



E-Commerce and the Digital Economy Programme (ECDE)

The rapid development of the digital trade economy creates opportunities for developing countries and is a powerful driver of economic growth and job creation.

The E-Commerce and the Digital Economy Programme (ECDE) helps policy makers of developing countries, in particular Least Developed Countries (LDCs), to create favourable framework conditions and enhance capacities for e-commerce by supporting them in identifying and removing obstacles to its development.

Rationale

As the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted, better connectivity as well as new digital platforms and solutions allow more countries to participate in e-commerce and engage in the digital economy. However, many developing countries, especially LDCs, lack favourable framework conditions for e-commerce, for example related to the legal framework, ICT infrastructure, logistics, payment solutions or skills to capture the many opportunities that result from digitalisation. The ECDE programme strengthens the knowledge and capacity of policy makers to create an enabling environment for e-commerce and the digital economy by providing research products and technical assistance and by facilitating access to external resources to support them in this endeavour.

Objectives and activities

The ECDE Programme seeks to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains and economic benefits from e-commerce and the digital economy for people and businesses in developing countries, particularly in LDCs. To this end, it aims at lifting barriers to establishing favourable framework conditions and the necessary capacities for e-commerce and the digital economy by improving

- a. decision-making and policy formulation on e-commerce and the digital economy for development at the national level in a gender-sensitive manner and;
- b. the efficiency of governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector to address issues and provide assistance on e-commerce and the digital economy for development in a gender-sensitive manner.

The programme builds around three pillars: research and analysis, technical cooperation, and consensus building and partnerships. Each pillar reflects a different modality of support. The work under the different pillars feeds into each other, which enhances the ECDE Programme's ability to offer sustainable solutions to address barriers in the e-commerce ecosystem.

Country/region
Global

Executing agency
United Nations
Conference on Trade
and Development
(UNCTAD)

Duration
2021-2024

Total budget
USD 50,000,000

SECO contribution
CHF 4,000,000



- 1. Research and analysis:** Activities in this pillar aim at a better understanding and increased awareness of policy makers about options and good practices to benefit from e-commerce and the digital economy. They include, for example, the flagship publication, the *Digital Economy Report*, thematic studies, web-based technical notes on ICT for development and statistics related to e-commerce and the digital economy.
- 2. Technical cooperation:** Activities in this pillar build policy makers' capacities to integrate e-commerce and the digital economy in their national development agenda in dialogue with other stakeholders. This includes the eTrade Readiness Assessments, which are conducted in beneficiary countries and offer a diagnostic of opportunities and constraints in the existing framework conditions as well as specific policy recommendations, and the activities under the eTrade for Women initiative. UNCTAD also provides technical assistance, for example, to update and revise e-commerce laws, to collect relevant statistics and to formulate, monitor and implement e-commerce strategies.
- 3. Consensus building and partnerships:** Activities in this pillar target improved cooperation, exchange of best practices and consensus building among relevant stakeholders. For instance, they cover the work of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on E-commerce and the Digital Economy (fostering dialogue on the development dimension of e-commerce and the digital economy among UNCTAD member states) and the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy (addressing the lack of reliable statistical data in this area). Other activities include fostering development dialogue with other intergovernmental organisations and relevant stakeholders through the eTrade for all initiative, participating in digital cooperation initiatives in the UN system, and organising global and regional e-commerce weeks.

Governance structure

The ECDE Branch of UNCTAD's Division on Technology and Logistics administers the day-to-day operation of the ECDE Programme. The Branch has dedicated staff for each pillar responsible for the programme management and quality control. A multi-year activity plan helps the Branch to prioritise its work based on available funds, demands for assistance from developing countries and LDCs and donors' priorities. Requests for technical assistance are processed, in principle, on a first-come-first-served basis. ECDE collaborates with a wide network of institutions that participate in the programme activities according to their specific expertise in e-commerce and the digital economy and most of which are partners of the eTrade for all initiative.

Swiss local representations will be involved when activities are conducted in their countries. They will explore and ensure synergies with existing Swiss activities. SECO is part of an advisory board of core donors, which provides strategic advice on the steering of the programme. It will approve annual reports, monitor the progress on programme outcomes and discuss necessary operational adjustments in accordance with new trends and priorities.

How to get involved

Governments interested in an eTrade Readiness Assessment of their country's framework conditions have to submit a formal request to UNCTAD through the office of its Secretary General. Part of the Swiss contribution to the ECDE Programme is reserved to finance such assessments in priority countries of Swiss development cooperation.

Further information and contact details

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