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**Trade and Development Board**  
**Working Group on Measuring E-Commerce and the Digital Economy**  
Sixth meeting  
Geneva, 4 – 5 December 2025  
Items 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the provisional agenda

## **Issues note on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy**

### **Summary**

This non-paper provides background information on the substantive agenda items that will be discussed at the sixth meeting of the Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy. This document informs on progress made by international organizations and current measurement issues, and recommends possible actions that could be taken by the Working Group to advance related work. Delegates to the Working Group are encouraged to share their experiences under any of the agenda items through written contributions (to be made available as received) and brief oral interventions. Delegates are also encouraged to make proposals for topics to be included in the agenda of the next meeting of the Working Group in December 2026.

# Issues note on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy

## I. Introduction

1. The Intergovernmental Group of Experts (IGE) on E-commerce and the Digital Economy, during its eighth session in May 2025, acknowledged the summary of the Chair of the fifth meeting of the Working Group (WG) on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy, and agreed on the following topics for its sixth meeting<sup>1</sup>:

- a) Progress in measuring work on e-commerce and the digital economy and knowledge resources by relevant international organizations (Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda).
- b) Measuring the value of e-commerce (Item 4).
- c) Updating the core indicators on information and communications technology (ICT) use by businesses and on the ICT sector (Item 5).
- d) Developing capacities on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy (Item 6).

2. This background document provides an overview of main issues and developments related to these agenda items, as a starting point for discussions. The WG Chair will prepare a summary of the discussions and any eventual recommendations, and report to the ninth session of the IGE on 11-13 May 2026.

3. This Working Group takes place following the 16th UNCTAD Conference in October 2025, in which Member States asked UNCTAD to continue supporting developing countries in the strengthening of innovation systems, including for the delivery of public services and statistics, and to enhance support to developing countries in the assessment of their readiness for the digital economy and for harnessing gains from digital trade. Furthermore, the Global Digital Compact, adopted in 2024, recognized that policies to shape an inclusive and sustainable digital future will depend on a stronger evidence base of digitalization data and statistics. It explicitly underlines the importance of strengthening the collection and use of data to inform decision-making.<sup>2</sup> It also calls on all stakeholders, where requested, to provide technical assistance to developing countries, in line with national digital transformation policies and priorities.<sup>3</sup>

4. This Working Group aims to guide policy and statistical stakeholders on the issues they should explore, as well as the kinds of capacity building needed to develop national statistical capacities and build the evidence base to inform digital economy policy for inclusive and sustainable development.

## II. Progress in measuring e-commerce and the digital economy

5. **Agenda item 3** of this WG meeting refers to progress in measuring electronic commerce (e-commerce) and the digital economy by relevant international organizations (see Provisional Agenda). It is a standing agenda item intended to ensure that delegates are aware of ongoing activities in relevant international organizations, can explore opportunities for synergies and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts.

6. Since the fourth meeting of the WG, its Task Group on Measuring E-commerce Value (TG-eCOM) has worked to develop methodology on measuring the value of e-commerce. It is anticipated that new guidelines and recommendations on this issue will be published in 2026. A draft version of them will be reviewed and discussed under agenda item 4 (see section III, below).

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<sup>1</sup> The Report of the IGE containing this action (TD/B/EDE/8/4) is available at [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb\\_e8d4\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb_e8d4_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Global Digital Compact, para 21c.

<sup>3</sup> Global Digital Compact, para 21d.

7. UNCTAD implemented its biennial survey of national statistical offices on the availability of core indicators on the digital economy in the summer of 2025. The UNCTAD statistical portal published updated tables on e-commerce sales and digitally ordered trade, international trade in ICT goods and ICT services, and digitally deliverable services trade statistics.<sup>4</sup> Experts in this Working Group are encouraged to inform the Secretariat if they have statistics on the core indicators of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development on business use of ICT and on the ICT sector for inclusion in the UNCTAD digital economy tables.

