Policy review

Trinidad and Tobago

eTrade Readiness Assessment

United Nations

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Foreword

The UNCTAD-led eTrade for all initiative, launched at the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XIV) in July 2016, is a practical example of how to harness the digital economy in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The initiative seeks to raise awareness, enhance synergies, and increase the scale of existing and new efforts by the development community to strengthen the ability of developing countries to engage in, and benefit from, e-commerce, by addressing seven relevant policy areas:

- E-commerce readiness assessment and strategy formulation
- Information and Communication Technologies infrastructure and services
- Trade logistics and trade facilitation
- Payment solutions
- Legal and regulatory frameworks
- E-commerce skills development
- Access to financing

UNCTAD works with governments of developing countries and key stakeholders to improve their digital economy capabilities through eTrade Readiness Assessments. The assessments analyse the digital and e-commerce ecosystems of beneficiary countries and provide policy recommendations based on the challenges and opportunities for e-commerce development identified across the seven policy areas. To operationalize those recommendations, UNCTAD established an Implementation Support Mechanism in 2020 to increase in-country coordination support and build national capacities needed to ensure efficient and effective implementation of e-commerce policies and initiatives.

The eTrade Readiness Assessment of Trinidad and Tobago is the thirty-seventh such assessment conducted by UNCTAD. It is the second assessment in the Latin America and Caribbean, following the Peru eTrade Readiness Assessment in 2023. It provides recommendations that seek to enable Trinidad and Tobago to move forward, at both e national and regional levels, in leveraging e-commerce for development.

I hope that this report will contribute to further strengthen the efforts that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has initiated since the early 2000s in pursuit of the digital transformation of the economy and society. This includes ongoing efforts to develop the National E-commerce Strategy 2025-2030. To this end, the report identifies main challenges and opportunities to e-commerce development and proposes policy recommendations for a robust and safe e-commerce ecosystem, favourable to all consumers and supportive of local businesses to be empowered to serve domestic and international markets.

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Abbreviations

ACH	Automated Clearing House
AI	Artificial Intelligence
API	Application Programming Interface
ARC	Alliance of Rural Communities
ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs Data
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Consumer
CAF	Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CARIFORUM	Caribbean Forum of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Region
CBTT	Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago
CED	Customs and Excise Division
CGSI	Core Government Systems Index
CSO	Central Statistical Office
CTU	Caribbean Telecommunications Union
DATER	Department of Air Transport Economic Regulation
DER	Digital Economy Report
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EGDI	E-Government Development Index
EFT	Electronic Funds Transfer
EMIs	E-Money Issuers
eT4W	eTrade for Women
ETA	Electronic Transactions Act
ETRs	Electronic Transferable Records
EU	European Union
FIA	Financial Institutions Act
FIUTT	Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago
FTTB	Fibre to Business
FTTH	Fibre to Home
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GITR	Global Information Technology Report
GoRTT	Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
GSMA	Global System Mobile Communications Association
GTEI	GovTech Enablers Index
GTMI	GovTech Maturity Index
G2P	Government-to-person

HSPA	High-Speed Packet Access
IBIS	Integrated Business Incubator System
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IH	Innovation Hub
IIPD	Integrated Index for Postal Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMPACS	Implementation Agency for Crime and Security
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IoT	Internet of Things
IPA	Investment Promotion Agency
IRD	Inland Revenue Division
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITA	Information Technology Agreement
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IXP	Internet Exchange Point
LDC	Least developed country
LPI	Logistics Performance Index
LTE	Long-Term Evolution
LTE-A	Long-Term Evolution Advanced
MASA	Multilateral Air Services Agreement
MDT	Ministry of Digital Transformation
MLETR	Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records
MNS	Ministry of National Security
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoL	Ministry of Labour
MoPD	Ministry of Planning and Development
MOWT	Ministry of Works and Transport
MPA	Ministry of Public Administration
MPU	Ministry of Public Utilities
MSMEs	Micro, Small, Medium-Sized Enterprises
MTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
MYDNS	Ministry of Youth Development and National Service
NAMDEVCO	National Agricultural Market and Development Company
NDS	National Development Strategy
NIS	National Insurance System
NFLP	National Financial Literacy Programme
NICT	National Information Communication Technology
NTFC	National Trade Facilitation Committee
OACPS	Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States

PATT	Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
PATTGU	Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago Governing Unit
POSINCO	Port of Spain Infrastructure Company
PPO	Port of Port of Spain
PSDI	Public Service Delivery Index
RTGS	Real Time Gross Settlement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEW	Single Electronic Window
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SMEs	Small, Medium-Sized Enterprises
SSF	Small-scale fishers
SST	Smart Seas Toolkit
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TATT	Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
TTCAA	Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority
TTCSI	Trinidad and Tobago Confederation of Services Industries
TTIFC	The Trinidad and Tobago Financial Centre
TTIT	Trinidad and Tobago Inter-Island Transportation Company
TTSEC	Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission
TTTP	Trinidad and Tobago Trade Policy
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPU	Universal Postal Union
UPU 2IPD	Integrated Index for Postal Development
UTT	University of Trinidad and Tobago
VAT	Value added tax
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

Note

Within the UNCTAD Division on Technology and Logistics, the E-commerce and Digital Economy Branch carries out policy-oriented analytical work on the development implications of information and communication technologies (ICTs), e-commerce and the digital economy. It is responsible for the preparation of the Digital Economy Report (DER) as well as thematic studies on ICT for Development.

The Branch promotes international dialogue on issues related to ICTs for development and contributes to building developing countries' capacities to measure the digital economy and to design and implement relevant policies and legal frameworks. It also monitors the global status of e-commerce legislation (UNCTAD Cyberlaw Tracker). Since 2016, the Branch has coordinated a multi-stakeholder initiative entitled eTrade for all (etradeforall.org), which aims to improve the ability of developing countries, particularly least developed countries (LDCs), to use and benefit from e-commerce. The initiative is also behind the UNCTAD eTrade for Women (eT4w) programme, launched in 2019, which aims to promote a more inclusive digital economy, in particular, through its network of Advocates. These female digital entrepreneurs are active in all developing regions and contribute to capacity-building, mentoring and awareness-raising activities for more inclusive gender policies.

When the United States is mentioned, reference is made to the United States of America, and when the United Kingdom is mentioned, reference is made to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Reference to companies and their activities should not be construed as an endorsement by UNCTAD of those companies or their activities.

The following symbols may have been used in the tables:

Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported. Rows in tables have been omitted in those cases where no data are available for any of the elements in the row.

A dash (—) indicates that the item is equal to zero or its value is negligible.

Use of an en dash (-) between dates representing years signifies the full period involved, including the beginning and end years.

The term "dollars" ($) refers to United States of America dollars, unless otherwise indicated.

Details and percentages in tables do not necessarily add up to the totals because of rounding.

Reference to "TTD" means Trinidad and Tobago dollars. For the purpose of this report, $1 is equivalent to TTD 6.78, which is the average rate published by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the period from January to July 2024.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Trinidad and Tobago, a small high-income developing country, presents significant opportunities for the growth of e-commerce. With a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $28.1 billion, a GDP per capita of approximately $19,800, and a population of 1.42 million as of 2023, the country is the second largest consumer market in the English-speaking Caribbean, after Jamaica (IMF, 2024). Its relatively high purchasing power makes it an attractive market for online businesses. In addition, with 96 per cent of households having access to Internet at home and 55 per 100 inhabitants having mobile broadband subscriptions in 2023, the digital infrastructure is well in place to support e-commerce (TATT 2024).

As in many developing countries, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, e-commerce has grown in significance, with a larger number of businesses (utilities, banks, and most recently retail establishments) offering the option to pay bills and make purchases online. E-commerce offers Trinidad and Tobago the opportunity to increase cross-border trade particularly in the areas of services to international markets. There are many services which businesses can offer digitally, including those with potential in the country such as entertainment services, software development, consulting, design, and online education.

A summary of the findings of the seven thematic eTrade policy areas for Trinidad and Tobago is presented below.

E-commerce readiness assessment and strategy formulation

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GoRTT) began to pave the way for the facilitation of e-commerce in the early 2000s. Key digital transformation policies and initiatives include FastForward (2003), SmartTT (2014), the National ICT Plan 2018-2022, the Trinidad and Tobago Trade Policy 2019-2023, and the Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027 led by a dedicated Ministry, the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT) created in 2021.

The GoRTT, through the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), prioritized e-commerce development in 2017, with the launch of a dedicated national e-commerce strategy. In addition to the creation of MDT, key government digital initiatives including TTBizLink (a one-stop-shop government-to-business portal), GovPayTT (an e-payments system for government transactions), a Developer's Hub (a platform promoting software development) and others. These examples illustrate strong commitment of the GoRTT towards digitalization. There has also been focus on the digitalization of payments and increased effectiveness of processes, within governmental agencies as well as for private stakeholders. A national e-identity and an interoperability solution are also under development.

With MTI and MDT in the lead on e-commerce and digitalization respectively, digital government initiatives are cross-sectoral and often based on a variety of online portals that are not always interoperable. In terms of the institutional framework, a number of other ministries, agencies and private sector representatives are involved, including the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Planning and Development (MPD), Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, Ministry of Public Utilities, Ministry of National Security, as well as the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (CBTT), Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT), Customs and Excise Division (CED), Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Services Industries and the Chamber of Commerce, among others. Better coordination among institutions

and stakeholders, greater understanding of e-commerce, as well as availability of data and statistics surrounding e-commerce are some of the key areas that require further improvement.

ICT infrastructure and services

Trinidad and Tobago has a robust digital infrastructure that is supportive of e-commerce, resulting from investments made by the Government and private sector. As of March 2024, the information and communications technology (ICT) sector accounted for 3.7 per cent of GDP, primarily in software development, web design, data processing, ICT training, and software solutions (TATT, 2024a). With 148 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people according to data from 2023, Trinidad and Tobago boasts one of the highest penetrations of mobile phone coverage in the world (TATT, 2024a). A leader within spectrum management in the region, the country has also assigned additional spectrum to mobile operators at significantly reduced rates, underscoring the commitment to fostering an environment conducive to digital growth (GSMA, 2024). The country has several government-led initiatives in place that have led to the establishment of 171 free public Wi-Fi access points, a Digital Skills Development Programme, 5G connectivity, a Developer's Hub, and plans to construct a Tier 4 Modular Government Data Centre (CANTO, 2024).

The national telecommunications and fibre-optic link systems are among the most advanced in the western hemisphere. The country has six undersea cables: Southern Caribbean Fiber, EC Link, Eastern Caribbean Fiber System, Suriname-Guyana Submarine Cable System, Americas II, and the Deep Blue Cable that started operations in 2024 (from Guyana to Trinidad and Tobago). Additionally, its domestic fibre-optic distribution system covers close to 100 per cent of the populated areas.

However, a digital divide still exists for underserved communities and population groups. There is a recognized need to improve the availability of data and capacity to access services and to keep costs competitive for sustained consumer access.

Trade logistics and trade facilitation

E-commerce development is reliant on the national logistical infrastructure, which features a network of roads, an inter-island ferry service, transport of passengers and goods by air passenger and cargo travel through two international airports, and several seaports. Postal services are implementing changes to launch and operationalize online payment solutions to facilitate the payment of duties, taxes and other fees for services received. Currently, however, customs procedures do not leverage ICT fully and there is reported scope for more coordination among public sector agencies responsible for trade facilitation.

The Single Electronic Window (SEW) for Trade and Business Facilitation Project, also known as TTBizLink, is a prominent IT-based trade facilitation solution in the country, launched in 2009. The portal provides access to multiple tools and resources under the categories of Trade, Business, and Investment. The SEW comprises 48 online services, 25 of which accept online payments, used by over 4,500 companies and over 45,000 registered users. TTBizLink accepts online payment for its services, supported by the e-Cashbook software developed by the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre (TTIFC). It is interconnected with the ASYCUDA World system used by CED for the transmission of cargo clearances from other government agencies, which in turn use TTBizLink. Trinidad and Tobago has also started developing a Port Community System to connect ASYCUDA, NAVIS and TTBizLink. However, customs declaration services systems, postal tracking systems and TTBizLink are still operating for the most part in a disjointed manner. The effectiveness of these platforms can be improved by ensuring further interoperability, as well as collaboration between the private and public sectors.

