

**Draft statement by Chair of the WG on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy
for the Sixth session of the IG on E-commerce and the Digital Economy**

Agenda item 4 – 12 May 2023

Excellencies, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to stand before you today and share the outcomes of the third meeting of the Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy, which I had the privilege to chair last year. The meeting took place here in Geneva from 28 to 29 November 2022, with participants from across the globe joining both physically and remotely. We were thrilled to have over 200 attendees from 79 countries, 15 intergovernmental organizations, and 14 other stakeholders, creating an incredibly diverse and vibrant environment that facilitated an invaluable exchange of knowledge and resources. For those interested, my summary of the Working Group meeting is available online on the dedicated UNCTAD website section for this IGE session.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During our meeting, the Working Group engaged in in-depth discussions on four main themes approved by the IGE at its fifth session. These topics were:

1. Progress in the measurement of e-commerce and the digital economy by different international organizations,
2. The definition of the digital economy for statistical purposes,
3. Web scraping and data sharing mechanisms for official statistics on e-commerce and the digital economy, and
4. Measuring the gender dimension of e-commerce and the digital economy.

These discussions were crucial in enhancing our understanding of the current state of e-commerce and the digital economy, as well as identifying opportunities and challenges for further development.

Under the first item (*Progress in the measurement of e-commerce and the digital economy by different international organizations*), experts heard from the European Union, ITU, the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, UNCTAD, and Task Team on Globalization and Digitalization of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics. Members explored the methodologies and challenges of measuring e-commerce and the digital economy. It was evident that countries with a better-prepared digital infrastructure fared better during the pandemic. Reference was made to various obstacles faced by national statistical offices in developing countries, organizing surveys in conflict zones, covering the informal sector, and measuring digitally delivered services. Many experts agreed that future methodological research and capacity building in this area should consider how to better reflect the informal sector. The Secretariat offered to channel requests for capacity building to the relevant members of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development

Ladies and gentlemen,

The second session (*The definition of the digital economy for statistical purposes*) discussed ways to define the digital economy for statistical purposes. While a universally accepted definition is lacking, experts agreed that some components of the digital economy can already be quantified. The OECD and the Asian Development Bank shared their experience with using digital supply-use tables and national accounts data to measure the contribution of the ICT sector and digitally enabled sectors to the economy. The discussion accentuated that more work is needed to develop methodologies to get the full picture of the digital economy. Many developing countries face challenges in measuring the digital economy, as they often lack the necessary business surveys and administrative or business registers to provide data for digital supply-use tables. The Working Group had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on draft chapters of the second edition of the OECD-WTO-IMF-UNCTAD Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade, set to be released later in 2023.

Furthermore, our discussions included UNCTAD background paper on measuring the value of e-commerce. After incorporating expert feedback, the finalized paper can now be found on the UNCTAD website. This paper serves as a stepping-stone towards a better understanding and measurement of e-commerce value. Moreover, it was suggested the need to establish a task force comprised of volunteer experts from the Working Group with a view to using the UNCTAD paper

as a basis for developing guidelines on how to measure the value of e-commerce. We firmly believe that this proposal has significant potential, and it is our sincere hope that the IGE will recognize its importance and grant it its endorsement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The third agenda item (*Web scraping and data sharing mechanisms for official statistics on e-commerce and the digital economy*) of the Working Group was devoted to the use of non-survey sources of data to measure e-commerce and the digital economy. Special attention was given to web scraping and data sharing by private service providers. Experts acknowledged that statistical agencies in both developing and developed countries continue to explore methods for leveraging big data more effectively in official statistics. Insights from Brazil, UN ESCAP, and Eurostat were shared, highlighting their experiences in utilizing web data for various projects. A key takeaway was the ongoing need to focus on data quality monitoring when employing web-based content to generate reliable and accurate statistics.

The final item was on *Measuring the gender dimension of e-commerce and the digital economy*. This was deemed important in order to better understand the involvement of women in the digital economy and to support policymaking and progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. It was noted that there is a lack of data about women, especially those in the informal sector, in existing business and labour force surveys. The discussion reiterated the importance of international organizations improving the ways of measuring the informal sector in the digital economy. There were also calls for more training and resources to help create gender-specific statistics, even when working with big data.

In the interim, we encourage national statistical offices to utilize the core indicators proposed by the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, focusing on gender in ICT-related employment, business, and entrepreneurship. Additionally, they might consider applying the UNCTAD conceptual framework for measuring gender in trade statistics to digital trade or to the ICT sector, further enhancing our understanding of gender dynamics in these areas.

As a result of our discussions, the Working Group suggests that the IGE consider discussing the following three topics at its next meeting:

- i. Progress in measuring e-commerce and the digital economy work by relevant international organizations (as a standing agenda item);
- ii. Measuring the value of e-commerce; and
- iii. Non-survey-based measurement of e-commerce and the digital economy.

Furthermore, we hope the IGE will support our proposal for UNCTAD to coordinate a task group consisting of interested Working Group members. This task group would be responsible for developing UNCTAD guidelines on measuring the value of e-commerce, including cross-border e-commerce.

Before closing, I would like to express my gratitude to the Vice-Chair of the Working Group, Mr. Richard Heys from the UK's Office of National Statistics, for his invaluable support during the meeting. I am also grateful for the engaged participation of delegates at both the Working Group and this meeting, as well as the assistance provided by the UNCTAD Secretariat.

On behalf of my colleagues in the statistical community, I want to emphasize the critical importance of sharing experiences and information on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy in our rapidly evolving digital landscape. With that in mind, I, therefore, look forward to the fourth meeting of the Working Group, scheduled for 30 November and 1 December of this year.

Thank you for your attention.