8. The measurement of digital trade received continued attention in 2025, based on the second edition of the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade.<sup>5</sup> The delivery of capacity-building activities is a collaborative effort of regional bodies and co-authors of the Handbook. For example, in February 2025, a workshop on measuring digital trade in the Caribbean was organized in cooperation with the Caribbean Development Bank, while another was organized in June for Latin America in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. In August 2025, a regional workshop for Pacific Island States was delivered in Fiji in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC), linked to building capacity in the context of UNCTAD's Pacific Digital Economy Programme a joint initiative of UNCTAD, UNDP, and UNCDF.<sup>6</sup> Finally, a regional workshop for Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) will be held from 9-12 December 2025.<sup>7</sup>

9. Technical assistance to measure the digital economy was provided to Fiji and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, an online course on Statistics on the Digital Economy, E-commerce, and Digital Trade for small island developing states was delivered in collaboration with UNCTAD's TrainForTrade Programme. The UNCTAD SDG Pulse 2025 report on progress towards the 2030 Agenda highlighted trade in digitally deliverable services to illustrate economic diversification for development.<sup>8</sup>

10. The ongoing digital transformation of the European Union has led to the European Statistical System (Eurostat) prioritizing data on the use of advanced technologies by businesses, such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence or engaging data analytics. Great attention is also given to digital skills of citizens, their use of e-government services and electronic identification and the number of ICT specialists on the market to foster the digital transformation, as well as cybersecurity and the environmental impact of digitalization. Apart from the core ICT surveys, Eurostat is looking at the use of additional data sources for the production of ICT indicators, such as data on network coverage received from telecommunications regulators or experimental data on the labour market demand for ICT specialists received from online job sites.

11. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is developing new international statistical standards for measuring digital platform work and employment. A Working Group<sup>9</sup> is developing a comprehensive statistical framework that defines digital platform work and employment and its main components. The aim is to develop a standard that strengthens countries' capacity to measure the various dimensions of digital platform employment according to national needs and policy priorities, while ensuring internationally harmonized statistics. The forthcoming standard is expected to be presented to the 22nd International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2028. It will be accompanied by methodological guidance, data collection tools and indicators, supported by testing and collaboration with partner agencies.

12. The ILO is proposing two new indicators on employment in the ICT sector for inclusion in the core list of ICT indicators under the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. The indicators would enable the monitoring of the size, composition, and evolution of ICT-related employment across countries and support analysis of the role of the ICT sector in job creation, structural transformation, and the broader impact of digitalization on labour markets. These indicators could replace the core indicator currently collected by UNCTAD on the proportion of total business

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<sup>4</sup> <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://unctad.org/publication/handbook-measuring-digital-trade>

<sup>6</sup> <https://unctad.org/meeting/regional-workshop-measuring-digital-trade-pacific-island-states>

<sup>7</sup> <https://etradeforall.org/courses/regional-workshop-measuring-digital-trade-services-comesa-member-states>

<sup>8</sup> <https://sdgpulse.unctad.org/ict-development/>

<sup>9</sup> The establishment of the Working Group reflects the decision at the 21<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) to develop statistical standards to better guide data collection and improve the coverage, quality, and harmonization of statistics in this area.

sector workforce involved in the ICT sector. This issue may be discussed in the context of updating the core indicators on ICT use by businesses and on the ICT sector (see section IV, below).

13. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) held its Expert Group on ICT Household Indicators (EGH) in September 2025 and continued the discussion of ITU's ICT Development Index (IDI) jointly with its Expert Group on Telecommunication/ICT Indicators (EGTI).<sup>10</sup> The review process for the IDI methodology starts again in 2026. The EGH agreed to extend the mandate of its subgroup on measuring the use of AI through household surveys and to open a discussion topic on combining administrative sources with survey data, both items that are complementary to the measurement of the digital economy. Kazakhstan presented its experience with measuring the volume and characteristics of e-commerce from the supply side and demand side, within the framework of an Asian Development Bank project.<sup>11</sup>

14. As digital transformation accelerates, measuring digital trade is becoming increasingly important for trade policy. In the absence of official statistics, the OECD has recently produced experimental estimates of digital trade aligned with the definitions in the Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade. In early 2023, ISIC Rev. 5 was endorsed at the 54th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Changes in the ISIC classes that make up the ICT sector, the Content and Media sector, and Information Industries required a revision of these three OECD definitions in June 2025. The OECD also revised its 2009 e-commerce definition. The revision reaffirms core principles while refining guidance to ensure clarity, adaptability, and continued statistical relevance in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. The updated framework strengthens key concepts, provides guidance on digital intermediaries, subscriptions, and AI-assisted transactions, and clarifies the treatment of emerging ordering channels.

