete actions to support Africa's digital integration and promote its digital markets, boosting public and private investment, improving the business environment and investment climate as well as the development of digital skills. Detailed recommendations can be found in its 2019 report, and in Annex 2.

**Trade and investment**

EC intends to address unjustified restrictions for European companies in third countries (e.g. data localization requirements), and pursue goals in terms of market access, respect of intellectual property, research and development and standardization programs. Also, on-going discussions on building a trustworthy data alliance with like-minded partners.

**A Global Digital Cooperation Strategy:**

A Global Digital Cooperation Strategy should be published in 2021 to develop better how European values will be projected onto the international stage and engage with partners globally.

**Standard Setting:**

Leading the adoption and standardization process of the new generation of technology: blockchain, supercomputing, quantum technologies, algorithms and tools to allow data sharing and data usage.
3.1. Key actions

Among the key actions to position Europe as a global player:

- A Global Digital Cooperation Strategy (Q2 - 2021)
- A White paper on an instrument on foreign subsidies (Q2 2020)
- A strategy for standardization, which will allow for the deployment of interoperable technologies respecting Europe’s rules, and promote Europe’s approach and interests on the global stage (Q3 2020).
- Mapping of opportunities and action plan to promote the European approach in bilateral relations and multilateral fora (Q2 2020).
- A Digital for Development Hub that will build and consolidate a whole-of-EU approach promoting EU values and mobilizing EU member states and EU industry, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), financial institutions, expertise and technologies in digitization (2021).

3.2. Digital for Development (D4D) Hub

The D4D Hub, launched in December 2020, is the main mechanism aimed at supporting and accelerating digital transformation in partner countries. It is a multi-stakeholder platform between the European Commission, EU Member States (11 countries have joined, including Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Estonia and France), private sector, civil society and financial institutions.

As the first operational regional component, the D4D Hub is kicking off activities in Africa from January 2021 onwards, including the three following initiatives:

- **AU-EU D4D Hub**: to advance multi-stakeholder dialogue, joint partnerships and investments in the African digital economy

- **The African-European Innovation Bridge**: to strengthen digital innovation networks in Africa and promote intercontinental dialogue between African and European innovators and policymakers

- **The EU-AU Data Flagship**: to facilitate investments in African data infrastructures and data technologies and services
Although the initial geographic area of focus is Africa, the hub is expected to cover all regions.

Ursula Von der Leyen, President of the European Commission
“We are not just the number one investor in development cooperation, Europe is also a leading player in the digital field”.

Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market
“This will help close the global digital divide and grow the digital economies of Europe and Africa together”.

3.3. Digital mainstreaming in EU Development policies

The D4D Hub is in fact an initiative that is mostly led by the Directorate General for International Partnerships (INTPA, previously called DEVCO), dealing with development policies of the EU. Digitalization for sustainable development is therefore both a mandate of DG CONNECT (Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology), responsible for digital related EU policies, and the mandate of INTPA, responsible for development policies of the EU.

As the two Directorates work hands in hands, it is clear that there is both 1) an external dimension to EU digital policies (DG CNECT) and 2) a digital dimension to EU development policies (DG INTPA). A close cooperation between these two EU actors has been encouraged to promoting the use of digital technologies in EU external aid programs.

Since 2017, there is a clear intention to mainstream digital topics in the EU Development Agenda and all cooperation programs. Indeed, the notion “Digital4Development” also refers to the strategy put forward in 2017 to mainstream digital technologies and services into EU development policy. ¹⁶

In the Staff Working Document that the Commission adopted, entitled “Digital4Development: mainstreaming digital technologies and services into EU Development policy”, Digital4Development is defined as:

“A framework for mainstreaming digital technologies into development policy, contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring effective delivery based on existing policies, funding instruments and partnerships involving the public and private sectors. Digital4Development should be guided by a vision that maximises the uptake of digitalisation as a strong driver for economic growth in partner countries and reduces the digital divide by providing access for all, with particular emphasis on women, youth and vulnerable groups, and on their education.”

