Digital Public Services for Enhanced Competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

A High-Level Policy Exchange
in support of the Asia Pacific Information superhighway (APIS) Action Plan 2022-2026

Concept Note of the Side Event

Time and Date 12:00 – 13:15 hrs, Wednesday, 4 September 2024
Event page: https://unescap.org/
Venue: Congress Centre, Caspian-hall, Astana, Kazakhstan

Background: The unprecedented scale of digital development is transforming societies and economies in Asia and the Pacific region. Increased demand for online working during the COVID pandemic accelerated this growth and led to a significant expansion of large corporations providing digitally delivered services. At the same time, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) were so far able to benefit from this process on a much more modest scale.

SMEs nowadays play very important role in many economies, including in the North and Central Asia region, through their ability to deliver variety of goods and services, create jobs, promote inclusion, innovate and foster economic growth and sustainability. Accelerated implementation of new technologies and the digitalization of the business processes of SMEs would strengthen their ability to swiftly adapt to changing market conditions, ensure survival and success of the business, which in turn holds enormous potential to contribute to building and expansion of digital economy.

However, several problems inevitably arise. The most evident obstacle is the low structural capacity of SMEs to interact with other businesses (B2B), with consumers (B2C), and with the governments (B2G and G2B) in a new digital environment. It has been particularly challenging to transform the government-to-business channel and tailor the public services for benefits of SMEs. However, countries in Asia-Pacific are demonstrating an extraordinary commitment to work on this, learning and cooperating to bring the benefits of digital transformation and digital public services to SMEs.

On the margins of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Digital Inclusion and Transformation, the ESCAP secretariat calls on member States and partners to join this high-level policy and experience exchange between the Asia-Pacific region and North and Central Asia (NCA). The inputs for the discussion are summarized in the draft ESCAP research study, built on results of the first sub-regional workshop on innovation and technology for sustainable development for NCA and SPECA countries, which was held in Bishkek June 26-28, 2024.

Objectives of the high-level exchanges: This side event aims to share best practices and knowledge on the digital transformation of SME-oriented digital public services in ESCAP countries, showcase successful projects across different sectors, their economic and social outcomes, and highlight the importance of public-private partnerships in the digital development of SMEs. The panel speakers will be answering the following questions:

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1 According to the recent IFC data, MSMEs make up over 90% of all firms and account, on average, for 70% of total employment and 50% of GDP worldwide. Accessible at: https://www.ifc.org/en/what-we-do/sector-expertise/financial-institutions/msme-finance
2 Side event is supported by the ESCAP project on “Strengthening policies and regulatory frameworks of digital public services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in support of the Asia Pacific Information Superhighway (APIS)” (sponsored by the Russian Federation and ESCAP, see project brief here) and is following the decisions of the fifth session of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD, delivered by ESCAP and ECE, accessed here).
3 Materials of the subregional workshop in Bishkek, 26-28 June 2024 can be accessed here.
What are the good practices and common challenges of developing digital public services for small and medium-sized enterprises?

How can governments help SMEs to overcome the challenges of digital transformation?

How do policies shape the digital future of the SMEs in the Asia and the Pacific region?

How can regional cooperation platforms enable further cooperation between the region’s countries?

What did we learn from our experiences of implementation of the Asia and the Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative and its Action Plan 2022-2026?

Panel Speakers: High-level speakers from the Asia and the Pacific region, namely: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, APIS Bureau Members from the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea, IsDB, and the global and regional SME networks (North and Central Asia, South Asia and ASEAN).

Expected Audience: Policymakers from ESCAP member countries and wider audience.

Organizers: ESCAP, MDDIAI Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Russian Federation

Language: The event will be delivered with simultaneous interpretations in English and Russian languages.

Registration: On-site registration of participants by 20 August 2024 to issue the entrance pass (badge).

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ESCAP and Russian Federation sponsor the new regional project.