Updating the core indicators on ICT use by businesses and on the ICT sector

WG-ECDE

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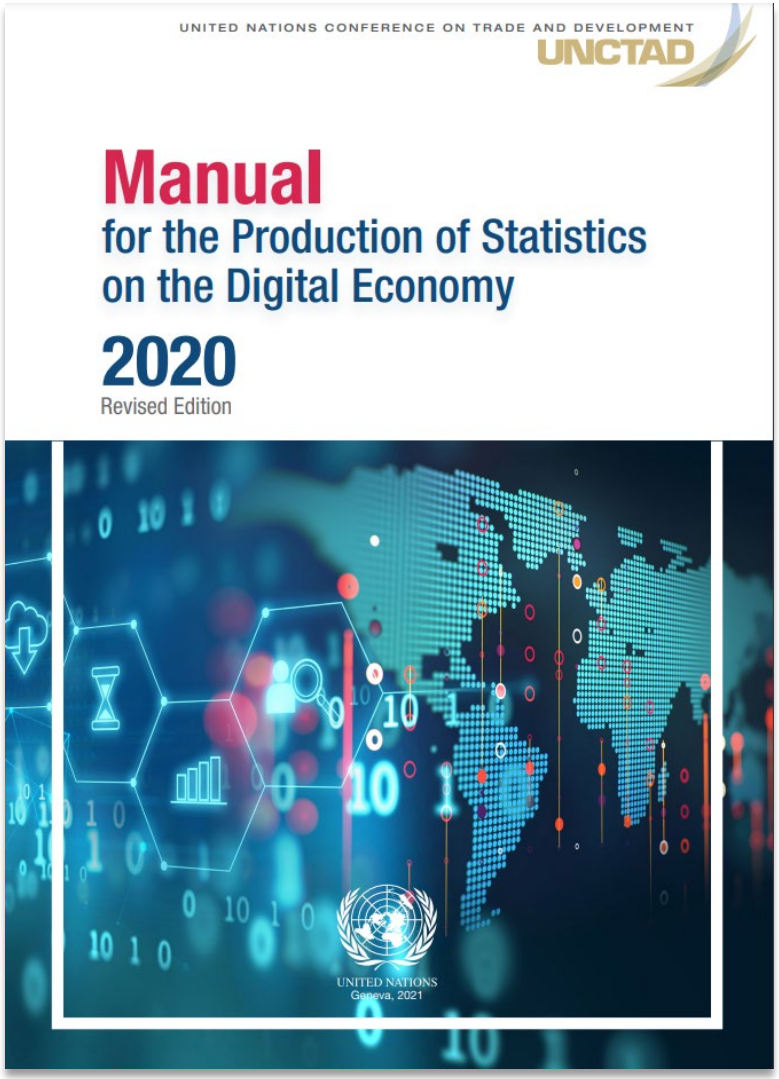
ICT usage in business

- Core indicators:
  - Established through the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development
  - Set out in the UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Digital Economy
- Used for national and international analyses

- Collection conducted every 2 years
- Where possible, filled from Eurostat and OECD databases
- Other economies provide figures directly to UNCTAD through an online collection tool
- Requests for participation are sent to all permanent missions in Geneva, national statistical offices, WG-ECDE participants, and previous respondents



Why the update

- Last revision of the indicators themselves was 10 years ago
- In the meantime, updates to classifications, underlying technological concepts and definitions, model questionnaires
- Digitalization has rapidly transformed business use of new technologies (AI, cloud services)
- Some original indicators may have lost policy relevance
- New policy considerations and statistical developments
- Demand from countries for guidance on building evidence base for policy making
- UNCTAD strengthened mandate on data and statistics