It identified 4 main priority areas:

1. Access to open, affordable and secure broadband connectivity and digital infrastructure including the necessary regulatory framework
2. Digital literacy and digital skills
3. Digital for growth, entrepreneurship and job creation
4. Digital technologies as an enabler for sustainable development

One central debate is on the Digital Single Market’s alternative for Africa through its development cooperation. The EU could support Africa in creating a regulatory environment that promotes competition and protection of end-user’s rights in the digital economy. Indeed, although compared to the US and China, the EU’s long-term strategy in digitalisation (called Digital Europe) arrived late, the EU as the largest aid donor, is well positioned to introduce the rules and standards of the European Digital Single Market to developing countries.\textsuperscript{17}

To implement its Digital4Development Strategy, DG INTPA is identifying and implementing initiatives to boost job creation and inclusive growth through digital transformation:

- **The energy-digital nexus initiative**: aimed at increasing access to energy by stimulating financially sustainable business models of investments for digitally-enabled energy grids.
- **Digital2equal initiative**: aimed at engaging with the private sector at both domestic and international levels to promote more opportunities for women in online platforms.
- **DIGIFI initiative**: aimed at promoting financial inclusion through inclusive and Digital Financial Services (DFS) by creating a conducive regulatory framework and scaling-up successful digital financial projects.

\textsuperscript{17} CONCORD, Development is going digital, 2018, p.54.
To deliver on these initiatives, DG INTPA is working together with public and private partners. It has also created several task forces bringing together the expertise of the private sector and policy makers such as the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force (the DETF) or the Task Force Rural Africa.

Several projects in this field are already being implemented, including market information and extension services through SMS in the Gambia and Ghana; online database and digital platforms in Senegal, Djibouti and Cameroon; mobile banking services in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso; e-voucher systems in Mozambique, Zambia and Rwanda.\(^{18}\)

However, specific support for digitalisation is a relatively new part of the EU’s foreign policy. This explains why the EU has only funded a small number of digital projects for development so far. At the same time, digital challenges in the EU partner countries were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the EU needs to adapt its approach to digital cooperation with partner countries to the new conditions.\(^{19}\)

December 2020, in addition to the D4D Hub Launch, also marked another important milestones for the EU to support the digital transformation of the Global South: the approval of the NDICI Regulation—the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, which will be used to provide funding to the EU’s partner countries for poverty reduction and sustainable development, and to financially support the European Commission’s priorities, one of which is digitalisation.

### 3.4. Digital Compass 2030

Sections number 6 and “way forward” of the EU Digital Compass 2030 outlines the international dimension given to the EU Digital Strategy. In particular, it is mentioned that the EU aims at working resolutely to promote its human-centred digital agenda through strong international digital partnerships. The Communication also emphasizes the significance of investing in improved connectivity with the EU’s external partners, such as through the creation of a Digital Connectivity Fund.

Most of all, the EU stressed the importance of having a human-centric approach to digital transformation and putting human rights at the heart of all digital policies. The “European way” is indeed characterized by values and principles that promote a human-centered, secure and open digital environment that should comply with the law, but also further enable people to enforce their rights.

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\(^{18}\) Schuman Associates, Digital in EU development projects, 8 April 2019.  
\(^{19}\) EDDA, How can the EU help to address digital challenge in Africa?, October 2020.
The Compass calls for a “wider coalition of like-minded partners”, and “international digital partnerships” should result in greater opportunities for European companies, increased digital trade via secure networks, respect of European standards and values, and a more supportive environment internationally for the kind of human-centric digital transformation we and other partners want to see”. The EU is therefore clearly promoting inclusive multilateralism and pushing for a coordinated approach that is defending a use of technology that is fully adherent to the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The European Commission will build on several concertation steps, including a consultation process on digital principles and a stakeholder forum, with a view to proposing the Digital Policy Programme to the co-legislators by the third quarter of 2021, and hopes to achieve decisive progress with the other institutions on a Declaration of Digital Principles by the end of 2021. Eventually, international projects will be implemented to promote the European way for digital transformation on the global stage.