Payment solutions

With a well-developed financial and banking system and numerous initiatives involving digital payments and services, Trinidad and Tobago is well positioned to achieve a cashless digital ecosystem, which is essential for e-commerce. To further support e-payments uptake, emphasis has been placed on facilitating e-money activity, digitalizing financial services, and becoming a fintech-enabled financial services hub. Despite these recent initiatives, the country's payment landscape is still characterized by high reliance on cash. Access to banking can prove difficult for MSMEs and individuals alike, with ongoing efforts by TTIFC and other stakeholders to help address this issue. Increased use of digital payment solutions may require a cultural shift, as well as further development of the country's digital and financial capabilities.

Additionally, the current model of digitalization of payments and implementation of online government payments is being implemented by a number of different stakeholders. This may result in high costs of implementation, lack of integration and a unsatisfactory user experience. While government entities rely on online payments to provide services, non-bank institutions, such as credit unions and e-money issuers, do not yet have direct access to certain payment infrastructures.

Legal and regulatory frameworks

Several key pieces of legislation in Trinidad and Tobago aim to regulate e-commerce. Among these are the 2011 Electronic Transactions Act (ETA), the Consumer Protection and Safety Act and the Data Protection Act. The country has also initiated amendments to existing legislation, including updating the Data Protection Act, finalizing the Cybercrime Bill and amending the Telecommunications Act.

Internationally, Trinidad and Tobago has started the process of acceding to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime of the Council of Europe. This will be key in strengthening the country's ability to effectively address risks related to cybercrime. At the national level, current legislative frameworks such as cybersecurity, data protection and consumer protection can be improved, and awareness of applicable laws and frameworks can be promoted.

E-commerce skills development

The population of Trinidad and Tobago has high literacy levels leading to a high potential for digital literacy and in turn e-commerce skills. According to the 2021 Digital Inclusion Survey, basic ICT skill levels among the youth and elderly are 86 per cent and 73 per cent, respectively (TATT, 2022). The lack of intermediate and advanced digital skills contributes to a digital divide, particularly between rural and urban areas. Although there is no gender-disaggregated data in the survey, other studies indicate that women are less confident about their digital skills, and they are underrepresented in technical ICT services and platforms positions. Challenges have also been identified in building skills within the digital sector and in the labour force more broadly. Indicators included in the Global Innovation Index show the country being challenged on the creative and innovation fronts. These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions regarding e-commerce skills at all levels of education, as well as in the workplace.

Access to financing

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) can be a driving force for e-commerce and the digital economy, as they constitute the majority of domestic businesses and contribute significantly to economic growth and job creation. Despite progress in the array of financial

products provided by the banking sector and in the start-up and entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country, bottlenecks faced by MSMEs in terms of requirements to open a business bank account, capacity-building, training, and access to finance remain.

Figure 1 below highlights the results of the surveys conducted in the public and private sectors in March and April 2024 on the maturity of e-commerce development in the main policy areas.

Respondents suggest that the infrastructure related to Internet connectivity and availability of service providers are the most advanced, while they point to the legal framework to support e-commerce, coordination among institutions and the level of political support for e-commerce as areas in most need of improvement.

Figure 1
Needs and opportunities for e-commerce development in Trinidad and Tobago
Please evaluate the following factors related to e-commerce development based on their maturity (Public and private sector respondents, 195 answers)
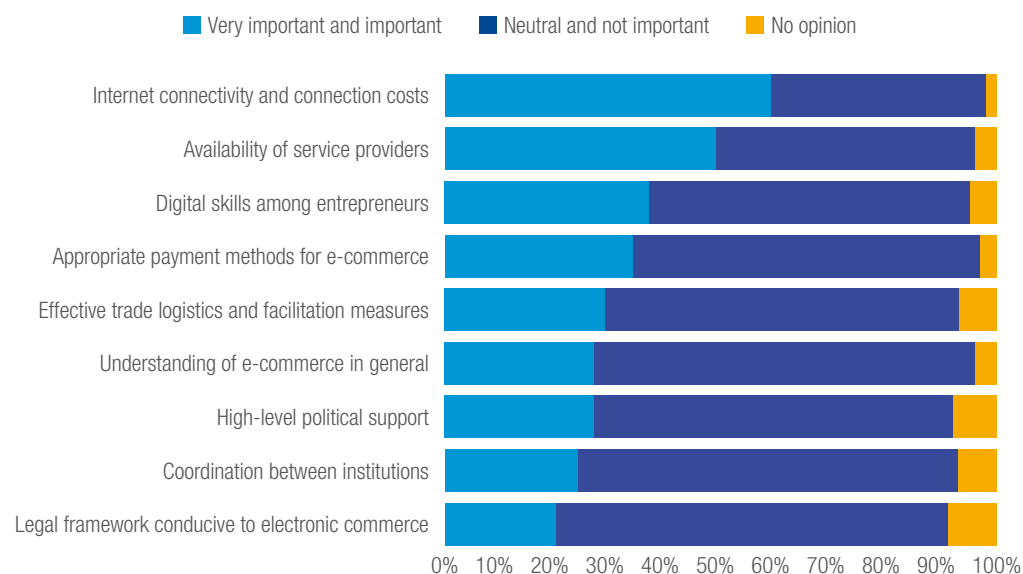
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

Methodology

The eTrade Readiness Assessment was conducted to identify the main barriers and opportunities for e-commerce development in the seven eTrade for all policy areas by providing a detailed diagnostic of the digital ecosystem and identifying key policy actions for which support can be mobilized.

It used a five-step methodology developed by UNCTAD for the project in order to: i) ensure a high level of participation and engagement of key stakeholders in the overall assessment process; ii) raise awareness on the opportunities offered by e-commerce (through capacity-building and knowledge sharing); iii) strengthen the public-private sector dialogue and enhance interministerial coordination and policy coherence in the field of e-commerce; and iv) mobilize support from development partners to accelerate the country's digital transformation.

Phase 1. Initial consultations, January 2024

Initial consultations were held between UNCTAD and GoRTT and outreach with the community of eTrade for all and development partners, including the UN country team and resident partners, such as the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), foreign embassies in the country and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

Phase 2. Institutional setting and mapping, January - February 2024

This phase included the revision of the composition of the National E-commerce Committee, consisting of designated focal points in relevant ministries, agencies, chambers of commerce, and others, and a kick-off meeting with the committee. A mapping of national stakeholders and resident development partners active in e-commerce and digital development was conducted.

Phase 3. Data collection, January - April 2024

The data-collection phase included the following elements:

- Desk review: Comprehensive desk research was carried out to analyse secondary data (national and sector-specific strategies, relevant programme, and policy documents) and compile statistics and digital-related indicators;

- eTrade Readiness Surveys: Three tailored online surveys (for public and private stakeholders; and consumers) were disseminated online between 15 February and 26 April 2024. A total of 260 responses from the private sector, 86 from the public sector, and 253 responses from consumers were collected and analysed;

- National multi-stakeholder consultations: Consultations were organized with over 145 stakeholders and relevant experts from 19 to 21 March 2024. Focus group discussions covered the seven key policy areas and a session was dedicated to e-commerce start-ups and incubators. A roundtable with the UN country team and resident development partners was held on 18 March 2024, hosted by the UNRCO, to present the project and identify synergies with ongoing digital activities and technical assistance projects in the country. Organizations present included the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ECLAC, UN Women and the World Food Programme, as well as the European Union, Embassies

of the Republic of Chile, Republic of Colombia, Republic of Turkey, United Mexican States, Republic of Korea, and the United States of America, the High Commissions of the United Kingdom and of India, as well as the CAF Development Bank and IDB; and

• Bilateral meetings: A series of meetings were organized with key e-commerce actors and public institutions to discuss their role in ongoing e-commerce initiatives and elaborate on key issues raised during the national consultations.

Phase 4. Report drafting, April - June 2024

• The first draft of the assessment covering the seven key policy areas and the eT Ready Action Matrix was followed by the midterm review of the project to present preliminary results. Subsequently, initial internal and external reviews by UNCTAD and eTrade for all partners were undertaken.

Phase 5. Finalization of the report, July - November 2024

• A national workshop was organized to review and validate the results of the Assessment and Action Matrix by national stakeholders on 16 July 2024, with the participation of the Minister of Trade and Industry and over 70 key stakeholders from the public, private sector, civil society and academia. A meeting with the UN country team and development partners also took place, in addition to other bilateral meetings. Following the workshop, the final draft of the report was prepared before the report was submitted for editing, layout, and printing.

In line with the eT Ready methodology, the seven eTrade for all policy areas were utilized as entry points.

Additionally, wherever relevant, this assessment integrates cross-cutting themes such as gender mainstreaming, youth engagement, rural community support and persons with disabilities, and addresses the lack of reliable statistics related to e-commerce. These aspects are considered crucial to ensuring that the digital economy fosters inclusive growth and sustainable development.

While the primary focus is on e-commerce, the report also underscores the significance of digital trade defined as all trade that is digitally ordered and/or delivered. The bottlenecks identified in e-commerce often overlap with those in broader digital trade, highlighting common challenges such as infrastructure gaps, regulatory barriers, and skills shortages. As such, solutions proposed within this framework are intended to not only facilitate e-commerce development but also digital trade more broadly.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Main Findings	Main Recommendations
E-commerce Readiness Assessment and Strategy Formulation	
• The National E-commerce Strategy 2017-2021 aimed to create an enabling environment, facilitate and promote e-commerce for local businesses to serve domestic and international markets. MTI is currently working to develop a follow-up strategy, which is aligned with the National Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027 and linked to cross-cutting foundation elements.	• Focus the National E-commerce Strategy 2025-2030 on responding to the priority constraints and opportunities present in the country in creating an enabling e-commerce environment for businesses, taking into account other existing policies. Ensure alignment between the new e-commerce strategy and the National Digital Transformation Strategy.
• The e-commerce ecosystem involves a diverse array of actors, but limited coordination risks leading to siloed initiatives with less effective results.	• Continue to develop enhanced institutional coordination, government-led collaboration with the private sector, civil society and academia, which would be instrumental for the removal of barriers for e-commerce development and innovation.
• There is limited availability of country-level statistics on the state of e-commerce, which is necessary for policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation.	• Improve statistics and data-collection efforts across all concerned government agencies, and seek to apply internationally agreed standards.
• At the regional level, as a member of CARICOM and within the framework of the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago is part of initiatives supporting data exchange, integration of digital infrastructure, and regulatory harmonization, among others.	• Increase efforts at the regional level (in the framework of CARICOM, CARIFORUM, the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean and relevant others), to facilitate cross-border e-commerce and digital trade. Prioritize regional connections and global linkages, strengthen digital regional cooperation to support governance processes and improve dialogue mechanisms, with the participation of public and private actors.
ICT Infrastructure and Services	
• Trinidad and Tobago benefits from a robust ICT infrastructure. However, a digital divide persists in underserved areas.	• Further work on accessibility is needed, building on projects that are already addressing these issues.
• The cost for Internet services in the country is relatively high, in particular for higher speeds of Internet and for lower-income groups.	• Examine affordability of Internet access to all citizens.
Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation	
• Trinidad and Tobago has a well-established transport infrastructure by road, sea and air.	• Implement complementary actions to enhance the public transportation system, including strengthening the integration of networks and interoperability of public transport electronic systems.
• Public transport services currently lack sufficient integration, interoperability and fare integration, which hinders efficiency and user convenience.	• Ratify the Montreal Convention of 1999 and increase transparency by registering air services agreements and amendments with ICAO.
• On air logistics, the legal framework is outdated. The Government is yet to ratify the Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules for International Carriage by Air (Montreal Convention of 1999), including the latest liability protections for e-commerce and traditional traders.	• Continue efforts to promote postal reform including the reach and reliability of TTPost.
• Trade logistics services are managed through the postal network, TTPost, as well as by private and international couriers. TTPost is engaged in reform efforts to enhance its delivery, quality and overall effectiveness. It tends to be a preferred channel for mail, while company delivery services or private couriers are favoured for parcel delivery.	• Encourage interoperability among trade and related platforms: TTBizLink, ASYCUDA, the postal CDS system, as well as the Port Community System, to better support and facilitate trade and e-commerce.
• Trade and related online systems including TTBizLink, ASYCUDA and the postal customs declaration system (CDS), as well as the Port Community System could improve operations through further coordination.	• Implement outstanding commitments under the WTO TFA to fully leverage its opportunities and attain the benefits afforded through the implementation of efficient trade facilitation measures.
	• Implement WCO Immediate Release Guidelines to expedite the clearance/release of goods.