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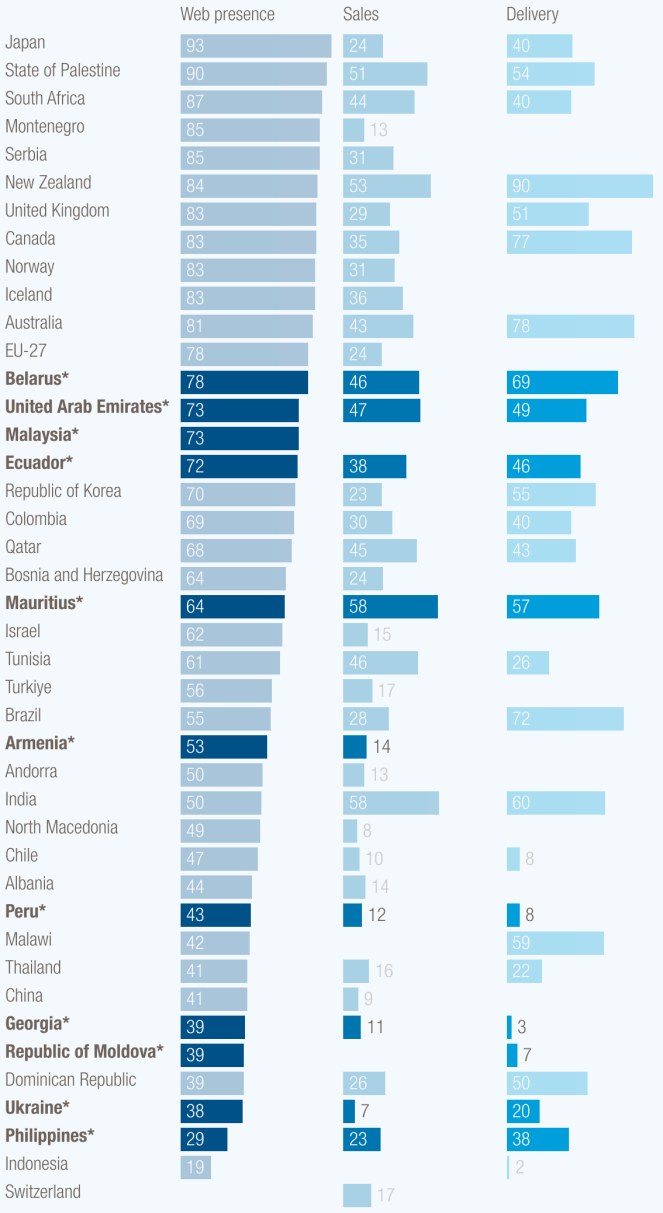
ICT usage in business

- 2025 update live soon
  - Includes figures submitted by Member States through 2025 collection
  - Forthcoming updated Eurostat (2025) and OECD data will be incorporated early in the New Year
- Response remains *limited*
  - Statistics on ICT usage in business are only produced in a minority of countries
  - Production of statistics can be irregular
  - More countries have these indicators, but don't respond to the collection
  - Broader participation will be crucial to ensure the viability of this collection going forward
- Future plans
  - Finalise review against UNCTAD Statistics Quality Assurance Framework
  - Next collection in 2027
  - Review of core indicators

While most businesses have an online presence, only the minority sell products or deliver services online

% of businesses, 2024 or latest



Note: * figures received in 2025 collection

Source: UNCTAD Core indicators on ICT use in business databases (https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/)

Task Group on Core Indicators (TGCI)

- To review existing and develop new indicators on business ICT use, including reviewing and developing harmonized definitions, response categories and/or classificatory variables to stay current with technological and behavioral changes.

- To review the *UNCTAD Manual for the Production of Digital Economy Statistics* to reflect revised ICT business indicators, experiences and lessons learnt by national statistical agencies around the world.

What the update includes

- Survey-based indicators
- Definition of concepts
  - OECD definition of e-commerce, ITU latest technology definitions
- Model questions, based on those used by countries
- Proposed disaggregation and classification (enterprise size, economic activity, geographical location)
- Policy relevance
- Possible new indicators or response categories (sub-indicators)
  - On e-commerce
  - On use of social media for business
  - On use of AI by businesses
  - Women in ICT
- The update excludes international trade indicators, calculated from import-export databases

Proposed timeline

- Jan 2026: collect expressions of interest from experts
- Feb 2026: convene a first virtual meeting to discuss terms of reference and programme of work for 2026
- Mar-Oct 2026: monthly virtual meetings to discuss a few indicators at a time, set up of online discussion platform (like TG-eCOM)
- Oct-Nov 2026: finalizing of report to WG
- Dec 2026: report to WG
- Continued work after 2026

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After 2026

- 2027: Review of UNCTAD data collection based on updated indicators
- Mapping of updated indicators to WSIS Action Lines, SDGs, GDC
- Review of UNCTAD Manual based on updated indicators
  - Inclusion of TG-eCOM results
  - Review of survey methodology
  - Guidance on issues raised in WG (coverage of informal sector, complementarity of non-survey data sources)
  - Recent country experiences
- Review of training material based on updated Manual
- Delivery of capacity building based on updated Manual and training material
- 2028: Report to the UNSC

B1: Proportion of businesses using computers

The proportion of businesses using computers is calculated by dividing the number of in-scope businesses. using computers during the 12-month reference period by the total number of in-scope businesses.