3.5. EU Digital dialogues with partners around the world

With the EU Digital Strategy calling for international digital partnerships to promote EU digital vision globally, the EC maintains annual Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) digital dialogues with several partners around the world.

With Africa, the EU set up an EU-African Union Digital Economy Task Force (DEFT) to bring together African and European representatives. The DEFT report published in 19 June 2019, represents a milestone to put the Digital Economy at the heart of EU-Africa Cooperation.

The EU has also had several bilateral engagements with China and South Korea. Recently, on 10 September 2020, EU-China hold first High-level Digital Dialogue, which served to identify priorities in the digital transformation of both the EU’s and China's economies. On 18 November 2020, the first EU-Republic of Korea High Level Policy Dialogue on digital economy addressed a clear mutual interest and convergent approach on digital approach.

On a regional level, the EU is advancing digital cooperation with the ASEAN community. On 23 October 2019, DG Connect met ASEAN senior officials in Vientiane (Lao PDR) to exchange and discuss digital economy and connectivity.

Most importantly, EU Digital Dialogues are taking place with International Organisations and Multilateral Fora. Such dialogues seek common ground with international partners on the development of international norms and standards. The EU is indeed proactively engaging with the UN Family (in various fora within UNCTAD, ITU, WIPO, etc.) and more particularly with the UN Office of the Tech Envoy since the release of the UN Secretary General Roadmap on Digital Cooperation.
4. Possible synergies for UNIDO

Understanding the priorities and policy actions that the European Union is putting in place to advance the digital transition is highly strategic for UNIDO as it opens the door to various opportunities to create synergies between UNIDO and EU activities.

Considering the alignment between the European vision for digital policies and the Agenda 2030 and the EU’s clear call for multilateralism, the EU is very much open to collaborating with the United Nations. Since UNIDO has a strong expertise in digitalization to advance the SDGs, a few channels for further engagement with the EU could be explored such as:

- answering open public consultations on digital topics
- consulting EU Delegations in the field to push for the mainstreaming of digitalization in EU programming 2021-2027
- leading the work of the UN Brussels Digital Task Force
- joining European and global discussions
4.1. European digital vision in line with the Agenda 2030

The EU 2030 Digital Compass states a vision for 2030 that promotes «a successful digital transformation based on the empowerment of citizens and technological leadership, resulting in a more resilient and prosperous society». Europe intends to influence the way in which digital solutions are developed and used on a global scale through a clear framework that promotes trustworthy, digitally enabled interactions across society for people as well as for businesses. The EU vision is framed according to the interconnected pieces of the following puzzle.20

To complete this puzzle and turn its vision into reality, the EU will get involved in areas such as data protection, cybersecurity and ethically designed AI. It will provide trustworthy and controllable digital products and services that would ensure a safer digital environment for an inclusive and ethical digital economy. Ensuring transparency and trust has become the hallmark of EU approach to digital matters.

This vision for digital transformation seems to echo the considerations of Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2030. The EU is explicit in its ambition to embark on a digital journey that is inclusive and sustainable for the people, the planet, and the economy. By promoting a social, economic, and environmental development we can conclude that the EU vision for a digital future that shares similar principles of the SDGs and UNIDO.

Also, it is important to remember that the European Union is very much involved in the UN processes at the global level, in particular in the workstreams launched to implement the Secretary-General Roadmap on Digital Cooperation. In a recent discussion with the Office of the Tech Envoy, we were informed that the EU is notably championing the digital Human Rights workstream but is also engaging as a constituent in the discussions related to connectivity, digital inclusion, AI and digital cooperation architecture.

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20 European Commission, Shaping Europe’s Digital Future, February 2020, p.3.
4.2. EU as a key partner to fulfil UNIDO functions

UNIDO is supporting the digital transformation and industrial recovery worldwide in the key areas of Innovation and digitalization, Investment and technology promotion, and Quality infrastructure and smart production.