Main Findings	Main Recommendations
• There are ongoing efforts to strengthen trade facilitation and implement the WTO TFA. • Trinidad and Tobago has not joined the WTO Information Technology Agreement (ITA) I and II, which could make the country more competitive in terms of lowering the costs of importing ICT goods. There is a need to improve port operations, as well as the facilitation between the port operation system and customs clearance. The Port Community System, which is being established, is also expected to boost collaboration.	• Enhance effectiveness of the customs clearance procedure by fully adopting ASYCUDA's risk management framework and tools. • Join the WTO ITA I and II. • Implement a more efficient port operation system with the relevant border regulatory personnel providing requisite services to facilitate customs clearance and other trade facilitation processes.

Payment Solutions

• The payment landscape is still characterized by a high level of cash usage. Common challenges identified in terms of payment solutions are linked to overreliance on cash, limited experience with online payments, and lack of trust in online payments. • There are currently a number of supportive policies and orders in place to facilitate e-payments. However, some are not promulgated, others are unpublished. • Regarding online government payments, several systems currently exist but are not necessarily interoperable. As more service channels are developed, coordination and interoperability will be essential for the further adoption of e-payments for government services. Having attractive standard fees in place was also identified by stakeholders as a priority for boosting consumer confidence in online government services. • For businesses, issues with financial inclusion, as well as cost and access to payment infrastructure present further challenges for online payments. Non-bank institutions, such as credit unions and EMIs, do not yet have direct access to certain payment infrastructures.	• Strengthen key platforms such as GovPayTT to build a culture of trust and confidence in the online payment regime. This includes public education and outreach. • Develop financial literacy and trust in financial systems via education and upskilling. • Implement legislation and policies geared to facilitate digital transactions (such as the e-Money Policy, the FinTech Policy, Simplified Due Diligence Requirements, E-money issuers (EMIs) and One FinTech Avenue). This will aid the country in implementing the objectives of the many initiatives geared towards full connectivity and cashless transactions. • Define clear roles, responsibilities and mandates as well as establish interoperability of systems to ensure the long-term sustainability of digital payments in public service revenue collection. • Invest in the development and provision of payments infrastructure to increase the uptake of online payments by making it more user convenient. This could include encouraging and creating alternative cost-effective payment solutions that can be integrated easily and effectively by MSMEs. Such infrastructural expansion should be matched with educational and awareness-raising campaigns on e-payment functionality and its benefits to increase usage among those in the informal sector.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

• The ETA 2011 forms a solid basis for e-commerce. • Section 6 of the ETA, under the title "Inapplicability of the Act," establishes exceptions that apply to various matters. • Trinidad and Tobago is not a signatory to the UNCITRAL Convention on the Use of Electronic Signatures (ECC) and the United Nations Convention for Contracts of the International Sale of Goods (CISG). Accession to these conventions can further support cross-border recognition of electronic signatures. • The Data Protection Act, 2011, was partly proclaimed on 6 January 2012. Part I and sections 7 to 18, 22, 23, 25(1), 26 and 28 of Part II of the Act are in force. This means that the general privacy principles are in force along with the Office of the Information Commissioner. Part III of the Act, which governs the use and handling of personal information held by public bodies, was also brought into force, while Part IV of the Act, which governs the use and handling of personal information held by the private sector, is not. The Data Protection (Amendment) Bill, which was drafted in 2021 but not yet enacted, incorporates several new elements in an effort to modernize the legislative framework. Efforts in the area of digital identity and data governance need further development.	• Update the ETA through the adoption of the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR) and the removal of restrictions. • Exceptions currently contained in the ETA should be removed to allow Trinidad and Tobago to take advantage of new technologies and improve operations and public service delivery. • Formally accede to the ECC and CISG. • Complete the development of a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework to govern data protection and data security issues. Trinidad and Tobago should ensure that responsible data governance practices are developed and implemented with a view to minimize the adverse effects of data usage, taking also into account views from the private sector. One of the best mechanisms to implement these concepts and safeguards is through data protection legislation. • Strive for focused frameworks that enable both data protection and innovation promotion when designing data privacy legislation. Implementing a governing regulatory framework in this regard must be done in a flexible manner to allow for adaptions to the global dynamic environment.

Main Findings	Main Recommendations
• Trinidad and Tobago developed a national cybercrime strategy in 2012 and has been working on putting in place a Cybercrime Bill, but there is still a lack of effective legislation in this respect and an up-to-date policy.	• In this context complementing any ongoing national efforts for a national data framework would be important.
• At the regional level, CARICOM member countries have faced some challenges in designing, implementing and maintaining legislative, institutional and policy frameworks that are sufficiently fluid and harmonized.	• Lastly, such a framework must also provide adequate protection of Intellectual Property Rights associated with advancements and the use of artificial intelligence (AI).
• Regarding cybersecurity, the country is in the process of becoming a party to the Budapest Convention.	• Revise the regulatory and legal framework for ICT and telecommunications with focus on cybersecurity including finalizing the Cybercrime Bill and revising the cybersecurity policy.
• Part II of the Consumer Protection and Safety Act addresses the Protection of Consumers and Part IV addresses Consumer Safety. However, it does not address consumer rights comprehensively as relevant for e-commerce and the digital economy. It also lacks targeted provisions for online transactions and specific mechanisms for addressing issues related to consumer protection in distance selling. Additionally, the Consumer Protection and Safety Act does not adequately provide for an expedient, accessible and affordable mechanism for the settlement of disputes and the Consumer Affairs Division lacks the authority to initiate investigations in the absence of complaints.	• Apply international best practices, pursuing transnational cooperation, enhancing balanced investigative procedures and promoting regionalism, harmonization and collectivism in the approach to combat cybercrime, all of which are crucial for the CARIFORUM region and for CARICOM Member States.
	• Accede to the Budapest Convention will be key for ensuring a more effective response to cybercrime and increasing cybersecurity.
• Knowledge surrounding legislation related to e-commerce can be improved, especially regarding recent or foreseen changes.	• Update consumer protection legislation in line with the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection to address issues related to the digital economy such as the protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged consumers, online consumer product safety, consumer data protection and privacy and dispute resolution, ensuring a level of protection for consumers using electronic commerce that is not less than the one afforded in other forms of commerce. Develop a follow-up National Consumer Policy and strengthen the powers of the Consumer Affairs Division.
	• Increase government involvement in campaigns to disseminate information on recent or foreseen changes in the legal or regulatory framework. Conduct training on the subject matter for public service representatives and lawyers.

E-commerce Skills Development

Main Findings	Main Recommendations
• The National Digital Transformation Strategy embraces developing the right set of skills and competencies within government and society at large among its core values. A number of initiatives are ongoing in the framework of eLearnTT and other government programmes.	• Identify where skill gaps exist for e-commerce specifically through an in-depth analysis. Recommend gender-disaggregated data collection regarding ICT skills.
• At the same time, the overall supply of ICT skills does not fully satisfy e-commerce needs. Despite high literacy levels, data sources suggest that a digital skills divide exists in Trinidad and Tobago. Advanced ICT skills are weak. There is a lack of specific gender-disaggregated data regarding ICT skills, but there are indications women are less confident in terms of digital skills and underrepresented in technical ICT positions.	• Reform the educational system with a view to integrate e-commerce skills in the curriculum.
• Significant issues have been identified in the education and training system in terms of ICT skills. Positions where shortages are experienced include software developers, cybersecurity specialists and other professionals. This limits the development of a labour force capable of competing in the evolving global economy. The general lack of awareness regarding e-commerce can further limit available skills.	• Craft a national capacity-building programme targeting learners at various stages of education and in the workplace to support the development of e-commerce, ICT and innovation skills. This programme can include the following actions: – Targeted e-commerce training, covering topics such as digital marketing, online customer service, e-commerce platforms, and logistics management, with interventions at different levels of education. – Continuous professional development through online courses on latest e-commerce trends, including on-the-job training programmes through the national employment services. – Government support through funding for training programmes and incentives for businesses to invest in digital skills training.
• Emerging labour trends are likely to include open-source technologies, AI, big data and others. It is crucial to evaluate market opportunities in collaboration with investors and partners, while actively engaging with the private sector to identify and address the growing demand for digital skills.	• Engage in community outreach to raise awareness of the benefits of e-commerce and available training opportunities by advertising on local media, engaging community leaders and events to engage residents.

Main Findings	Main Recommendations
• There is a need to create more opportunities to encourage innovation, and to allow STEM graduates to contribute to digital innovation. • There are also challenges regarding inclusive digital skills development with a digital divide between urban and rural, young and older population segments both at the consumer and vendor levels, in addition to gender-specific gaps and constraints for persons with disabilities.	• Integrate a market analysis in the e-commerce skills gaps study to understand industry trends, growth potential, and emerging technologies (e.g., AI, big data) and identify where demand is growing. • Improve public-private sector dialogue on digital skills and enhance targeted interventions where the private sector and industry support skills development. • Increase local capacity for tech research and development for local STEM professionals which are essential to build a strong innovation and digital ecosystem. • Develop training opportunities for specific groups including youth, women, people in rural areas and persons with disabilities. Improve the availability of and access to government programmes in rural areas.

Access to Financing

• MSMEs represent the majority of registered businesses. Yet they face numerous challenges in accessing the support necessary for growth and expansion and in accessing financial products and services. Those include complex requirements to open a business bank account, onerous eligibility criteria and loan requirements, low levels of financial literacy, and insufficient knowledge regarding alternative means of financing and lack of collateral. • While initiatives to further develop fintech as well as start-up incubators and other projects supporting business development are promising, awareness of such options, as well as coordination among them, is low. • Women, youth and rural entrepreneurs face distinct challenges in terms of access to financing.	• Implement public education campaigns to inform MSMEs and entrepreneurs of access to financing options. • Improve financial literacy among MSMEs, develop mentoring and partnership programmes on specific documents and procedures to facilitate access to financing. • Strengthen the national framework to support the efficient and effective use of a movable collateral registry. • Undertake policy reforms to support increased access to finance by MSMEs including by the introduction/expansion of government-backed loan programmes, simplification of the loan application processes, modification of the eligibility criteria for financial support to accommodate new business entrants and offering low-tiered business bank accounts to MSMEs. • Create synergies among support entities to enhance the effectiveness of initiatives by the public and private sectors, as well as international partners. Their service offerings need to be better communicated to stakeholders. • Develop specific incentives for women, youth, rural entrepreneurs and businesses to support access to financing for vulnerable groups.

Findings Under the Seven eTrade for All Policy Areas

1. E-commerce Readiness Assessment and Strategy Formulation

The national policies on e-commerce, ICT, e-government, and digital transformation are aligned with the country's overall development vision and indicate the readiness to further strengthen and benefit from e-commerce. The National Development Strategy (NDS), Vision 2030, sets out important priorities relevant for e-commerce, such as innovation and skills development, improving infrastructure, and building globally competitive businesses. The development of e-commerce has been guided through a dedicated strategy, the National E-commerce Strategy 2017-2021, with MTI leading efforts in further leveraging e-commerce to promote exports and diversify the country's overall economy.

Trinidad and Tobago has also made significant strides towards creating an enabling policy environment for business to grow, especially within the digital space. The establishment of MDT and the resulting work towards the National Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027 are indicators of this trend. At the same time, a lack of coordination of policies and efforts can lead to a siloed approach and duplication of efforts, and there is limited relevant statistics to inform policies.

1.1 Recent developments of the country's economy

Over the past decade, Trinidad and Tobago's economy faced several significant challenges. These included the global energy price collapse in 2014, and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As a result, the country's real GDP declined during 2015–2018 and again in 2020–2021, leading to a cumulative GDP loss of 21.7 per cent. After the economic activity contracted in 2019, 2020 and 2021, it started its recovery in 2022, boosted by rising global energy prices and the recovery of the non-energy

sector (International Monetary Fund, 2024).

There was strong economic performance in 2022 and more moderate activity in 2023. Real GDP expanded by 1.5 per cent in 2022 and 2.1 per cent in 2023 (IMF, 2024). Regarding inflation, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) reported a rate of 8.7 per cent in 2022, driven by imported energy and food prices, partial liberalization of domestic fuel prices and domestic weather-related shocks. However, by the end of 2023, the rate of inflation stood at 0.7, a decline of 92 per cent from the previous year's rate, mainly due to declining food and imported goods inflation. This

downward trend continued into 2024 with 0.3 per cent reported in July 2024.

The unemployment rate was 4.7 per cent at the end of the second quarter of 2021 but improved over the next years with 4.1 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2023. There was an increase in the unemployment rate to 5.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2024. The average number of persons without jobs and seeking work increased by 2 per cent between the first quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024 (CSO, 2024).