Policy relevance:
Knowing the extent to which businesses in different sectors and of different sizes use computers is important for policymaking aimed at fostering a more inclusive digital economy and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures seeking to increase ICT use by enterprises.

Question to WG:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. Has this indicator become redundant, reached almost 100%?

B2: Proportion of persons employed routinely using computers

The proportion of persons employed routinely using computers (in all in-scope businesses) by the total number of persons employed (in all in-scope businesses).

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which employees routinely use computers is important for policymaking to assess the ICT skills level in enterprises in different sectors and of different sizes, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting ICT use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. Has this indicator become redundant, reached almost 100%?

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B3: Proportion of businesses using the Internet

The proportion of businesses using the Internet is calculated by dividing the number of in-scope businesses using the Internet by the total number of in-scope businesses.

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which businesses in different sectors and of different sizes use the Internet is important for policymaking aimed at fostering more inclusive e-commerce and a more inclusive digital economy and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures seeking to increase Internet use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. Has this indicator become redundant, reached almost 100%?

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B4: Proportion of persons employed routinely using the Internet

The proportion of persons employed routinely using the Internet is calculated by dividing the number of persons employed routinely using the Internet (in all in-scope businesses) by the total number of persons employed (in all in-scope businesses).

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which employees routinely use the Internet is important for policymaking to assess the ICT skills level in enterprises in different sectors and of different sizes, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting Internet use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator? What's the response rate /quality of responses?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. Has this indicator become redundant, reached almost 100%?

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B5: Proportion of businesses with a web presence

The proportion of businesses with a web presence is calculated by dividing the number of in-scope businesses with a web presence by the total in-scope businesses.

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which enterprises in different sectors and of different size have a web presence is important for policymaking to assess the extent to which enterprises are visible online, which is essential for reaching potential buyers through e-commerce.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. **What's the response rate /quality of responses?**

B6: Proportion of businesses with an intranet

The proportion of businesses with an intranet is calculated by dividing the number of in-scope businesses with an intranet by the total number of in-scope businesses.

An intranet refers to an internal communications network using Internet protocols and allowing communication within an organization (and to other authorized persons). It is typically set up behind a firewall to control access. The question is only asked of those businesses answering 'yes' to the question “Did your business use computer(s)?”

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which enterprises in different sectors and of different size have an intranet is important for policymaking to assess the way in which businesses are leveraging digital technologies, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting such use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. **What’s the response rate /quality of responses?**

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B7: Proportion of businesses receiving orders over the Internet

The proportion of businesses receiving orders over the Internet by the total number of in-scope businesses.

Orders received include orders received via the Internet whether or not payment was made online.

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which enterprises in different sectors and of different size are receiving orders over the Internet is important for policymaking to assess the uptake of e-commerce, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting e-commerce use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. **What's the response rate /quality of responses?**
4. Should we consider new response categories or e-commerce indicators following TG-eCOM guidelines and recommendations?

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B8: Proportion of businesses placing orders over the Internet

The proportion of businesses placing orders over the Internet by the total number of in-scope businesses.

Orders placed include orders placed via the Internet whether or not payment was made online.

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which enterprises in different sectors and of different size are placing orders over the Internet is important for policymaking to assess the uptake of e-commerce, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting e-commerce use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. **What's the response rate /quality of responses?**
4. Should we consider new response categories or e-commerce indicators following TG-eCOM guidelines and recommendations?

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B9: Proportion of businesses using the Internet by type of access

This indicator should be calculated as the proportion of in-scope Internet-using businesses that use each type of access service, for instance, the proportion of Internet-using businesses that use a broadband service as their means of access.

It is expected that countries will collect data at a finer level than ‘narrowband’ and ‘broadband’. The categories chosen by countries should allow aggregation to total narrowband and total broadband, as well as fixed and mobile broadband. Broadband is defined by ITU.

Policy relevance:

Knowing the quality of Internet access for enterprises in different sectors and of different size is important for policymaking to assess the potential for more advanced use of the Internet, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting such use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. Is narrowband redundant?
4. **What’s the response rate /quality of responses?**

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B10: Proportion of businesses with a local area network (LAN)

The proportion of businesses with a LAN is calcultad by dividing the number of in-scope businesses with a LAN by the total number of in-scope businesses.

A LAN refers to a network connecting computers within a localized area such as a single building, department or site; it may be wireless.