In view of the drastically changed landscape for international development, UNIDO has been refocusing and repurposing its functions, in order to better contribute to common crisis response actions and also to help developing countries to build back better.\textsuperscript{21} UNIDO functions are:

For each UNIDO functions, there are opportunities to engage with the EU for more impact:

- **Analytical work**: share evidence-based analysis produced by UNIDO (such as the industrial Analytics Platform and the DTI Knowledge hub)
- Present to the EU the successful technical cooperation programmes and strategies dealing with digitalization issues worldwide
- Stress the normative function of UNIDO and position ourselves as a key player to be consulted on standards, metrology, conformity assessment, accreditation and certification
- **Convene** the EU as a main partner during UNIDO led international fora (GMIS, etc).

4.3. Influence EU policymaking through open public consultations

The EU regularly opens **consultations to the public** to gather views on the scope, priorities and added value of EU action for new initiatives, or evaluations of existing policies and laws.

The department of DTA/DTI/IDD kindly contributed in September 2020 to the consultation on the new [Digital Services Act package](#). As part of the evidence collection and analysis process for the European Digital Strategy, the European Commission has announced a Digital Services Act package to modernise the current legal framework to ensure online safety, and a fair and open market. Further information on the Digital Service Act and the legislative procedure can be found in [this article](#).

In the Digital Compass 2030, the section entitled “way forward” mentions a wide consultation process on the digital principles. Although we understood from conversations with DG INTPA and DG CNECT the consultation is mostly target at European stakeholders, the European Commission still seems to be open to receiving inputs from key international partners like the UN.

Answering such consultations represents a strategic way for UNIDO to share expertise, be identified as a relevant stakeholder in this domain, and directly influence EU policymaking. The UNIDO Brussels Office will continue to flag relevant EU consultations to expert colleagues at HQ and in Field Offices.

4.4. Contribute to the EU Programming exercise

The EU is currently carrying out its programming exercise for the next 7 years. During this exercise, every EU Delegation (EUD) elaborates its 7-year MIP (Multiannual Indicative Program), which is meant to set out their priority areas, specific objectives, expected results, performance indicators and the indicative financial allocations for the coming 7 years.

The programming will reflect the external dimension of the overarching policy priorities of Ursula von der Leyen’s agenda for Europe, which put particular emphasis on supporting two macro-transformations, related to climate/environment (European Green Deal) and digitalization. It will also be based on the EU’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda, its SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and other agendas common to all EU Member States.

EUDELs are expected to finalize the programming exercise in Q2 2021.
Considering that digital transformation is at the centre of attention for the EC both internally and externally, with increasing demands due to COVID-19, the EU intends to mainstream the digital topic at the heart of the new programming exercise. The digital component will be included in all EU programming documents, activities, and programs.

EUDELs worldwide have been informed by EU HQ of the importance of consulting with the UN in the countries. It is a unique opportunity for the UN/UNCT to make sure that the EU and UN visions and plans to support the country are aligned and that resources are mobilized accordingly. The EU is looking to move away from a donor-recipient model, and towards strategic partnerships aimed at sharing analysis and aligning our actions. It is an opportunity to further strengthen the overall strategic dialogue between the UN and the EU. This is advanced at the official consultations between EUD and UNRC. The official consultations are led by the RC, but it is encouraged that FOs have bilateral meetings with EUDs too.

For countries where a digital transformation is a priority, FO could engage with EU Delegations on their digital priorities. RCs and UNCTs are recommended to share analysis and highlight opportunities for cooperation related to digital transformation in the country. The strategic engagement with EU Delegations or EU Member States in February/March 2021 should mainstream the topic of digitalization for sustainable development. This is a unique opportunity for the UN family to support the EU in achieving its digital policy objectives. The ongoing programming exercise is an opportunity to share our expertise, thoughts, and concrete activities, so that not only Europe but all its partner countries throughout the world become “fit for the digital age”.