In 2023, the financial sector remained sound and stable. The fiscal position exceeded budget expectations and public debt stayed below the authorities' soft debt target. (International Monetary Fund, 2024).

Notably, in 2023, Trinidad and Tobago recorded a 54 per cent increase in total exports reaching TTD 89.1 billion, as well as a 15 per cent increase in non-energy exports with TTD 17.9 billion (MTI, 2023c). CBTT in its Economic Bulletin for July 2024 indicated that economic activity is expected to improve in 2024, bolstered by the non-energy sector as the "main driver of growth" (CBTT, 2024a).

1.2 National policies related to e-commerce, digital transformation and e-government

Among the early efforts undertaken by the GoRTT to support e-commerce, several policy frameworks stand out including FastForward I and II (respectively, 2003-2008 and 2017), the Policy Framework for e-Business in Trinidad and Tobago (2008), and SmarTT (2014-2018), as well as the National ICT Plan developed in 2014.

To provide businesses and individuals with access to major trade and business services GoRTT launched TTBizLink in 2009. This platform provides trade and business-related regulatory information and approvals, eliminating the need to navigate multiple processes across several government departments and agencies. It enhances transparency, accountability and overall service delivery.

In 2017, MTI launched the National E-commerce Strategy 2017-2021, with the objective of creating an enabling environment to facilitate and promote e-commerce for local businesses to serve domestic and international markets. Five specific goals were set for progress in this regard:

A comprehensive and effective regulatory environment for e-commerce,

- An Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) framework,
- Increased private sector participation in e-commerce,
- Increased consumer awareness and confidence in e-commerce, and
- Enhanced ICT infrastructure for commercial activity throughout the country.

Among the obstacles to the full development of a strong e-commerce landscape in the country, this strategy identified insufficiently coordinated efforts by relevant public sector entities, lack of implementation of the legal framework to encourage and protect businesses and consumers using e-commerce, as well as lack of awareness of the benefits from e-commerce. As reported in the multi-stakeholder consultations organized in March 2024 in the context of this assessment, the shortcomings identified above persist. Acknowledging the necessity for ongoing strategic and coordinated reforms to bolster e-commerce development, MTI is developing a new e-commerce strategy for 2025-2030, building on its 2017-2021 Strategy.

Another important policy for e-commerce is the Trinidad and Tobago Trade Policy 2019-2023 (TTTP) which outlines the GoRTT's trade-related priorities for improving competitiveness, economic and export diversification, as well as the country's foreign exchange earning potential. The TTTP builds on and integrates the National Aid for Trade (AfT) Strategy 2016-2019.

Early efforts by the Government to support e-commerce date back to the early 2000s.

The trade policy endeavours to establish an improved facilitative and enabling environment for international trade, spur growth in the production and export of non-energy goods and services, facilitate growth in the production and export of high value-added goods and services, and achieve growth in share of CARICOM trade, inclusive of trade in services. These goals are intended to contribute to the achievement of the following objectives of the policy:

- Improvement of the supply (output) capacity and characteristics of the trade, business and investment environment,
- Upgrade of the policy environment, and
- Increased market access and penetration.

The TTTP includes numerous references to e-commerce, which is considered as a means of providing new business models to improve the country's performance in trade. The policy refers to similar issues as those raised in the National E-commerce Strategy 2017-2021, including among the policy measures to be put in place by MTI, updating the legal and regulatory framework, building consumers' trust through consumer protection frameworks and mechanisms, and upgrading e-commerce skills and technology. It suggests the establishment of both a domestic and a CARICOM-wide platform, offering online marketplaces with associated payments and shipping services. Finally, e-commerce is mentioned as a channel particularly relevant for the manufacturing and services sectors. TTTP has been shaped by internationally agreed development goals, especially the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and international and regional trade agreements to which the country is signatory. MTI has commenced the development of the new Trade Strategy 2024-2029, which is currently ongoing.

Developments in e-commerce policy have been accompanied by policy advances in the areas of ICT and digital transformation. In 2021, the establishment of a dedicated ministry (MDT) demonstrated the country's

> Persistent challenges in e-commerce include insufficiently coordinated public efforts, legal gaps, and low awareness of benefits.

ambition to become a "Digital First Government." The mandate of MDT is to enhance the consumption and delivery of goods and services to customers, using appropriate digital technology. In fulfilling this mandate its goals are to increase access to ICT in underserved communities, improve digital literacy, improve governance efficiencies, reduce bottlenecks in public systems for grants and allowances, create opportunities for developer and entrepreneurs, and strengthen ICT legislative framework, among others.

MDT's National Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027 aims to bridge the digital divide and enhance the country's digital culture (MDT, 2023a). The focus areas include digital society, digital economy, digital government, regional integration and global linkages. Key cross-cutting elements include a national e-identity system, regional connections and global linkages, skills ecosystem, a national cybersecurity framework, a modern policy and regulatory environment, connected communities, and emerging technologies. Under the umbrella of MDT are two important initiatives aligned with the broader digital strategy:

- The D'Hub Platform: launched in 2023, this brings together resources and technical expertise from the private and public sectors to support the country's software development community. This initiative is crucial as the consultations conducted for this assessment revealed that the country lags behind in software applications development and e-payments through these applications; and
- TTWiFi: this initiative provides free Wi-Fi and easy access to broadband Internet in public spaces, aiming to bridge the digital divide by increasing Internet accessibility for all citizens. It is currently available at over 171 locations comprising public libraries, public transport hubs, hospitals and health centres, and primary schools without connectivity.

All these sectoral policies align with the

overarching NDS 2016-2030, Vision 2030, led by the MPD. The NDS is a long-term framework which guides the formulation of policy and strategy to take Trinidad and Tobago into developed country status by 2030. The strategy highlights five priority themes including putting people first, delivering good governance and service excellence, improving productivity through quality infrastructure and transportation, building globally competitive businesses, and placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development.

The NDS addresses key challenges such as dependence on oil and natural gas, an ageing population and migration, dependency and entitlement, food security, weak institutions, low productivity, crime, advances in technology, managing a diverse society, and climate change. Specifically, the NDS focuses on using innovative practices, creative solutions, and new skills to drive economic growth.

In terms of e-government, the country has made steady progress in e-government interoperability. According to the United Nations E-Government Survey (2022), Trinidad and Tobago has an E-Government Development Index (EGDI) value of 0.6339, slightly above the global average of 0.6201, ranking ninety-third among 193 countries (United Nations, 2022). However, regarding e-participation, the country ranks 143rd, highlighting further possibilities for improvement.

According to the World Bank GovTech Maturity Index (GTMI), Trinidad and Tobago falls into category B, or "Significant Focus on GovTech" (World Bank, 2022). The GTMI score of the country is 0.516 (in comparison, the regional average score is 0.541 and the global average is 0.552). The GovTech Enablers Index (GTEI), is significantly above the regional and global score taking into account relevant factors, including a dedicated government entity in the form of MDT, an implementing body (iGovTT), a relevant strategy, enabling legislation and others (World Bank, 2022).

Among ministries contributing to digital government, the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) is digitalizing records and re-engineering business processes to enhance efficiency, in alignment with Vision 2030 and its mandate to improve service delivery. Additionally, MPA has introduced a Change Management Framework to support the digitalization of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), aiming to increase the success of various transformation projects. This includes streamlining business processes to eliminate waste and optimize resources, incorporating the latest technologies to boost productivity and innovation, designing customer-centric processes to improve satisfaction and loyalty, and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and standards.

Furthermore, MPA is drafting an Open Data Policy to make non-sensitive government data freely available to the public in reusable format. This can improve market information, logistics and supply chain management relevant to e-commerce. The policy aims to foster innovation and support new digital services and business models by providing access to open government data.

Other policies that include specific sectoral digitalization priorities include the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (MTCA)'s revised National Tourism Policy (2021-2030). This focuses on digitalizing the tourism sector, including implementing ICT regulations and policies, as well as acquiring visitor information (such as electronic immigration cards and contactless data acquisition at airports and seaports to enable real time access to data) or encouraging use of technology and contactless payments for businesses in the sector.

Despite these relevant policies and initiatives, stakeholder consultations pointed out that there is still room for progress for maximum-impact online citizen services. They emphasized the government's role in fostering e-commerce, particularly through digital inclusion, which remains incomplete. This shortfall limits

the effectiveness of current and future policies and initiatives. Ensuring that digitalization and e-commerce facilitate an increase in revenue for local entrepreneurs, strengthen competitiveness and foster human resource capacity was also flagged as crucial for the implementation of effective policies and initiatives.

1.3 Other national policies related to trade

A noteworthy policy framework which interplays with trade and related areas is the Special Economic Zones Policy for Trinidad and Tobago, aimed at strengthening and modernizing the existing framework governing free zones. On 5 July 2024, the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act was fully proclaimed, which brings into effect the SEZ Regulations, 2023, and allows any public, private, or public-private partnership to apply for specific licences. It aims to attract investment, boost exports, create employment opportunities, and encourage private sector participation in the economy.

Aligned with the TTTP and the NDS are the National Quality Policy (NQP) 2018-2030 and the National Consumer Policy for Trinidad and Tobago 2018-2023. The NQP promotes a National Quality Infrastructure (NQI), adding to the efforts already made in this regard. The NQP aims to boost productivity, innovation, competitiveness and consumer health and environmental protection. It fosters a culture of quality that supports a diverse and competitive economy for sustainable development. The National Consumer Policy, also under the responsibility of MTI, focuses on improving consumer's well-being through enhanced consumer empowerment and protection. It encourages confident participation of consumers and suppliers in the marketplace taking into account regional and international commitments.

1.4 Regional and international developments and cross-border opportunities

Regional developments in the Caribbean can also have an important impact on policies relevant for e-commerce in Trinidad and Tobago. The country is a member of the Caribbean Community and Single Market and a member of CARIFORUM.

As a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the country is part of regional efforts to harmonize digital strategies. Developments at CARICOM level address and facilitate cross-border trade and digital transformation through regional harmonization of legislative and regulatory frameworks. Examples include the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, the Regional Information and Communication Technology for Development Strategy, the Caribbean Regional Communications Infrastructure Programme, the Broadband Infrastructure Inventory and Public Awareness in the Caribbean, the Vision and Roadmap for a CARICOM Single ICT Space, the Regional Information Exchange Initiatives, the Harmonization of ICT Policies and Legislation Across the Caribbean (HIPCAR) Project, the Caribbean Internet Governance Forum and others. Very few tangible efforts have, however, materialized thus far relating to regional approaches to cross-border data flows (UNCTAD, 2021).

Trinidad and Tobago is also a signatory to the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement, which covers a range of trade in goods, trade in services and other trade-related areas including e-commerce. The latter is defined under Title II, Chapter 6, Articles 119 and 120 where, "the Parties of the Agreement agree to promote the development of electronic commerce between them" including a commitment to "the highest international standards of data protection," as well as a recognition of deliveries by electronic means as services that are "not subject to customs duties" (Official, 2008). The document also includes an agreement to have dialogue

on a range of regulatory topics including electronic signatures, liability and storage of information, unsolicited commercial communication and consumer protection.

Furthermore, the country is part of the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC), promoted by ECLAC, in cooperation with the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF). The most recent iteration of the agenda, eLAC2024 focuses on digital transformation, inclusion and digital skills, and emerging technologies.

These regional forums provide opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago to promote and facilitate further cross-border e-commerce and digital trade. Strengthened digital regional cooperation could support governance processes and improve dialogue mechanisms where needed. The rise of digital services such as software development, consulting, design, and online education offers good opportunities for local businesses to engage in cross-border e-commerce, expand and distribute their products and services internationally.

As a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Trinidad and Tobago is a party to several agreements (including the General Agreement on Trade in Services, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) which are directly relevant to e-commerce, as was clarified in the early work under the WTO Work Programme on Electronic Commerce established in 1998. It is not a party to the WTO ITA I and II, relevant for lowering the costs of importing ICT goods (WTO). The WTO committees associated with the agreements mentioned above were provided with a list of trade-related issues that they were tasked with examining, before reporting to the WTO's General Council. The Committee on Trade and Development was for its part tasked with examining the development implications of e-commerce, considering the economic, financial and development needs of developing countries. Among the issues identified for review by the Committee on Trade and Development

were the effects of e-commerce on the trade and economic prospects of developing countries, and particularly their SMEs, the role of improved access to infrastructure and transfer of technology, and the financial implications of e-commerce for developing countries (WTO, 1998b). The Ministerial Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce, which was issued at the end of the Second Ministerial Conference (MC2) of the WTO held in May 1998, also called upon WTO Members to continue their practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions (known as the Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions (WTO, 1998a).