15. The Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development<sup>12</sup> held a session during the WSIS+20 Forum High-Level event held in 2025 linking the work of the Partnership to the implementation of WSIS action lines and the outcomes of the Summit of the Future, and the need for ICT indicators for monitoring international goals and targets. In 2026, the Partnership intends to carry out a mapping exercise to identify indicators that reflect ICTs as drivers of development and inclusion, based on commitments related to Universal Meaningful Connectivity (UMC), WSIS Action Lines, and the Global Digital Compact, all of which require measurement for implementation. The mapping should also help identify areas where core indicators are missing, such as in health, security, governance, or artificial intelligence. In an input provided to the 2025 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Partnership underscored the central role of ICTs in achieving the SDGs and the urgent need to strengthen statistical capacity for monitoring digital transformation. The Partnership noted the compounded effects of global crises (pandemic, climate change, conflicts, and economic shocks) which have deepened inequalities and widened the digital divide. Rapid technological change, including AI adoption, calls for coordinated global action, policy coherence, and investment in capacity building for ICT measurement. The Partnership will once again report on progress in ICT statistics to the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Statistical Commission in 2026.<sup>13</sup>

16. At the 8th Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics in June 2025, its Task Team on Digitalization provided an update on progress that included the international collaboration on the definition of e-commerce and the work of the TG-eCOM. The Task Team also worked on a concept note proposing the development of new business statistics indicators (and a model questionnaire) to better measure the use of artificial intelligence (AI), automation and robotics technologies, and their contribution to firm performance. This work takes place in coordination with other related international initiatives, including the OECD's Working Party on Digital Economy Measurement and Analysis (WPDEMA) and the System of National Accounts (SNA) 2025 revision. The Task Team would develop a model questionnaire. Eventually, best practices will be included in UNSD Global Repository of Practices. Countries interested in testing the indicators and sharing their experiences were encouraged to join the Task Team.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/egh2025/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/wp-content/uploads/IPS/documents/35/32\\_ITU\\_EGH2025\\_AigozinaGurzhykhan\\_ICTAnde-CommerceStatisticsInRepublicOfKazakhstan.pdf](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/wp-content/uploads/IPS/documents/35/32_ITU_EGH2025_AigozinaGurzhykhan_ICTAnde-CommerceStatisticsInRepublicOfKazakhstan.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The Partnership is composed of 14 international organizations that coordinate to improve the availability and quality of ICT data and indicators, particularly in developing countries. See <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/intlcoop/partnership/default.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/business-stat/uncebts/Eighth\\_Meeting\\_2025](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/business-stat/uncebts/Eighth_Meeting_2025)

17. The work of international organizations and national statistical systems to measure e-commerce and the digital economy has gained a renewed sense of urgency in the context of the Summit of the Future in 2024 and the Global Digital Compact.<sup>15</sup> The Summit of the Future recognizes the importance of data for development and, under Objective 4, countries commit to increase financing for data and statistics from all sources and to build capacity in data and related skills, by 2030. In this context, developing countries and their development partners should consider increasing financial support for overall strengthening of national statistical systems to implement business surveys with ICT modules, or stand-alone ICT business surveys, and to build the capacity of countries to tap into non-survey-based sources of data to measure e-commerce and the digital economy.

### III. Measuring the value of e-commerce

18. **Agenda item 4** focuses on the work of the Task Group on Measuring E-commerce Value (TG-eCOM) to develop internationally agreed guidelines and recommendations on measuring e-commerce value. During 2025, TG-eCOM met two times virtually and a third time in person (with financial support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), on 2-3 December, to develop the guidelines and recommendations to measure e-commerce value, the latest draft of which can be made available upon request of interested Working Group participants (request at [emeasurement@unctad.org](mailto:emeasurement@unctad.org)).<sup>16</sup> The TG-eCOM online platform proved a valuable tool to host meeting materials and records, as well as discussions to enable collaborative work. The guidelines and recommendations also take into account the revised OECD e-commerce definition.<sup>17</sup> The completed draft will be shared with the Working Group in 2026.

19. The TG-eCOM welcomes comments on the draft guidelines and recommendations and invites donors to consider supporting future work aimed at disseminating and building capacity on the guidelines, including translation of the document and the development of training resources. Countries that would like to contribute their experience in developing measurement of e-commerce value or request assistance in implementing the guidelines and recommendations, are welcome to contact the UNCTAD secretariat ([emeasurement@unctad.org](mailto:emeasurement@unctad.org)).

