

E-commerce and Digital Economy Programme

Year in Review 2021

Bridging the digital readiness divide



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AI	Artificial intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
B2C	Business to consumer
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DACUM	Developing a Curriculum
DCDF	Digital Cooperation and Development Forum
DER	Digital Economy Report
EAC	East African Community
ECDE	E-commerce and Digital Economy
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECS	E-commerce strategy
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HLCP	High-Level Committee on Programmes
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IGE	Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy
ISM	Implementation Support Mechanism
ITC	International Trade Centre
JSI	Joint Statement Initiative
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDEP	Pacific Digital Economy Programme
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
RPTC	Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNGIS	UN Group on the Information Society
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Message from Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director, Division on Technology and Logistics

With the world still in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic, last year further underscored the value of being able to harness digital opportunities for economic resilience and sustainable development. At the same time, as wide digital divides remain, countries' readiness to "go digital" varies considerably. And as brought out in our *Digital Economy Report 2021*, the pandemic may well result in deepening existing divides and accentuating inequalities.

This makes the E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) work programme all the more relevant, as recognized by all UNCTAD's member States. The main outcome document from UNCTAD's 15th Ministerial Conference – The Bridgetown Covenant – which sets the basis for our work for the next few years, calls for strengthening the work on assisting developing countries to enhance their readiness to engage and integrate into the digital economy, thus contributing to the closing of the digital divide. In doing so, the Covenant reinforces UNCTAD's mandate to work on enhancing development gains from the digital economy.

I deeply appreciate the faith member States are placing in the Programme, which continues to receive a high number of requests for support. Against this background, I am also grateful to our

donors and partners, without whom we would not be able to deliver the work programme. In 2021, we welcomed Switzerland on board as a new core donor together with Germany and the Netherlands. We also had our first meeting of the new Core Donor Advisory Board, which will serve as a platform for transparent interaction between UNCTAD and the core donors as well as among the core donors. Two new organizations also joined the *eTrade for all* initiative: the British Standards Institution and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia.

The ECDE Programme has significantly expanded in the past few years. Nevertheless, it will need to continue to grow in order to meet the expectations signaled through the strengthened mandate from UNCTAD's member States and to foster a more inclusive digital future as we recover from the pandemic. The importance of enhancing digital cooperation and digital governance is also underlined in the United Nations Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda".

In this *Year in Review* you will find out more about the many activities and results achieved during 2021 in our newly created E-commerce and Digital Economy Branch.



Message from Torbjörn Fredriksson, Head, E-commerce and Digital Economy Branch

The year 2021 witnessed the continued growth and innovation of the E-commerce and Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme. An important milestone was the creation of the E-commerce and Digital Economy Branch, which provides a stronger basis for further reinforcing UNCTAD's position as a centre of excellence for helping member States to harness digitalization for sustainable development. This will also be facilitated by the clear message in the Bridgetown Covenant to strengthen our work.

Many important outputs were produced, despite continuous challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the area of research, the *Digital Economy Report 2021* quickly attracted the attention from member States, partners and the academic community. Both the G20 and the BRICS subsequently invited UNCTAD to support the work on data and the digital economy in 2022.

Our collaboration with developing countries to strengthen their capacities to harness e-commerce and the digital economy for inclusive development was further developed. We created the Implementation Support Mechanism to ensure better

economy was released, providing an update on its previous edition published one decade earlier.

Our network of partners was further strengthened, with a broader base of donors and new partners joining *eTrade for all*. For the first time, we also launched a regional partnership, with UNCDF and UNDP, to support the development of the digital economy in the Pacific. We welcomed the second cohort of amazing eTrade for Women Advocates and saw the emergence of three new Communities of women digital entrepreneurs which will help us foster more inclusive digital economies in developing countries. Several new competent colleagues joined the team, thanks to the growing support from our partners.

In the last few months of the year, the ECDE Programme underwent its first external evaluation, the results of which are to be released in 2022. We will welcome them as we continue to explore ways to improve our ability to deliver results in support of the overall objectives of the Programme.

I will take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the entire ECDE team as well as

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