The last ministerial conference of the WTO (MC13), held from 26 February to 2 March 2024 in Abu Dhabi, addressed the issue of e-commerce like all the previous conferences since the establishment of the Work Programme and the Moratorium. In a declaration issued at the end of MC13, WTO Members agreed to re-invigorate work under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, with particular focus on the development dimension, taking into account the economic, financial and development needs of developing and least-developed countries. The declaration also included the decision to maintain the moratorium until the next ministerial conference or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier. It included, however, the clarification that the moratorium and the Work Programme would expire on that date (WTO, 2024c).

Trinidad and Tobago, like the other CARICOM countries, has opted not to join the negotiations of the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on E-commerce. Several reasons may explain this position, including possible concerns that their ability to engage in negotiations in this new and evolving area is limited, that participation in the negotiations may limit the policy space, including in respect to cross-border data flows and data privacy and cybersecurity issues, and the absence of a critical mass of developing country participants in the negotiations, which

limits their ability to form coalitions with "like-minded" countries (Centre, 2019). For now, the current involvement in trade discussions and engagements relating to e-commerce within CARICOM, under the CARIFORUM-EU EPA and in the WTO does not necessarily reflect the prioritization that the country has placed on the subject in other areas of policymaking.

1.5 Institutional coordination mechanisms for e-commerce

The GoRTT provided for the establishment of a committee to drive implementation of the National E-commerce Strategy 2017-2021. MTI was appointed the Chair of the Committee, which comprised representatives of the following entities: MTI (Chair), MPA, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, ExporTT (incorporated in the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency in August 2024), Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association (TTMA), Trinidad and Tobago

Chamber of Industry and Commerce (TTCIC), and the American Chamber of Industry and Commerce (AMCHAM).

While the composition of the committee has been revised in January 2024 with MTI continuing as chair, a further expansion could be envisaged in the framework of the next e-commerce strategy. Currently, the composition of the committee includes MDT, Ministry of Finance; MPD, Ministry of Labour, as well as the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association and the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

As described in the previous sections of this report, several ministries are responsible for a number of different policies related to e-commerce. Table 1 below illustrates the overall governance framework on e-commerce and digital developments, which highlights the ministries primarily responsible for each policy, noting these policies are also the result of multi-stakeholder consultations.

> **Table 1**
> **Main institutions and responsibilities relevant for e-commerce and the digital economy**

Ministry of Trade and Industry	**Ministry of Digital Transformation**	**Trinidad and Tobago Financial Centre**
Development and implementation of the National E-Commerce Strategy. Responsible for the Trade Policy 2019-2023, the NQP, The National Consumer Policy and others	Development and implementation of the National Digital Transformation Strategy Coordinating policy level activities with TATT, iGovTT	EFT Framework and Policy Acceleration of cashless payments in GoRTT
Ministry of Planning and Development	**Ministry of National Security**	**Telecommunications Authority**
National Development Strategy - Vision 2030	National Cybersecurity Strategy	Telecommunication and broadcasting sectors

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

Moreover, noting that there are avenues for the leveraging of intergovernmental relationships in the development of the e-commerce sector and broader digital economy, the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs represents another key national ministry that can support the development of e-commerce.

Additionally, and at agency level, as the implementation arm of MDT, the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT) is a provider of ICT services in the country, responsible for the implementation of government's enterprise-wide ICT strategies and programmes, and under which falls GovPayTT, a system allowing for cashless payments of government services. MDT also provides policy level guidance for TATT, which regulates the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. Aligned to MTI, the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency is the first point of contact for investors seeking investment opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago. TTIFC is the agency responsible for the acceleration of cashless payments, for fintech development and growth, as well as for EFT policy and framework.

Better coordination is necessary across all these institutions with respect to e-commerce to ensure overall alignment of actions and to avoid duplication of efforts. This can be achieved through the clear identification of roles and responsibilities at national level, institutional strengthening and through the future National E-commerce Strategy. Regular monitoring and evaluation would ensure effective coordination and allow for a continuous assessment of progress towards the achievement of the overarching goals and objectives.

1.6 Access to relevant statistics

The principal agency for collecting, analysing and disseminating statistical data in Trinidad and Tobago is the CSO, under the MPD. The CBTT also collects, compiles and analyses a wide range of economic data from primary and secondary sources. Its electronic database, which uses the Forecasting Analysis and Modelling Environment platform, covers a wide range of data domains including Monetary and Financial Statistics, Public Finance and Debt Statistics, Trade and Payments Statistics, Capital Market Statistics and Real Sector Statistics (e.g., prices, production, labour force and employment). Additionally, among the areas of focus of the Customs and Excise Division, a division of the Ministry of Finance, is the collection of accurate trade-related information and statistics, which is disseminated to the public by the CSO.

However, the existing metrics are not specific to e-commerce, leading to a lack of related business and consumer data. As such, it is difficult to estimate the value of e-commerce in the country, project its growth, impact and future potential. During the multi-stakeholder consultations organized in the context of this assessment, MPD emphasized the lack of e-commerce related statistics, the need for data-collection exercises to capture the relevant data, suggesting cultural shift programmes to support the transition. There is a clear need to develop a framework for the collection of comprehensive statistics on e-commerce in the country.

In this context, Trinidad and Tobago would benefit from joining the Task group on measuring e-commerce value, established under UNCTAD's Working Group on Measuring E-commerce and the Digital Economy. The group brings together selected countries with hands-on experience of measuring the value of e-commerce sales by businesses, and their breakdown into domestic e-commerce and digitally-ordered trade. The group also welcomes countries working to develop such statistics. In particular, it is working to deliver internationally agreed guidelines and recommendations on measuring e-commerce value, which will set a framework for the collection of comprehensive statistics on e-commerce.

> Developing a framework for collecting e-commerce statistics will help the country understand its potential and drive effective policy-making.

1.7 E-commerce activity and consumer preferences

In terms of e-commerce penetration, the proportion of persons 15 years and older reporting that they purchased goods or services online was 12 per cent in 2021 according to the Telecommunications Authority's Digital Inclusion Survey 2021. According to the World Bank's Findex Report, the proportion of persons 15 years and older that used a mobile phone or the internet to buy something online was 16 per cent in 2017, indicating there may have been a decrease (World Bank, 2018). In 2021, 80 per cent of those that purchased goods or services online reported that their purchase was made from a foreign vendor, while one in every five purchases made online was from a local supplier (TATT, 2022).

Digitally deliverable services exports experienced fluctuations between 2010 and 2020 but have had an upward increase since then with $136 million in 2020, $188 million in 2021, $218 million in 2022 and $240 million in 2023. The major sector of influence was the insurance and pension services at 65.5 per cent, followed by telecommunications, computer and information services at 26.4 per cent, and trade-related services at 5.2 per cent of the total digitally deliverable services exports in 2023 (UNCTAD, 2024).

The items most often bought online include clothing and apparel (79 per cent), food/groceries/alcohol and tobacco related items (21 per cent) and cosmetics (17 per cent). At the same time, 13 per cent reported purchasing services online (TATT, 2022).

The findings of a consumer survey conducted by UNCTAD in 2024 for this assessment (with 253 respondents), also highlighted that the most common online transactions were bill payments, as well as purchases of textile and clothing, and beauty and personal care items.[1] The survey also shows that nearly 80 per cent of respondents buy from merchant websites, as indicated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2
Preferred channels for e-commerce
What channel do you buy from? (Consumer survey respondents, 203 responses)

Channel	Percentage
Merchant websites	80%
Marketplaces (with multiple vendors)	45%
Social media	32%
Deal platforms	20%
Platforms and ad sites (for individuals)	10%
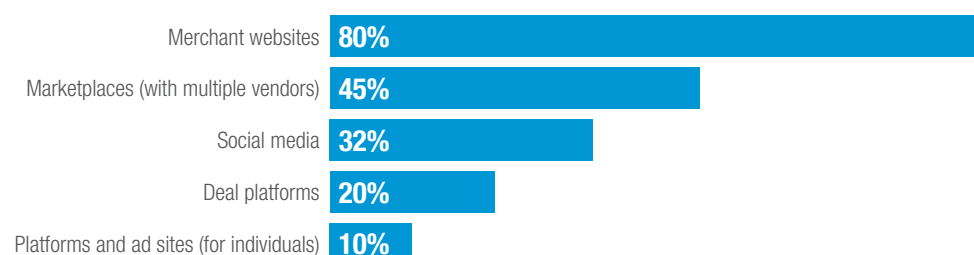
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated many small companies to expand their businesses online, and in particular to offer their products through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. For example, in the agricultural sector, WhyFarm, a non-profit organization, launched an online platform called 'Dasheen yuh Door Step' to support southern farmers impacted by COVID-19. This platform connects farmers with customers, handling everything from online orders to delivery. The National Agricultural Market and Development Company (NAMDEVCO)

....

[1] The consumers surveyed were primarily private professionals and civil servants, with the biggest age group being between 40 to 49 years old.

used its Facebook page to inform the public about Farmers' Markets schedules and produce prices. Green Market Santa Cruz introduced call-ahead orders and delivery options. Similar innovations emerged in the pharmaceutical sector. In the food and beverage industry, many supermarkets adopted WhatsApp orders, curb side pickup, and delivery services. Small businesses like Boxed Produce, the Fresh Basket, Harvest 2 Home, and the Alliance of Rural Communities offered specially bundled fruits and vegetables with delivery included. Meat and seafood businesses also introduced special bundles of products with home delivery (MTI, 2020).

Since then, e-commerce has proliferated and formalized further. Based on information provided by one of the e-payment providers, First Atlantic Commerce, there were over 1,050 merchants utilizing their facility in 2024 through a number of banks (RBC, CIBC, Scotia Bank, Republic Bank and First Citizens). The real figure of businesses engaged in e-commerce is likely higher, since no account is taken of other e-payment providers such as WiPay, or other means of payments including cash on delivery, bank transfers and deposits.

According to ECLAC and ITC's Latin American and Caribbean Marketplace Explorer (LACME), the country had about 40 e-commerce platforms in 2023, of which 34 per cent were transactional and 66 per cent non-transactional. The transactional marketplaces attracted 16 per cent of the total visits, compared to 84 per cent to non-transactional marketplaces. The top four leading marketplaces in Trinidad and Tobago in 2023, based on numbers of visitors, were Pin.tt (a non-transactional general goods classifieds site receiving 4.2 million visits in 2023), TriniCarsForSale (a non-transactional used cars oriented classifieds site receiving 2.0 million visits), DesertCart (a transactional multiple goods online shopping mall receiving 0.5 million and TriniTrolley (another transactional general goods online shopping mall 0.2 million) (ECLAC, 2023).

Nevertheless, Trinidad and Tobago appears to lag slightly behind other Latin American countries in terms of the number of local e-commerce platforms/websites, according to data from ECLAC's Digital Development Observatory. In 2023, Trinidad and Tobago accounted for 1.4 per cent of the total website / e-commerce platforms in Latin America and the Caribbean trailing its Caribbean counterparts Jamaica (1.98 per cent), Bahamas (1.5 per cent), and Cuba (1.5 per cent).

Most B2C e-commerce activity in Trinidad and Tobago is concentrated in purchases on foreign e-commerce marketplaces (for multiple buyers and sellers), according to data from LACME. In 2023, 86 per cent of all consumer visits to e-commerce platforms were on such marketplaces, to which visits grew from about 34 million in 2019 to 42 million in 2023. In 2024, the most popular international marketplaces were Amazon (27.6 million visits), followed by eBay (6.7 million) and AliExpress (2.4 million).

The predominance of cross-border versus national marketplace e-commerce activity is typical for many developing countries with underdeveloped local digital ecosystems. In the Caribbean region, a significant majority of e-commerce transactions are conducted over foreign platforms. For instance, in Jamaica, 89 per cent of e-commerce activity involves foreign websites, while in Belize, Barbados and Guyana that share is over 95 per cent.

Analysis and feedback from the multi-stakeholder consultations illustrate that trust in foreign online marketplaces is much higher compared to local ones. Additionally, less customer-friendly return and refund policies may contribute to this lack of trust in national online purchases.

Consumers surveyed for this assessment indicated that the lack of protection of consumer rights, personal data and cybercrime, are the top obstacles impeding online purchases and some of the likely factors reducing trust. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the obstacles.