Before engaging with the EU on the programming exercise, you may wish to ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the priorities for EU cooperation in your country/region? Which ones are related to UNIDO’s mandate?
- What could be the added value of UNIDO in your country/region? Including: ongoing projects, key sectors, the presence of UNIDO in country, contact with government, etc.
- State of play of relationships with EU: Have you engaged with EUD, either bilaterally or through RC?
- Do you have information on Team Europe Initiatives? Is there an ongoing dialogue with EU Member States or key projects?

Do not hesitate to reach out to the Brussels Office for more guidance.
4.5. Commit to the UN Brussels Task Force on Digitalization for the SDGs

Together with ITU and UNESCO, UNIDO is **co-leading the UN Brussels Task Force on Digitalization for the SDGs**. It was approved during the United Nations Brussels Team (UNBT) retreat in February 2020 and it was launched in September 2020. It represents a powerful analysis and advocacy mechanism through which the different UN agencies in Brussels **contribute as One UN to EU digital policies**.

Its key objective is to engage in a **collaborative process** through regular meetings, share intelligence, and create common messages to accelerate digital transformation for sustainable development in Europe and in the world.

To achieve its goals, the task force is working under 5 workstreams:

1) Analysis of the UN work in digital cooperation
2) Analysis of the EU Digital policies for Development
3) Joint One UN position paper
4) Outreach & communication strategy
5) Follow-up of programming exercise

UNIDO is therefore in a **unique position** to gather relevant information from other UN agencies, build on each other’s strengths (contacts in Brussels, expertise, etc) and influence the EU digital agenda for more alignment with the SDGs. While the Task Force will look into the external dimension of the EU digital policies, it will mostly focus on the EU development policies and how they can mainstream digitalization through international partnerships.

In the framework of the Task Force, UNIDO will also attempt to better understand two key processes mentioned in the Digital Compass, namely the wide consultation process on the digital principles and the multi-stakeholder forum.
4.6. Join global discussions

As stated in the conclusion of the *New Industrial Strategy for Europe* “only a shared commitment from all relevant stakeholders in a renewed partnership will allow Europe to make the most of its industrial transformation”. This call for partnerships may represent an opportunity to strengthen UNIDO-EU cooperation on topics at the very heart of UNIDO’s mandate: industry and digitalization.

UNIDO was glad to contribute to the [EU Industry Week 2021](https://ec.europa.eu/industry), the European Commission’s annual multi-stakeholder event to advance dialogue on the future of industry in Europe. ITP Network in Vienna, ITPO Italy, and ITPO Germany put together 3 high-level panels for multi-stakeholder virtual discussions on investment and technology promotion in Europe.

- **ITP Network, Vienna Session**: “Investment Promotion as driver of competitiveness and sustainable development”, on 4 March 2021
- **ITPO Italy, Rome session**: “The digital future of sustainable industrial manufacturing in Italy and beyond”, on 10 March 2021
- **ITPO Germany, Bonn session**: “Investments and technology transfer from Germany as driver for economic development in Europe and Africa”, on 24 March 2021

Other similar events can be held in partnership with the European Union and relevant stakeholders.

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5. Conclusion

To conclude, this report summarized the priorities and activities of the European Union in the field of digitalization for sustainable development as well as the opportunities they involve for UNIDO.

It first shed light on the context in which the EU is developing its digital agenda. We understand that the European focus on “strategic autonomy” leads to a rather self-centered strategy but also to high ambitions for a digital transition to happen in Europe and beyond.

Then, the report highlighted both the internal and the external considerations in the European Digital Strategy. It also emphasized presented the latest updates from the 2030 Digital Compass, and the special place given to the new Industrial strategy to create a “Europe fit for the digital age”. We understood that the EU ambition is to be a leading global player and to mainstream digitalization in the EU development policies.

The EU will need the support of UNIDO among other key international partners to lead the way and live up to its ambitions.

This short report is also an invitation for UNIDO to engage with the European Union on digital issues and leverage impact not only in Europe but throughout the world. To do so, it stressed some possible synergies to strengthen EU-UNIDO partnership on digital issues including answering open public consultations, mainstreaming digital topics in EU programming discussions, leading the work of the UN Brussels Digital Task Force, and joining European and global debates on digital for development.

