

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

UNCTAD



INFORMATION ECONOMY REPORT 2017

DIGITALIZATION, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT



UNITED NATIONS



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DIGITALIZATION, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT





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**Information Economy Report 2017:
Digitalization, Trade and Development**

Corrigendum

Chapter II, page 16

For Cross-border B2C e-commerce: \$7 billion in 2015 *read* Cross-border B2C e-commerce: \$189 billion in 2015

For Global Internet traffic 66 times higher in 2019 than in 2015 *read* Global Internet traffic 66 times higher in 2019 than in 2005

Chapter IV, page 62

For Strong cognitive, adaptive and creative skills *read* Strong non-cognitive, adaptive and creative skills



NOTE

Within the UNCTAD Division on Technology and Logistics, the ICT Analysis Section carries out policy-oriented analytical work on the development implications of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and e-commerce. It is responsible for the preparation of the *Information Economy Report*. The ICT Analysis Section promotes international dialogue on issues related to ICTs for development, and contributes to building developing countries' capacities to measure the information economy and to design and implement relevant policies and legal frameworks. The Section is also managing the *eTrade for all* initiative.

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Developed countries: the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (other than Chile, Mexico, the Republic of Korea and Turkey), plus the European Union member countries that are not OECD members (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta and Romania), plus Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino. Countries with economies in transition refers to those in South-East Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Developing economies in general are all the economies that are not specified above. For statistical purposes, the data for China do not include those for Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China (Hong Kong, China), Macao Special Administrative Region of China (Macao, China) or Taiwan Province of China. An excel file with the main country groupings used can be downloaded from UNCTADstat at: <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/Classifications.html>.

Reference to companies and their activities should not be construed as an endorsement by UNCTAD of those companies or their activities.

The following symbols have been used in the tables:

Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported. Rows in tables have been omitted in those cases where no data are available for any of the elements in the row;

A dash (–) indicates that the item is equal to zero or its value is negligible;

A blank in a table indicates that the item is not applicable, unless otherwise indicated;

A slash (/) between dates representing years, e.g. 1994/95, indicates a financial year;

Use of an en dash (–) between dates representing years, e.g. 1994–1995, signifies the full period involved, including the beginning and end years;

Reference to “dollars” (\$) means United States dollars, unless otherwise indicated;

Annual rates of growth or change, unless otherwise stated, refer to annual compound rates;

Details and percentages in tables do not necessarily add up to the totals because of rounding.

The material contained in this study may be freely quoted with appropriate acknowledgement.

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PREFACE

These are still the early days of the digital economy. But already it is clear that it has had, and will continue to have, globally transformative impacts on the way we live, work and develop our economies. As the world strives to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – our universal blueprint for building peaceful, prosperous societies on a healthy planet – harnessing the great power of information and communications technologies can be one of the keys to success, including by opening new pathways of development and helping countries gain access to the global store of knowledge. The developing world itself is showing great leadership in technological innovations that can spur their own growth while benefiting the world.

At the same time, we know that large parts of the developing world remain disconnected from the Internet, and many people lack access to high-speed broadband connectivity. Policymaking at the national and international levels needs to mitigate the risk that digitalization could widen existing divides and create new gaps. Moreover, since increased reliance on digital technologies, such as cloud computing, three-dimensional printing, big data and “the Internet of things”, is certain to influence most industries and global value chains, it is essential to start assessing opportunities and pitfalls alike, and to prepare for what is coming.

The enormous scope and considerable uncertainty associated with the next digital shift call for more facts, dialogue and action by all stakeholders. The analysis contained in the *Information Economy Report 2017: Digitalization, Trade and Development* contributes to this process and proposes ways in which the international community can reduce inequality, enable the benefits of digitalization to reach all people and ensure that no one is left behind by the evolving digital economy.



António Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations

FOREWORD

The world is at the dawn of the next technological revolution. It will be multifaceted and its implications transformational. Digitalization will create opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses, while also bringing enormous benefits to consumers. However, at the same time it will disrupt existing practices, expose incumbents to competition, change skills requirements of workers and result in job losses in some countries and sectors.

The *Information Economy Report 2017* looks at some of these trends, and examines how information and communications technologies are having an increasing impact on global trade and development.

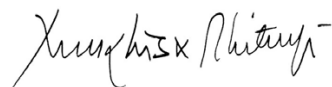
Like previous large-scale economic transitions, the benefits will be immense, but they will not materialize through a smooth, cost-free process. The net outcome will depend on policies undertaken at both national and international levels to build countries' capabilities to take advantage of these transformations.

The international community has a huge responsibility to ensure that no one is left behind in this transformation process. Given the very rapid evolution of the digital economy, many developing countries will need to develop or strengthen their capabilities in a wide range of policy areas, including in all key aspects of e-trade readiness: connectivity, payment solutions, trade logistics, Internet security and legal frameworks.

This year's *Information Economy Report* aims to augment our collective understanding of the way the digital economy works and its implications. It aims to help intensify policy dialogue and peer learning about the issues involved among developing and developed countries alike. And countries with more resources will need to reach out and assist those with less; current efforts are inadequate.

UNCTAD is committed to playing a constructive role in this context. We do this through in-depth research, as evidenced in this *Report*. In addition, our new Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-Commerce and the Digital Economy will provide a new forum for policy dialogue, and our eTrade-for-all initiative can be leveraged to ensure that technical assistance is offered in more effective ways through smart partnerships and enhanced transparency.

It is my hope that this holistic approach will help us to respond to the desire of people in developing countries to connect to the new world of technological progress, and to benefit from the prosperous future they deserve.



Mukhisa Kituyi
Secretary-General of UNCTAD



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