In 2023, 40 e-commerce platforms existed in the country: 34 per cent transactional, 66 per cent non-transactional.

Most e-commerce activity takes place on foreign marketplaces due to underlying issues of trust with local ones.

Figure 3
Biggest obstacles to online shopping
In your opinion, what is (are) the biggest obstacle(s) to online shopping? (Consumer respondents, 158 answers)

Lack of protection of consumer rights	**47%**
Lack of protection of personal data	**37%**
Lack of protection against cybercrime	**35%**
Payment solutions are not offered by all merchants	**29%**
Weak security of payment systems	**25%**
The unsatisfactory quality of delivery services	**20%**
The supply of goods and services online is insufficient	**15%**
Poor access to a reliable Internet connection	**12%**
No information on the obligations of the e-merchant	**11%**

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

2. ICT Infrastructure and Services

The ICT infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago is relatively advanced and supportive of e-commerce, with high mobile penetration and widespread Internet access, particularly in urban areas. The country's digital transformation agenda is well on its way with several initiatives already in place. It has made significant investments in broadband and fibre-optic networks, providing a foundation for digital growth and e-commerce. However, there are still challenges, such as a digital divide that limits connectivity for some communities. Continued development is needed to enhance the ICT ecosystem, promote digital inclusion, and support the country's transition to a more digital economy.

2.1 ICT infrastructure and services

Trinidad and Tobago has a well-established ICT infrastructure with connectivity relayed through six submarine cables landing in the country, the latest of which (Deep Blue One) started operations in 2024. The telecommunications sector was liberalized between 2004 to 2006, bringing about new Internet service providers in the country leading to a positive impact on Internet traffic costs, network latency, performance and coverage. The country stands out among Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in ICT infrastructure and services

with 171 public Wi-Fi access points at transport hubs, hospital and health centre waiting rooms, public libraries, and primary schools, 5G connectivity at the recently commissioned Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, Tier 4 Modular Government Data Centre to house existing critical data, software, and digital infrastructure in distribution across the public sector.

Surveyed private sector companies and public sector representatives highlighted broadband Internet and overall Internet access as the most important factors enabling e-commerce, followed by the cost of Internet and mobile phone use.

Trinidad and Tobago has a well established ICT infrastructure and Internet connectivity.

> **Figure 4**
> **Key ICT factors enabling e-commerce**
> Please assess the following items according to their level of importance for creating an enabling environment for e-commerce in your country, in terms of ICT infrastructure and services. (Public and private sector respondents, 194 responses)

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

> Trinidad and Tobago boasts a competitive telecommunications market with multiple providers offering a range of Internet services and packages.
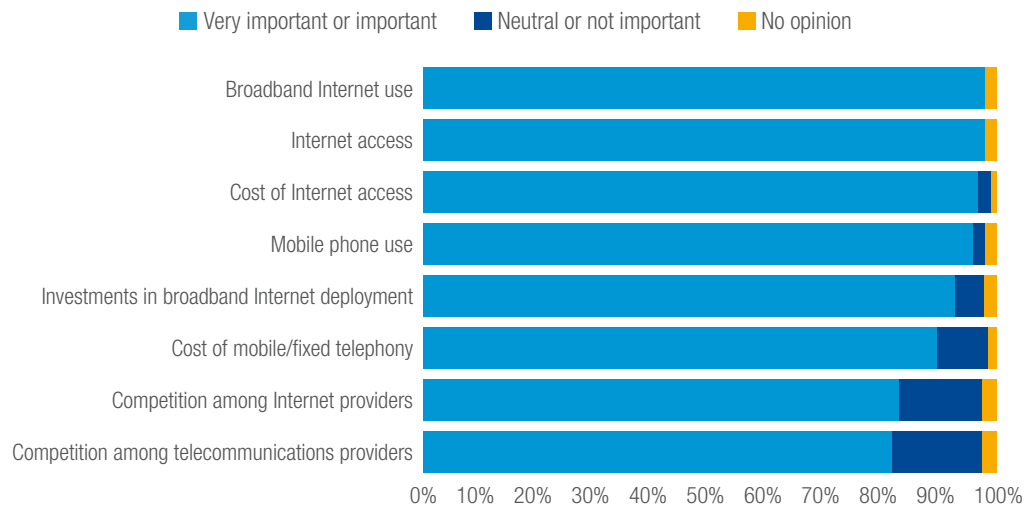
Fixed Internet subscriptions

After a contraction in 2021, fixed Internet subscriptions increased by 14,700 reaching 404,400 in 2023. The fixed Internet penetration rate increased from 94 per cent in 2022 to 96 per 100 households (December 2023). Some 30,000 households, however, remain without fixed Internet, possibly due to access or affordability, or both (TATT, 2024a).

Mobile Internet subscriptions

The number of subscriptions increased from 2 million mobile voice subscriptions in 2022 to 2.02 million in 2023. There was a decrease in the mobile Internet penetration rate per 100 inhabitants from 62.9 in 2022 to 55.2 in 2023 (TATT, 2024a).

Broadband subscriptions

The proportion of mobile broadband Internet subscriptions was 97.8 per cent in 2023 (TATT, 2024a).

Percentage of individuals using the Internet

The percentage of individuals using the Internet was 80 per cent surpassing the world average, which was estimated at 67.4 per cent for 2023 (ITU, 2022).

Main telecommunications service providers

The telecommunications sector in Trinidad and Tobago is competitive, consisting of 13 ISPs – 12 provide service nationally and one provides service in the Princes Town and surrounding areas. Most recently added to that list are two satellite broadband direct-to-home service providers (Starlink and Neptune Communications). Two mobile operators, Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (bmobile) and Digicel (Trinidad & Tobago) Limited, offer 4G LTE mobile Internet. Fixed ISP services offerings range from 150 Mbps to 1 Gbps residential packages (from the three major ISPs: Amplia, Digicel and Flow) and business packages can go much higher (TATT, 2024a).

TATT's 2023 Annual Market Report on the Telecommunications and Broadcasting Sectors notes that operators provided fixed wired and broadband Internet services to the public using various technologies. Fixed wired broadband Internet services used ADSL2+ over copper cables, DOCSIS 3.0 technology uses Hybrid Fibre Coaxial Networks, as well as a mixture of Fibre to the Business (FTTB), Metro-Ethernet or Fibre to the Home (FTTH) topologies, using GPON access networks. Fixed wireless broadband Internet operators employed technologies, such as WiMAX and LTE technologies, to support services that require higher speeds on the access network.

Mobile Internet operators offered customers mobile broadband Internet services using Evolved High-Speed Packet Access (HSPA+), Long-Term Evolution (LTE) and Long-Term Evolution Advanced (LTE-A), with a further increase in the latter in comparison to 2023. In addition, the report points out that mobile Internet services using 2.5G technology, i.e., Enhanced Data rates for GSM Evolution (EDGE), were also offered in rural areas not yet covered by 3G and 4G technologies (TATT, 2024a).

2.2 Quality and affordability of digital connectivity

As of July 2024, Trinidad and Tobago ranked forty-second globally for fixed broadband, with an average download speed of 119.49 Mbit/second and an upload speed of 51.37 Mbit/second. However, mobile Internet speeds are slower, with the country ranking ninety-first in May 2024 with a download speed of 29.19 Mbit/second and 10.19 for upload speed (Ookla, 2024).

Additional challenges remain with open data access in public spaces and the quality and distribution of mobile Internet data. The UNDP Digital Readiness Assessment of Trinidad and Tobago indicated "broadband reception, affordability, and reliability [are] constraining factors which limit broader digital connectivity delivery in the country" (UNDP, 2022). Stakeholder consultations held in March and July 2024 in the context of this assessment also highlighted continued broadband issues in underserved areas.

Regarding affordability, ITU defines Internet access as affordable if the cost of a basic broadband subscription is less than 2 per cent of GNI, a rate which the country exceeds slightly for three out of four ICT price options.

The country still faces challenges in addressing connectivity gaps in underserved areas.

Figure 5
ICT price baskets in Trinidad and Tobago and regional comparison (2023)

a. Data-only mobile broadband basket (2GB) as % of GNI, 2023s

Country	Value
Jamaica	5.19
Haiti	4.48
Barbados	3.08
Dominica	2.91
Suriname	2.80
Belize	2.44
Trinidad and Tobago	2.35
Dominican Republic	1.95
Panama (Rep.)	1.57
Guyana	1.29
Aruba	1.18
Bahamas	0.97
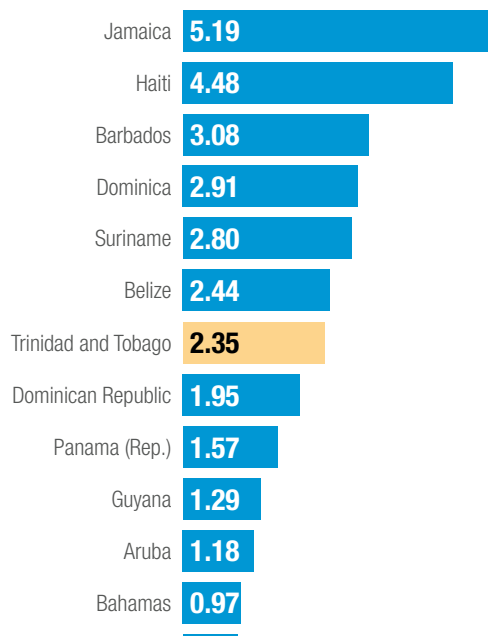
b. Fixed broadband Internet (5GB) as % of GNI, 2023

Country	Value
Haiti	40.99
Jamaica	8.32
Dominica	5.83
Suriname	4.75
Belize	4.43
Barbados	3.55
Panama (Rep.)	3.29
Trinidad and Tobago	2.85
Aruba	2.66
Dominican Republic	2.23
Bahamas	2.15
Guyana	1.86
Costa Rica	1.52
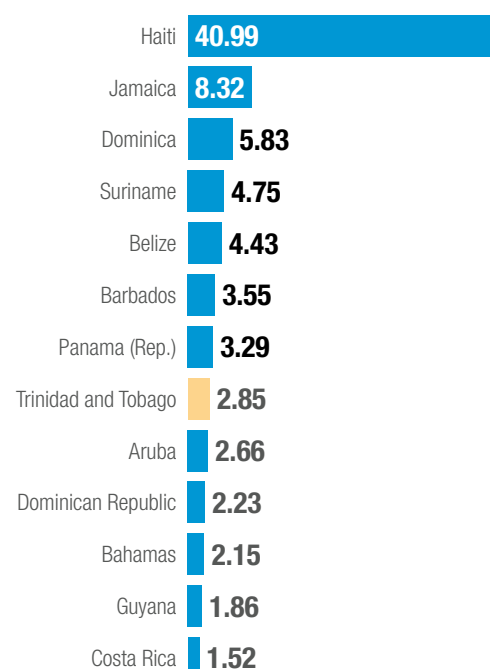
c. Mobile data and voice low-consumption basket (70 min, 20 SMS, 500 MB) as % of GNI, 2023

Country	Value
Haiti	8.25
Suriname	6.07
Jamaica	5.32
Dominica	5.04
Barbados	3.08
Belize	2.44
Trinidad and Tobago	2.35
Panama (Rep.)	1.57
Dominican Republic	1.45
Aruba	1.41
Guyana	1.29
Bahamas	0.97
Costa Rica	0.91
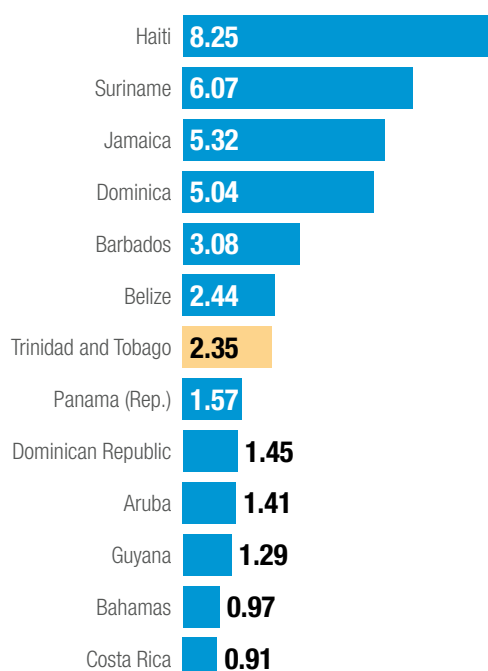
d. Mobile-cellular low-usage basket (70 voice minutes and 20 SMS) as % of GNI, 2023

Country	Value
Suriname	4.86
Barbados	3.08
Dominica	3.06
Haiti	3.04
Belize	2.44
Trinidad and Tobago	1.2
Aruba	1.13
Jamaica	1.12
Dominican Republic	1.08
Guyana	0.92
Bahamas	0.9
Panama (Rep.)	0.66
Costa Rica	0.48
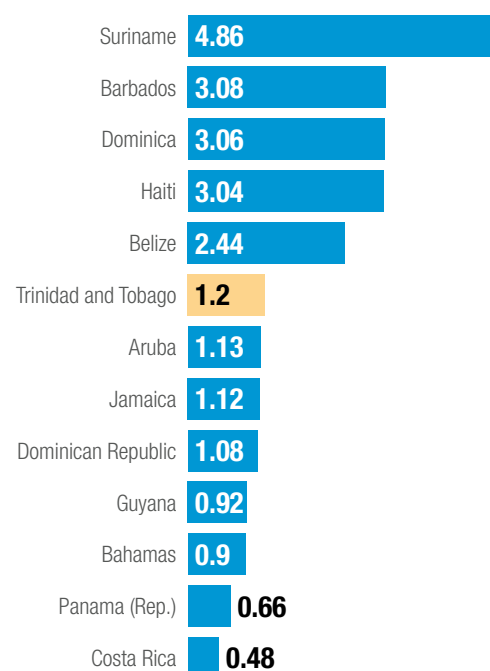
Source: ITU, 2023

While entry-level Internet services are relatively affordable, higher-speed broadband and mobile data plans remain costly for lower-income households. According to TATT, basic fixed broadband services cost around TTD 200-300 per month, while high-speed plans range from TTD 400-750 monthly (TATT, 2024c). Mobile Internet plans are slightly lower but can still represent a challenge for lower-income households. This suggests that despite decent Internet speeds, affordability could be improved, especially for faster services beyond basic packages.

