

Data protection regulations and international data flows: Implications for trade and development







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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 communication technologies (ICTs). It is responsible for the preparation of the *Information Economy Report* as well thematic reports on ICT for development such as this study. 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 E-Commerce and Law Reform Programme has supported developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America since 2000 in their efforts to establish legal regimes that address the issues raised by the electronic nature of ICTs to ensure trust in online transactions, ease the conduct of domestic and international trade online, and offer legal protection for users and providers of e-commerce and e-government services. UNCTAD helps to build the capacity of policymakers and lawmakers at national and regional levels in understanding the underlying issues underpinning e-commerce. The assistance targets, in particular, ministry officials in charge of law reform who need to learn more about the legal implications of ICTs; parliamentarians who have to examine new cyberlaws; and legal professionals who enforce new legislation.

The views presented in part II of the study are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

This publication has been edited externally.

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PREFACE

Increasingly, an ever-wider range of economic, political and social activities are moving online, encompassing various ICTs that are having a transformational impact on the way business is conducted, and the way people interact among themselves, as well as with government, enterprises and other stakeholders. This new landscape gives rise to new business models and a wider scope for innovation. At the same time, it facilitates undesirable activities online, including cybercrime. Against this background, world leaders in 2015 underscored the importance of adopting relevant policy responses to harness the potential of ICTs for all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Creating trust online is a fundamental challenge to ensuring that the opportunities emerging in the information economy can be fully leveraged. The handling of data is a central component in this context. In today's digital world, personal data are the fuel that drives much commercial activity online. However, how this data is used has raised concerns regarding privacy and the security of information.

The present regulatory environment on protection of data is far from ideal. In fact, some countries do not have rules at all. In other cases, the various pieces of legislation introduced are incompatible with each other. Increased reliance on cloud-computing solutions also raise questions about what jurisdictions apply in specific cases. Such lack of clarity creates uncertainty for consumers and businesses, limits the scope for cross-border exchange and stifles growth.

As the global economy shifts further into a connected information space, the relevance of data protection and the need for controlling privacy will further increase. Understanding different approaches to and potential avenues for establishing more compatible legal frameworks at national, regional and multilateral levels is important for facilitating international trade and online commerce. The rules surrounding data protection and cross-border flows of data affect individuals, businesses and governments alike, making it essential to find approaches that address the concerns of all stakeholders in a balanced manner.

This study is a timely contribution to our understanding of how data protection regulations and international data flows affect international trade. It reviews the experience in different parts of the world and of different stakeholders. The study identifies key concerns that data protection and privacy legislation need to address. It also examines the present patchwork of global, regional and national frameworks to seek common ground and identify areas where different approaches tend to diverge. The last part of the study considers possible future policy options, taking the concerns of all stakeholders into account.

I would like to acknowledge with appreciation the valuable contributions received from various stakeholders. I hope that the findings presented will serve as a basis for a much-needed global dialogue aimed at building consensus in a very important policy field.

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