### IV. Updating the core indicators on ICT use by businesses and on the ICT sector

20. **Agenda item 5** will discuss the review of the existing core list of indicators on ICT use by businesses and on the ICT sector. The current list is contained in the UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy 2020.<sup>18</sup>

21. The core list of indicators on ICT use in businesses and on the ICT sector was first proposed at the request of the World Summit of the Information Society (2003 and 2005), and its development was led by the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, which subsequently presented it to the UN Statistical Commission for endorsement in 2007. The Commission encouraged countries to use the list as a basis for their ICT measurement activities. In 2020, the core list was the basis for a thematic list to support the monitoring of progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

22. The process to establish the initial list involved a consultation with national statistical offices worldwide, with the collaboration of the UN regional commissions and their statistical units. UNCTAD became the custodian of the core list on ICT use by businesses and on the ICT sector and conducts a biennial data compilation of the latest available

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>

<sup>16</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/tg-ecom-update-wgecde\\_2024.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/tg-ecom-update-wgecde_2024.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-2025-oecd-definition-of-e-commerce-and-guidelines-for-interpretation\\_2254f1de-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-2025-oecd-definition-of-e-commerce-and-guidelines-for-interpretation_2254f1de-en.html)

<sup>18</sup> <https://unctad.org/publication/manual-production-statistics-digital-economy-2020>

statistics corresponding to the indicators. While the availability of the core indicators has improved over the past 20 years, progress has been slow and developing countries generally still lag behind developed countries in terms of data availability. At the same time, digitalization of the economy and technological advancements have expanded at a much faster pace than the modernization of statistical systems, especially in developing countries.

23. The core list is not mandatory, nor is it intended to be limiting, but it offers a baseline or minimum common denominator of indicators that could be collected by all countries (especially developing economies) and also be comparable between countries.<sup>19</sup> The list of core indicators has experienced little change since 2010 other than revisions to underlying definitions. The proposed revision would encompass the indicators themselves and the associated definitions, classifications, and methodologies. Some of the indicators on the current list may not be relevant to current and future digital policies. Others may be replaced by indicators collected by other members of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, such as the ICT employment indicator by ILO (see section II above). New proposed indicators on the supply side of the digital economy may be proposed to complement new indicators on the demand side, such as the e-commerce indicators proposed by ITU, and to reflect the guidelines and recommendations developed by the TG-eCOM. New model questions would need to be developed after validation of the revised list.

24. The current list of indicators to be produced by countries includes 12 core indicators on the use of ICT by businesses and 2 indicators on the ICT sector. There are 6 additional indicators related to international trade of ICT goods, ICT services, and digitally-deliverable services, compiled from existing trade statistics and will not be subject to this review and consultation process. The full list of core indicators on ICT use by businesses and the ICT sector appears below.

|      | <b>Indicator</b>                                                         | <b>Source</b>        | <b>Comments</b>                                                 |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| B1   | Proportion of businesses using computers                                 | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B2   | Proportion of persons employed routinely using computers                 | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B3   | Proportion of businesses using the Internet                              | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B4   | Proportion of persons employed routinely using the Internet              | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B5   | Proportion of businesses with a web presence                             | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B6   | Proportion of businesses with an intranet                                | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B7   | Proportion of businesses receiving orders over the Internet              | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B8   | Proportion of businesses placing orders over the Internet                | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B9   | Proportion of businesses using the Internet by type of access            | National surveys     | Distinction between narrowband and broadband (fixed and mobile) |
| B10  | Proportion of businesses with a Local Area Network                       | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B11  | Proportion of businesses with an extranet                                | National surveys     |                                                                 |
| B12  | Proportion of businesses using the Internet by type of activity          | National surveys     | The UNCTAD Manual proposes up to 18 response categories         |
| ICT1 | Proportion of total business sector workforce involved in the ICT sector | Labour force surveys | Could be replaced by ILO indicator on ICT employment            |
| ICT2 | ICT sector share of gross value added                                    | National calculation |                                                                 |
| ICT3 | ICT goods imports as a percentage of total merchandise imports           | COMTRADE database    |                                                                 |

<sup>19</sup> National ICT policies may require additional, country-specific indicators directly relevant to their digital policies and priorities, but they are not part of the core list.

|      |                                                                                     |                                                                  |  |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| ICT4 | ICT goods exports as a percentage of total merchandise exports                      | COMTRADE database                                                |  |
| ICT5 | ICT services imports as a percentage of total imports of services                   | COMTRADE database                                                |  |
| ICT6 | ICT services exports as a percentage of total export of services                    | COMTRADE database                                                |  |
| ICT7 | Digitally deliverable services imports as a percentage of total imports of services | UNCTAD estimates, based on UNCTAD-WTO Trade in Services Data Set |  |
| ICT8 | Digitally deliverable services exports as a percentage of total exports of services | UNCTAD estimates, based on UNCTAD-WTO Trade in Services Data Set |  |