In addition, a TATT report analysed mobile service price changes from 2018 to 2022 and found price increases of 38 per cent in 2018, 10 per cent in 2019, -1.4 per cent in 2020, 28 per cent in 2021, and 9 per cent in 2022. The report concluded that these significant changes require further investigation (TATT, 2024c).

Stakeholder consultations held in the context of this assessment confirmed that monthly costs for Internet connection are relatively high, in particular for rural and other lower-income groups. Ongoing efforts by Trinidad and Tobago for competitive pricing and initiatives to extend affordable Internet to underserved areas are crucial to closing the affordability gap.

2.3 Sectoral and institutional context

MDT is central to supporting the country's ICT framework. Its main objectives are to increase access to ICT services in underserved areas, improve digital literacy, increase governance efficiency through using digital technologies, and strengthen the ICT legislative framework, among others. The creation of the ministry in 2021 reflects the government's commitment to creating a strong digital enabling environment.

The development of a National Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027 sets the strategic framework for MDT's priorities. Key focus areas set out in the strategy include a digital society,

digital economy, digital government and regional linkages and global networks.

In the context of the strategy, the GoRTT aims to provide quality Internet access and empower everyone to use it meaningfully. The vision is to harness technology to improve quality of life, enhance public services, infrastructure, and the economy. It builds on previous plans, shifting from connectivity (FastForward) and usage (SmarTT) to broader empowerment and development (National ICT Plan 2018-2022).

The Digital Transformation Strategy aims to ensure inclusive access for all to ICT, digital finance and markets (both domestic and international). It fosters a modern policy environment for innovation, digital tools and digital payments to improve operations, and promote collaboration between the public and private sector works to strengthen Trinidad and Tobago's comparative advantages in the digital economy.

Under the overall leadership of MDT, another important actor in the ICT space is iGovTT, a state-owned enterprise responsible for providing innovative and impactful ICT solutions to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector services.

MDT is also the policy line-ministry for TATT, the independent body responsible for regulating telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. The Authority manages radio frequency spectrum and national number resources, establishes equipment and service quality standards, sets guidelines to help circumvent anti-competitive practices and encourages investment in the sectors, such that affordable telecommunications and broadcasting services are available to all. TATT administers the Universal Service Fund geared towards closing the access and affordability gap in line with GoRTT's Universality Policy promoting information and knowledge for all citizens of the country through ICTs (TATT, 2024e).

One of TATT's priorities is to educate and empower consumers about their rights, choices, and the services available

Efforts to ensure competitive pricing and expand affordable Internet access are essential to closing the affordability gap.

to them in the telecommunications sector. It is developing guidelines for the cyber protection of public telecommunications networks and broadcast facilities (TATT, 2024d).

The telecommunications regulatory framework in Trinidad and Tobago, made up of the Telecommunications Act 2001 along with regulations and guidelines, has played a crucial role in fostering competition and addressing market failures. This framework establishes clear rules and guidelines for regulatory decisions. TATT develops regulatory policies in consultation with stakeholders of the industry. TATT then advises the Minister, who then endorses the relevant Regulations under Section 78 of the Telecommunications Act. TATT is currently in the process of consultations on a Framework on Net Neutrality and a Framework on Over-the-Top Services in Trinidad and Tobago.

The legal framework is being amended to effectively regulate the competitive market and enhance the handling of offences including the introduction of administrative penalties and provisions for mergers and acquisitions. Alongside these legislative updates, new procedures will facilitate administrative processes such as dispute resolution, complaints handling, consultation, and equipment certification and licensing. In addition, the Authority has created specific plans for managing and distributing spectrum among various services.

In February 2024, Trinidad and Tobago received the Global System Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) Government Leadership Award, which "recognizes world-class leadership in the establishment of sound regulatory policies for mobile connectivity" (GSMA, 2024). The award is delivered to governments that have demonstrated impactful, positive changes in digital policy and telecommunications regulation, and it was the first time a Caribbean country won the award since 2005.

In addition, the country is making visible strides in developing the ICT sector through ongoing research initiatives. Key players include the National Integrated Business Incubator and related research and development networks, established by the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the University of West Indies (UNDP, 2022). The National Innovation Strategy of 2017 helped further steer more funding towards research and development, in order to address the shortcomings of innovation funding in the ICT sector.

2.4 Ongoing and planned initiatives

MDT initiatives that are currently at various stages of development:

- AccessTT to provide centres for underserved or ICT-excluded communities;
- the Developers' Hub that enables open-source programmes;
- e-identity that will offer a unique digital identifier for each person for accessing all government services;
- an interoperability solution to allow for the interconnection of customer databases across the government to support e-delivery of services;
- an open data initiative for the sharing of non-confidential government data, and
- WeLearnTT, which provides digital skills training.

The ministry is also planning to establish a government-owned and operated data centre (MDT, 2024).

Other projects are implemented in collaboration with partners. iGovTT is supporting government services through the eAppointment platform connecting the citizens to the Government, an online job portal providing recruitment services to the government EmployTT, the communications network GovNeTT, and the system for cashless payments for government services GovPayTT (iGovTT, 2024).

TATT is also leading several important initiatives to improve the telecommunications environment in Trinidad and Tobago. Within the framework of the Universal Service Fund, TATT currently supports:

- TTWiFi, which seeks to deploy public Wi-Fi coverage and enlarge the sphere of Internet access service to areas where coverage is lacking or poor, thereby improving connectivity in relation to ICT infrastructure;

- Persons with Disabilities Initiative, aiming to provide mobile devices that feature effective assistance for persons with disabilities, at a subsidized cost;

- Establishment of 5 community-based ICT access centres;

- Connectivity for the Adult Literacy Tutors Association (ALTA) Programme;

- Broadband Internet access infrastructure project at St. John's Parish, which was completed in May 2024; and

- Other underserved communities identified in the TATT 2021 Digital Inclusion Survey are being considered for broadband infrastructure development using the Universal Service Fund. Ten additional underserved areas in Trinidad and Tobago are pending approval (TATT, 2024e).

In addition, international and development partners have also been supporting the Government in improving the ICT infrastructure and services. Examples include the following:

- The Trinidad and Tobago Digital Transformation Project (UNDP, 2024) focuses on upgrading government services offering, through the development and integration of digital applications. The project aims to improve efficiency and to reduce transaction costs to the Government and citizens, while expanding the provision of such services to the elderly, poor, persons with disabilities, women and girls and residents of rural communities;

- The EU supports and finances the advancement of economic development and digital transformation in Trinidad and Tobago, including through a joint EU and CAF programme to support the initial phases of the electronic identity programme, public data interoperability platform, and government data centre; and

- The Smart Seas Toolkit (SST) for Disaster Resilience ("Smart Seas") project stems from a joint initiative of the ITU, Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) and TATT (Caribbean Telecommunications Union, 2024). It aims to increase the resilience and preserve the lives of Caribbean small-scale fishers (SSF) through ICTs by identifying and addressing existing gaps in the maritime communications environment, via technological, service and market innovations.

Despite various initiatives to enhance ICT infrastructure and services, a persisting digital divide for certain groups and areas remains, as highlighted by research and discussions during the multi-stakeholder consultations held for this report. Stakeholders recommended focussing on ensuring affordable service offerings, promoting meaningful connectivity, improving the reliability/latency/quality of experience, monitoring consumer complaints, and developing local talent in the area of ICT.

> Key initiatives of the Universal Service Fund include deployment of public Wi-Fi coverage, devices with assistance for persons with disabilities and community ICT centres.

3. Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation

An effective and competitive trade logistics and facilitation environment is vital for a functioning e-commerce ecosystem, both domestically and cross-border. The country has operationalized several initiatives and mechanisms, leveraging ICT to bolster trade efficiency with TTBizLink being a notable example. At the same time, several interrelated gaps and challenges remain, particularly the interoperability and lack of integration of different trade-related platforms. It is recommended to consider further reforms regarding logistics, as well as trade and facilitation mechanisms.

Trinidad and Tobago ranked 97th out of 139 countries in terms of logistics performance with lower scores on customs, infrastructure and logistics competence.

3.1 National logistics infrastructure

The national logistics infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago features a network of roads, which adequately enables road transportation, and further features an inter-island ferry service, enabling passenger travel and merchandise transportation between the mainland Trinidad and its sister isle, Tobago. There is no railroad network. Passenger and cargo air travel are facilitated through the Piarco International Airport and the A.N.R. Robinson International Airport, while trade and commercial activities are facilitated via several seaports across Trinidad and Tobago.

The World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI) 2023 Rank for Trinidad and Tobago is 97 globally out of 139 surveyed countries, measuring on-the-ground trade logistics performance and the challenges faced in terms of logistical barriers to international commerce. The rank reflects six dimensions of trade including customs performance, infrastructure quality, international shipments, logistics competences, tracking and tracing, and timeliness. Figure 6 below provides further details on the index and the performance of Trinidad and Tobago. The areas where the country has relatively lower scores are customs, infrastructure and logistics competence and quality.

Figure 6
Logistics Performance Index – Trinidad and Tobago, regional and international comparison

a. LPI score
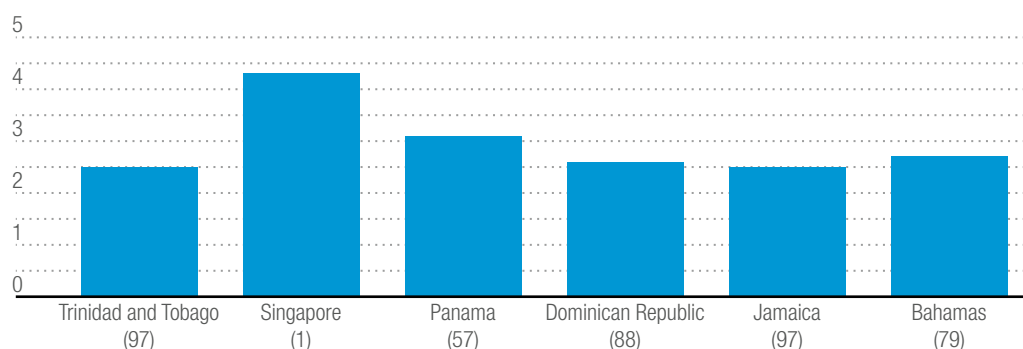
b. Breakdown of the six LPI dimension scores, regional and international comparison

■ Trinidad and Tobago   ■ Singapore   ■ Panama   ■ Dominican Republic   ■ Jamaica   ■ Bahamas

Source: World Bank, 2023

Figure 7 below summarizes the responses of 18 8 surveyed private companies and public sector entities in Trinidad and Tobago regarding key e-commerce enablers for logistics and trade facilitation. The primary factors identified as priorities are a single window system, transparent delivery times and availability of physical addresses. Electronic shipment tracking and online payment options are considered less critical by the respondents.