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which enterprises in different sectors and of different size have a local area network (LAN) is important for policymaking to assess the way in which businesses are leveraging digital technologies, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting such use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. **What's the response rate /quality of responses?**

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B11: Proportion of businesses with an extranet

The proportion of businesses with an extranet is calculated by dividing the number of in-scope businesses with and extranet by the total number of in-scope businesses.

An extranet is a closed network that uses Internet protocols to securely share a business' information with suppliers, vendors, customers or other businesses partners.

Policy relevance:

Knowing the extent to which enterprises in different sectors and of different size have an extranet is important for policymaking to assess the way in which businesses are leveraging digital technologies, and to assess the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting such use by enterprises.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. **What's the response rate /quality of responses?**

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B12: Proportion of businesses using the Internet by type of activity

The proportion of in-scope businesses using the Internet for activities per response categories.

Currently activity groups proposed: access to information, communication, interaction with government / providers / customers, and human resource management

Policy relevance:

Knowing how enterprises in different sectors and of different size make use of the Internet is important for policymaking to assess the extent to which enterprises are taking full advantage of digital technologies, and to assess the impact of such use on productivity and growth. This kind of information is also important for assessing the effectiveness of policy measures aimed at promoting more advanced Internet use of businesses.

Question to experts:

1. Have you surveyed for this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?
3. **What's the response rate /quality of responses?**

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ICT1: Proportion of total business sector workforce involved in the ICT sector

The proportion of total business sector workforce involved in the ICT sector is calculated by dividing the ICT sector workforce by the total business sector workforce (expressed as a percentage).

Policy relevance:

With growing digitalization of the economy and society, it becomes increasingly important for countries to have a minimum level of capabilities in the ICT goods and services producing sector. It is therefore important for policymakers to know how the ICT sector's share of the total business sector workforce is evolving over time.

Question to experts:

1. Have you calculated this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?

NOTE: This indicator might be replaced and taken over by the ILO. Pending discussion in the TGCI with the participation of ILO.

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ICT2: Value added in the ICT sector (as a percentage of total business sector value added)

Value added in the ICT sector is calculated as the estimated value added of the ICT sector divided by total business sector value added (expressed as a percentage).

Policy relevance:

Value added is the ICT sector contribution to GDP and is not directly measured but estimated in a national accounts framework.

Question to experts:

1. Have you calculated this indicator?
2. Is it relevant to your policy makers?

Next steps / decisions

- Should the WG form the Task Group on Core Indicators (TGCI)?
- Comments on the proposed timeline and process?
- Please express your interest in joining TGCI at this WG or by email to ecde@unctad.org by 15 January 2026.

- UNCTAD to convene first virtual meeting and draft terms of reference for February 2026.

Thank you

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Geneva consensus
Digital economy measurement

22 [...] creating better service trade data while addressing both the persistent challenges of sparse data on services trade, informality and low productivity in some service sectors and the emerging challenges of digital service provision [...].

42.bis (a) Continue its efforts in enhancing developing countries' capacities to harness the digital economy and narrowing digital and data divides by means of research, capacity building, [...], and knowledge sharing, and in synergy with other relevant international organizations and related public and private stakeholders, and civil society organizations, including by addressing challenges of digital and emerging technology, including AI, identifying and supporting an enabling environment for digital infrastructure development, improving digital literacy and skills, and supporting the participation of MSMEs, women, and youth-led business in the digital economy;

42(b) Enhance support to developing countries in their capacity for electronic commerce, including through digital trade negotiation support, and in the assessment of their readiness for the digital economy and for harnessing gains from digital trade, including through eTrade Readiness Assessments and follow up on the implementation of its policy recommendation.

42(b).bis. Continue producing analysis to, as well as promoting and facilitating discussions on, the challenges faced by developing countries on their public revenue generation capacity, in view of digital transformation process, in order to foster international cooperation on this subject.

42bis(m) Contribute, in accordance with its mandate and in synergy with the UN system and other organisations, to initiatives, debates and events on digital trade and digital economy from a development perspective

Priorities for 2026

Core indicators on ICT in business and the ICT sector

- Review of core indicators (through WG-ECDE)
- Complete quality review of indicators database and enhancements to collection platform

E-commerce and digital trade

- TG-eCOM: finalization of guidelines and recommendations on measuring e-commerce value
- Development of capacity building / technical assistance offer
- Maintaining and enhancing database on e-commerce value and digitally ordered trade
- Integration of digital trade in TISSTAT

Capacity building and technical assistance

- Including with partners (IMF, OECD and WTO)

7th Meeting of WG-ECDE 3-4 December 2026 (TBC)