Exploring a variety of channels for a strengthened EU-UNIDO partnership will be key to ensure that both Europe and developing countries are fit for the digital age.
# ANNEX 1: Possible initiatives from the EU

Source: EPRS Ideas Paper, Digital Sovereignty for Europe, July 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Actor responsible</th>
<th>What should be done?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 European cloud and data infrastructure</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Foster the creation of an EU-wide cloud infrastructure in line with the data strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 EU data regulatory framework</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Adopt a new set of measures to foster EU innovators’ access to and use of personal and non-personal data (e.g. open access to government data). Assess the opportunity to include ‘data sovereignty’ clauses in public procurement contracts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Multiannual financial framework and digital Europe</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Adopt the new multiannual financial framework, including Horizon Europe and the Digital Europe programme to support investments in frontier technologies (i.e. AI, IoT, blockchain, high performance computing and quantum technologies) and for advanced digital skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Public-private partnerships in AI, data and robotics</td>
<td>Commission, Council</td>
<td>Set up public private partnerships (PPP) in AI, data and robotics to develop AI innovation based on EU values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Large-scale EU research cooperation framework</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Support the creation of a large-scale EU research cooperation framework in new technologies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 GDPR review</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Amend the GDPR to introduce guidance for data protection in specific sectors, such as health or financial services. Assess the opportunity to amend the GDPR to create an innovation-friendly environment for AI.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 e-Privacy Directive</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Complete the revision of the e-privacy Directive, paramount to ensuring that all communications over public networks maintain respect for a high level of data protection and of privacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Set a compulsory EU-wide cybersecurity certification</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Amend the EU framework for cybersecurity certification to make certification compulsory in order to ensure a truly safe environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Foster coordination in cybersecurity at EU level</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
<td>Set up a Joint Cybersecurity Unit to reinforce cooperation between the Member states and organise mutual assistance. Finalise the adoption of the proposal to establish European Cybersecurity Competence Centres to support the development and deployment of cybersecurity technologies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Revise the NIS Directive</td>
<td>Commission</td>
<td>Revise the NIS Directive to strengthen the protection of the EU’s critical digital sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Standardisation for 5G and beyond</td>
<td>Commission</td>
<td>Foster definition of common EU standards for 5G networks and smart connectivity systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Standardisation in IoT</td>
<td>Commission</td>
<td>Define common EU standards for IoT devices.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transparency of decision-making systems</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>EU framework on the use of facial recognition technology</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>EU product safety and liability regime</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>e-Commerce Directive (Digital services act)</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Coordinated implementation of the EU’s public procurement rules</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>New instrument to assess takeover of high-tech EU companies</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Create an EU Task Force on Strategic Industries and Technologies</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>EU digital taxation framework</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>EU digital taxation framework</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Control digital gatekeepers</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Foster open digital ecosystems</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Governance mechanisms and coordination between digital regulators</td>
<td>Commission, Parliament, Council</td>
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</table>
ANNEX 2: the 7 fundamentals of a “New Industrial Strategy for Europe”

A deeper and more digitized single market: by providing a common regulatory space and scale, the single market is the driver of competitiveness and facilitates the integration of companies of all sizes in European and global value chains.

Supporting industry towards climate neutrality: modernizing and decarbonising energy-intensive industries must be a top priority. To create new markets for climate-neutral and circular products, novel industrial processes and more clean technologies are needed to reduce costs and improve market readiness.

Embedding a spirit of industrial innovation: the key to lead the way of industrial change is to unlock investment in innovation with an understanding of what to focus on and a clear pathway to market to allow scale. As part of the strategy, SMEs need to be incentivized and supported to innovate and bring ideas into the market.

Upholding a global level playing field: the EU works to keep markets open through trade deals with partner countries or regions or working in international fora to find rules that work for all. It is essential to take a coordinated European approach to secure mutually beneficial trade and overcome any barriers that prevent European businesses from properly accessing other markets around the world.