25. The consultation process will aim to gather input from a maximum number of national statistical agencies on the individual indicators under review, in the form of a survey, but will also seek to meet virtually at least 3 times in 2026 to discuss progress. UNCTAD proposes that the Working Group establish a Task Group on the Review of Core Indicators on ICT use by businesses. The method of work would follow the blueprint of the TG-eCOM, with an online discussion space to share work in progress. Countries and organizations that would like to contribute their experience in collecting the indicators and actively provide inputs to preparing the reviewed core list are invited to contact the UNCTAD secretariat ([emeasurement@unctad.org](mailto:emeasurement@unctad.org)) by 10 January 2026. A report on the work of the Task Group with a reviewed core list of indicators could be submitted to the Working Group for validation at its 7th meeting at the end of 2026.

## V. Developing capacities for measuring the digital economy

26. **Agenda item 6** allows for a targeted discussion on capacity building on measure e-commerce and digital economy. This item will showcase efforts from member States and international organizations to develop capacities to measure e-commerce and the digital economy. It will also allow for a discussion on capacity-building constraints faced by countries and their technical-assistance needs and wants. Experts are encouraged to contribute actively to the discussion.

27. As mentioned in sections I and II of this document, the Global Digital Compact noted that safe and secure data systems and capacity are critical for evidence-based policymaking and the delivery of public services, and committed to “increase financing for data and statistics from all sources and enhance efforts to build capacity in data and related skills, as well as responsible data use, particularly in developing countries. We will scale up predictable financing for sustainable development data”.<sup>20</sup>

28. Despite progress in capacity building in measuring trade in services and digital trade, other areas of technical assistance have suffered from constrained resources. No training courses, online or in-person, based on the UNCTAD *Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy*, could take place in 2025.

## VI. Conclusions and way forward

30. As per the substantive agenda items, the Working Group may consider conveying the conclusions and recommendations below to the ninth meeting of the IGE on E-commerce and the Digital Economy:

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.un.org/global-digital-compact/sites/default/files/2024-09/Global%20Digital%20Compact%20-%20English\\_0.pdf](https://www.un.org/global-digital-compact/sites/default/files/2024-09/Global%20Digital%20Compact%20-%20English_0.pdf)

*On progress in measuring e-commerce and the digital economy*

- a) Recommend that UNCTAD continue efforts to gradually improve the measurement of e-commerce and the digital economy by engaging with other international organizations and national statistical offices in future meetings of the WG.

*On measuring the value of e-commerce*

- b) Ask UNCTAD and the TG-eCOM to finalize the statistical guidelines and recommendations on measuring the value of e-commerce with a view to disseminate them and develop capacity building for national statistical offices based on the guidelines.

*On the review of the list of core indicators on ICT use by businesses and the ICT sector*

- c) Ask UNCTAD to conduct through the working group a widespread consultation process for the updating of the core indicators on ICT use by business and the ICT sector, with a view to submitting the reviewed core indicators to the Working Group at its 7th meeting in 2026 for validation.
- d) Encourage countries to actively participate in the consultation process.
- e) Ask UNCTAD to prepare a plan to review the Manual on digital economy statistics based on the updated list of core indicators and develop related capacity building material and resources.

*On building capacities for measuring e-commerce and the digital economy*

- f) Recognize that the availability of survey-based statistics from developing countries needs to be strengthened, and that official statistics should reflect the changing digital economy landscape and commitments of the Summit of the Future and the Global Digital Compact.
- g) Refer to the Global Digital Compact and call on the donor community to increase support for methodological development, including the development and updating of training courses on digital economy statistics in various languages, both online and in-person. Development partners can also consider funding the participation of statistical experts from developing countries in technical meetings such as this Working Group, with a view to improving the availability of statistics that inform digital economy policy.

31. Based on the above, the Working Group may wish to recommend that the IGE endorse the following topics for discussion at the next WG meeting:

- Progress in measuring e-commerce and the digital economy work by relevant international organizations (standing agenda item)
- Measuring the value of e-commerce
- Validating the core indicators on ICT use by business and on the ICT sector
- Developing capacities for measuring the digital economy