



Webinar on
Exploring digital-trade regulations to promote inclusive and sustainable regional integration in Asia and the Pacific

Virtual Meeting, Zoom
23 June 2022, 14:00-16:30 (GMT+7) (Tentative)

**Concept Note
(DRAFT)**

Background

Digital trade has opened up new opportunities for governments to leverage trade for economic and social objectives. Digital trade is not just about buying and selling goods and services online. It encompasses digitally-enabled transactions of trade in goods and services that can either be digitally or physically delivered.¹

Fostering integration through digital trade is crucial for many developing countries to achieve sustainable growth in the 21st century. They recognise that digitalisation entails several potential socio-economic benefits. Using digital technologies can facilitate businesses' access to new markets and new customers. It potentially lowers the cost of engaging in cross-border transactions and enhances the ability to coordinate global value chains. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation, demonstrating the importance of supportive digital trade policies to mitigate the global economic slowdown, sustain well-being, and speed up recovery.

Yet, the benefits of digital trade are not shared equally. The access to new opportunities in the least developed countries (LDCs) and for the Micro-, Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) is still relatively low. While investments in physical infrastructure are essential, the region's LDCs could be left behind unless introducing policies that improve the enabling environment for digital trade integration. Assisting the LDCs to integrate into and benefit from cross-border digital trade is an urgent priority. Due to the LDC graduation, many will soon lose preferential tariffs on their exports. At the same time, the rapid pace of digitalisation also raises challenges for policymakers worldwide, contributing to growing regulatory fragmentation and increasing global barriers to digital trade (OECD, 2022). However, digital trade integration is a complex, multidimensional process. It integrates regulatory structures to support the effective adoption of digital technologies in business processes along the entire global/regional digital value

¹ The impact of digitalization on trade, available at <https://www.oecd.org/trade/topics/digital-trade/>.

chain. The ESCAP Committee on Trade and Investment, at its seventh session in January 2021, has requested the ESCAP Secretariat to deepen its analysis of existing conventional and digital trade rules and regulations, as well as to provide support to smaller economies and LDCs, including the development of pragmatic policy recommendations and capacity-building, technology transfer and the initiation of a study on the impact of the harmonisation of digital trade rules and regulations on the effective participation of those countries in e-commerce and digital trade.

In this context, ESCAP and OECD secretariats have done the regulatory analysis of policies of various countries. The objective of the exercise is to support policymakers in making an informed decision for facilitating digital trade integration.²

In addition, as a preliminary step towards building a greater understanding of the digital trade policy environment in the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP, in collaboration with the OECD, has published the Asia-Pacific Digital Trade Regulatory Report (APDTR) 2022 on the regulatory analysis done for selected countries. The report summarises the important findings and insights in their regulatory databases across selected economies.

The report finds that different countries follow different regulatory approaches. Acknowledging that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution, the report aims to provide a platform for sharing experiences. Starting with evidence-based dialogues could facilitate the identification of common ground for promoting regulatory cooperation and interoperability in the long run. This platform can also help understand economies' capacity constraints and explore the possibility of technical assistance and policy advisories.

In this webinar, ESCAP and OECD will present their report findings. A panel session will follow it to discuss the way forward for regulatory cooperation among the economies in the Asia-Pacific region. The discussions will also focus on the needs of countries in special situations³ and the technical assistance required to meet their sustainable development goals and sustainable graduation of LDCs.

² ESCAP-OECD Initiative on Digital Trade Regulatory Analysis, <https://www.unescap.org/projects/dtra>.

³ Countries in special situations include LDCs, Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDs).

Tentative Programme

Time (GMT+7)	Agenda
14:00-14:10 hrs.	<p>Opening remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Rupa Chanda, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division (TIID), ESCAP Mr. John Drummond, Head, Trade in Services Division, OECD
14:10-14:20 hrs.	<p>Brief introduction to the ESCAP-OECD collaboration on digital trade regulatory analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Yann Duval, Chief, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section (TPFS), TIID, ESCAP
14:20-15:05 hrs.	<p>Asia-Pacific Digital Trade Regulatory Report 2022: Summary of key findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Witada Anukoonwattaka, Economic Affairs Officer, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section (TPFS), TIID, ESCAP Ms. Irene Olivan Garcia, Trade Policy Analyst, Trade in Services Division, OECD <p>Q&A (10-15 mins)</p>
15:05-16:30 hrs.	<p>A panel session on <i>“Toward inclusive and sustainable digital trade integration in the Asia-Pacific region”</i></p> <p>Panel-session moderator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Yann Duval, ESCAP <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Vahagn Ghazaryan, Director of the Department for Customs Tariff and Non-Tariff Regulation, Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) (10 mins) Mr. Sivaram Superamanian, Assistant Director for Digital Economy, ASEAN Secretariat (10 mins) Mr. Raoul Renard, Deputy Director, Legal Reform, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) (10 mins) Ms. Jane Drake-Brockman, Executive Director, Australian Services Roundtable and Industry Professor, Institute for International Trade, University of Adelaide (10 mins) Mr. Simon Hess, Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, the Executive Secretariat for the EIF, WTO (10 mins)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Country perspectives (<i>5 mins each</i>)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Mr. Suphat Suphachalasai, Commissioner, National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, Thailand○ Ms. Luisa Lagiono Letlet, NTDC Secretariat/ Aid for Trade Management Unit 1 VAMU, Ministry of Tourism, Trade, Commerce & Ni-Vanuatu Business, Vanuatu○ Mr. Gobinda Bahadur Karkee, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Nepal <p>Open discussions/ Q&A (<i>15-20 mins</i>)</p>
	Closing and way forward