Building a circular economy: to reach the goal of reducing carbon and material footprint and embedding circularity across European economy, it is necessary to revolutionize the way operators design, make, use and get rid of things by incentivising European industries. This will ensure a cleaner and more competitive industry by reducing environmental impacts, alleviating competition for scarce resources and reducing production costs.

Upskilling and reskilling: a competitive industry depends on recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce. Making lifelong learning a reality for all will become all the more important. Digitalization, automation and advances in artificial intelligence will require an unparalleled shift in European workers’ skill set. Meanwhile, gender balance is
essential to make the new industrial transition happen.

**Investing and financing the transition**: from the side of public investment, all European Structural and Investment funds will help to promote the competitiveness of EU industry. However, at a time when the public purse is under pressure, it is necessary to unlock private investment, which includes leveraging and blending EU money with Member States and other institutional partners, as well as crowding in private investors.
ANNEX 3: The EU-Africa Union Digital Economy Task Force Recommendations

Source: African Union, Digital Economy Task Force

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Short and medium term actions

- Accelerating universal access to affordable broadband
- Guaranteeing essential skills for all to enable citizens to thrive in the digital age
- Improving the business environment and facilitating access to finance and business support services to boost digitally enabled entrepreneurship
- Accelerating the adoption of eServices and the further development of the digital economy for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Focus

- Access to affordable broadband connectivity and digital infrastructure
- Digital skills
- Digital entrepreneurship
- E-Services
Annex 4: Digital tools against COVID-19 pandemic

Under the context of COVID-19, the Digital Strategy is more important than ever in Europe, as the European Commission deploys digital tools to monitor the spread of the virus, research and develop vaccines and treatments, and ensure online safety and connectivity. Thanks to well-established networks and digital infrastructure, Europeans can stay connected with the requirement of social distancing and keep on learning and being informed.

Data, Supercomputers and Artificial Intelligence

**European Data Strategy**

**EU Space Programme** offers a comprehensive, efficient and cost-effective way to quantify the industrial and environmental impacts of coronavirus. The common health data space can facilitate urgently needed data-driven solutions across borders.

**Recommendation for containment measures through mobile data and apps**

Steps and measures for the use of mobile applications and mobile data; Guidelines for the development of contact tracing and warning apps. Users of these apps are under the protection of the general data protection regulation (gdpr) and the eprivacy directive;

Key principles for the use of mobile applications for social distancing measures, warning, preventing and contact tracing under privacy and data protection.

Under this recommendation, member states adopted an eu toolbox for the use of mobile applications, which sets out the essential requirements for these apps and reflects the best practices.

**The use of artificial intelligence and supercomputers**

They help to accelerate the development of vaccines and treatments, and monitor the spread of the virus and quickly devise effective response strategies as a result;

Artificial intelligence plays a part in powering the robots used when coming into contact with patients, as human interaction must be kept to a minimum.
Staying safe online

The European Commission is working closely with the national authorities, other EU institutions, such as the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, and other bodies and agencies to monitor for any signs of threats to ensure a safe online environment throughout this vulnerable time;

The European Commission and the Consumer Protection Cooperation Network of national authorities are coordinating a screening of online platforms, e-shops and advertisements to protect consumers online.

Online learning

To help ensure continuity in education and training activities, there is a wide range of online learning materials made available online, such as Stay at Home Digital Toolkit and Coding from home.

Networks and connectivity

- To prevent network congestion at this stage, the European Commission is calling for actions of streaming platforms, telecom operators and users;
- The European Commission and the Body of European Regulators of Electronic Communications (BEREC) have set up a special reporting mechanism to monitor the internet traffic situation in each Member State to be able to respond to capacity issues.

Fighting disinformation

- The European Commission has been in dialogue with Google, Facebook, Twitter and Microsoft, the online platforms signatories of the EU’s Code of Practice on Disinformation;
- Disinformation narratives on the coronavirus were exposed, published and updated on www.EUvsDisinfo.eu.
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