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Federal Departement of Economic Affairs,
Education and Research EAER
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

Factsheet

E-Commerce and the Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme

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

The E-Commerce and the Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme helps policy makers in developing countries, in particular least developed countries (LDCs), to improve their understanding of the opportunities and obstacles related to e-commerce and the digital economy and strengthen their capacity to create favourable framework conditions, with a view to supporting developing countries'integration in the global economy.

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 in developing countries to create an enabling environment for e-commerce and the digital economy by providing research analysis and technical assistance and by improving coordination among partners to support them in this endeavour.

Objectives and activities

The ECDE Programme seeks to enhance inclusive and sustainable development gains 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 for e-commerce and the digital economy by improving:

a. the policy formulation at the national, regional and global level on e-commerce and digital economy for development, in a gender sensitive manner; and
b. the coordination of governments, together with development partners, civil society and the private sector, to implement policies on e-commerce and the digital economy that work for development, in a gender sensitive manner.

The programme builds around three pillars: research and analysis, technical cooperation, and consensus building, strengthened by multi-stakeholder partnerships. Each pillar reflects a different

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

UNCTAD

modality of support. The activities undertaken under the different pillars feed into one another, which enhances the ECDE Programme's ability to provide comprehensive and sustained support.

1. **Research and analysis:** Activities in this pillar aim at improved understanding and increased awareness of policy makers about policy options to benefit from e-commerce and the digital economy. These include, for example, the *Digital Economy Report* flagship publication, thematic studies, technical notes 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 and regional development agenda. This involves helping developing countries understand the state-of-play of the e-commerce enabling environment and issuing recommendations for overcoming barriers and bottlenecks identified (eTrade Readiness Assessments), as well as assisting them in formulating E-Commerce Strategies and Action Plans. Other technical assistance includes activities under the eTrade for Women initiative and support related to e-commerce legal frameworks and statistics.
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 the eTrade for all initiative, which seeks to promote more collaborative efforts for the development of e-commerce, the organisation of the UNCTAD eWeek and the collaboration with other parts of the UN, the G20, the BRICS and beyond (e.g. WSIS).

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. The Branch collaborates with a wide network of institutions, including the 35 partners of the eTrade for all initiative, that participate in programme activities according to their specific expertise in e-commerce and the digital economy. Swiss local representations are involved when activities are conducted in their countries. They 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 approves annual reports, monitors the progress on programme outcomes and discusses operational adjustments in accordance with new trends and priorities.

How to get involved

Governments interested in an eTrade Readiness Assessment or other ECDE technical assistance have to submit a formal request to UNCTAD through the Office of the Secretary-General. Part of the Swiss contribution to the ECDE Programme is reserved to finance such assessments in priority countries of Swiss development cooperation. Countries that have already benefited from available support include Peru, Tunisia and Ghana.

Further information and contact details

ECDE Programme at UNCTAD: ecde@unctad.org

ECDE Programme at SECO: info.wehu.cooperation@seco.admin.ch

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