Figure 7
Priority factors in terms of logistics and trade facilitation for enabling e-commerce

Please assess the following items according to their level of importance for creating an enabling environment for e-commerce in your country, in terms of logistics and trade facilitation (Public and private sector respondents, 184 answers)
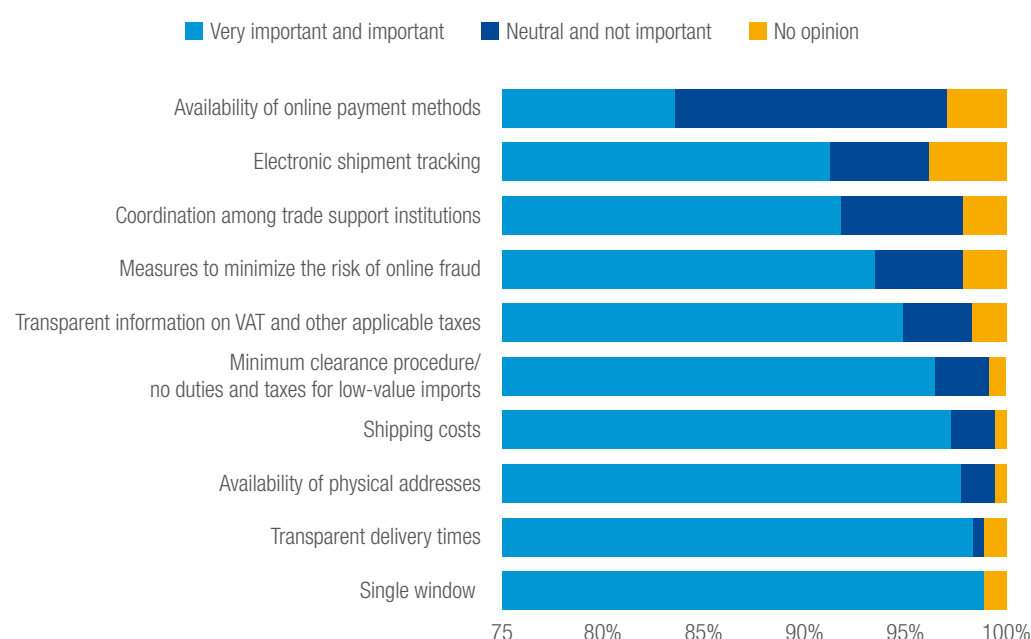
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

3.1.1 Road transportation infrastructure

The road network facilitates the movement of persons and goods on a daily basis. With 9,592 km of roads in the country, the Ministry of Works and Transport (MOWT) Highway Division maintains 2,050 km, including all highways (MOWT). Trinidad and Tobago ranked 104th out of 183 countries on the Global Sustainable Mobility Index 2022, performing relatively well in terms of rural access and safety, but with lower scores in terms of efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions (UNCTAD, 2022).

In terms of the legal framework, the Highways Act Chapter 48:01 (of 1970 and as amended last in 2010) consolidates several laws governing the use and management of highways, streets and bridges (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 1970). In addition, public transportation services are governed by the Public Transport Service Act No. 11 of 1965 (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 1965). The Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act of 1934 (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 1934) has most recently been amended in 2017.

While the national transportation network features notable successes, there are areas where improvements are needed. Strengthening the integration of transport networks, especially in the context of public transport, as well as the interoperability of public transport electronic systems should be mandated in an effort to improve the efficiency of the overall national transportation system. Since public transport could be used as a cost-effective way to deliver packages (relevant for MSMEs), consideration should be given to streamlining the powers and functions of the Public Transport Corporation to establish an integrated transport system among the different modes of transportation by augmenting integration networks, allowing for a single-card/multiple transit service system, rendering public transport electronic systems interoperable, and seeking institutional integration and cooperation.

3.1.2 Water transport infrastructure

Trinidad and Tobago features several seaports, including: Chaguaramas, Charlotteville, Point Fortin, Point Lisas, Pointe-a-Pierre, San Fernando, Scarborough, and Tembladora. They are managed by the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (PATT), which was established as a statutory entity in 1962, further to the Port Authority Act, Chapter 51:01 No. 39 of 1961 (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 1961).

The main responsibility of the PATT is to establish, support and implement measures for a coordinated and integrated system of harbour facilities and port services. In addition to facilitating the movement of people between Trinidad and Tobago, it also plays a crucial role in trade logistics by enabling the exchange of goods (PATT, 2024). Although digitalisation efforts have begun in some ports, they are at different stages of digital transformation.

A new important initiative for the country is the introduction of a Port Community System (PCS), which intends to provide a neutral electronic platform that connects the border clearance IT systems used by various stakeholders such as ASYCUDA, NAVIS and TTBizLink. The PCS is currently being developed, and when implemented, will increase transparency and traceability in the clearance process, as well as the movement and storage of goods across the supply chain (MTI, 2023a).

3.1.3 Air transport infrastructure

Air logistics in the country is evolving. The Piarco International Airport and the A.N.R. Robinson International Airport are the two international airports serving the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, respectively. In addition to benefiting from the air connectivity provided by major global carriers and their intercontinental networks, Piarco International Airport is the operating hub for the national air carrier, Caribbean Airlines. This relatively new major regional carrier makes Trinidad and Tobago well positioned to advance its domestic air transport industry and support neighbouring SIDS. The airport's runways can accommodate the largest aircraft and it is equipped with a dedicated cargo terminal.

Air freight can be a critical component of e-commerce logistics, providing speed, flexibility, and global reach for products. Data provided by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) shows that in 2023, the two airports reported 5,214 aircraft movements (comprising all cargo and mail departures and arrivals), marking a 5.2 per cent increase in comparison to 2022 and surpassing the 2019 pre-pandemic level of 4,826 movements. The airports handled 24,465 tonnes of freight in 2023, which represents a 3.8 per cent increase from 2022, although it remains 26 per cent below the 2019 pre-pandemic level. Notably, 98.5 per cent of freight traffic in 2023 was international with the main countries of destination and origin provided in Figure 8.

Figure 8
International freight market share, destinations and origins

a. **Market share of air carriers in international freight scheduled and non-scheduled services, 2023**

- Northern Air Cargo
- Amerijet International
- British Airways
- DHL Aero Expreso
- KLM
- Kalitta Air
- Caribbean Airlines Trinidad
- Atlas Air
- Copa
- United
- Sky Lease Cargo
- American

21.6%
4.5%
3.7%
3.7%
1.3%
1.2%
1.0%
0.8%
0.3%
0.1%
0.3%
61.5%
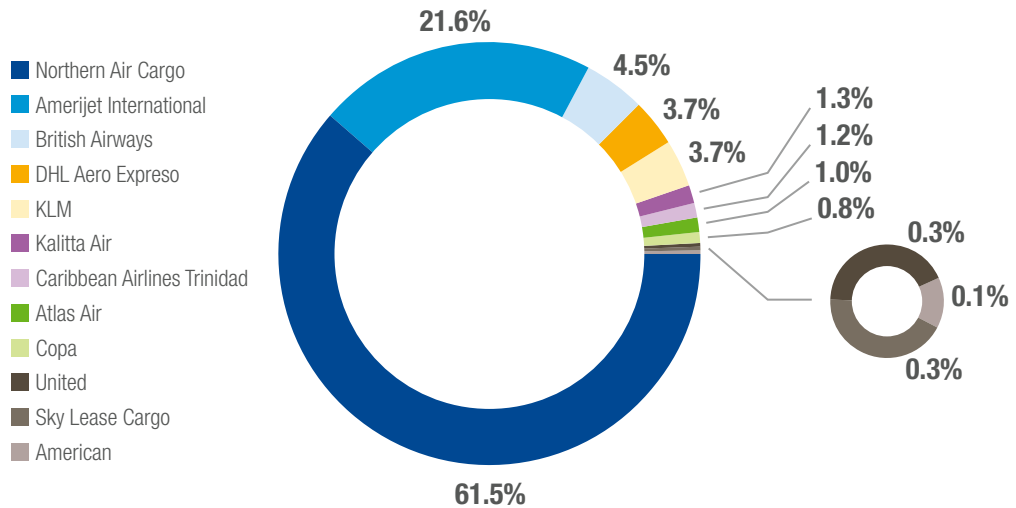
b. **International scheduled and non-scheduled air cargo traffic from Trinidad and Tobago to main destinations, 2023**

United Kingdom
The Netherlands
United States
Puerto Rico
Trinidad and Tobago
Panama
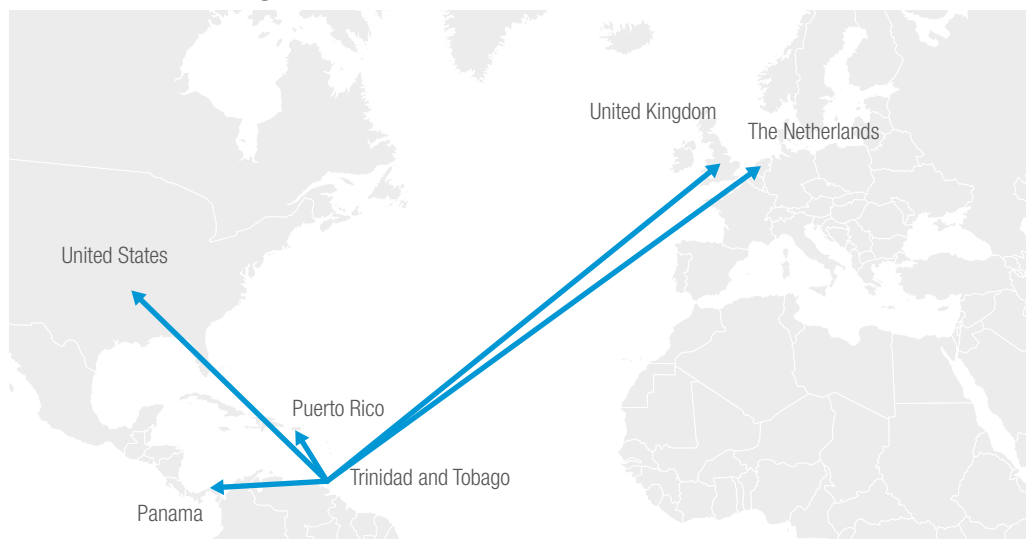
c. **Market share of air carriers in international mail scheduled and non-scheduled services, 2023**

39.3%

- American
- Amerijet International
- United
- Caribbean Airlines Trinidad
- British Airways

10.8%

0.0%

0.2%

49.6%
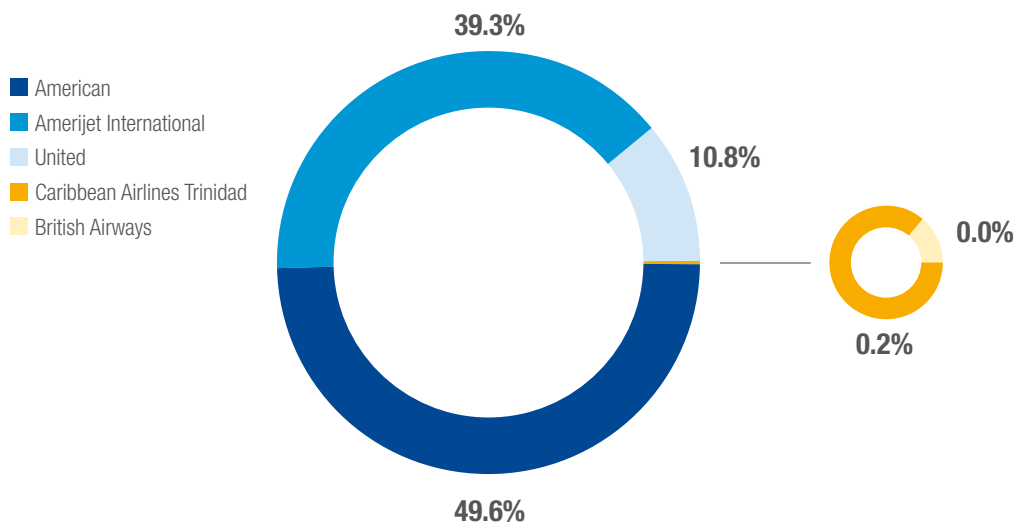
d. **International scheduled and non-scheduled air cargo traffic to Trinidad and Tobago from main destinations, 2023**

Canada

United Kingdom

The Netherlands

United States

Trinidad and Tobago

Panama
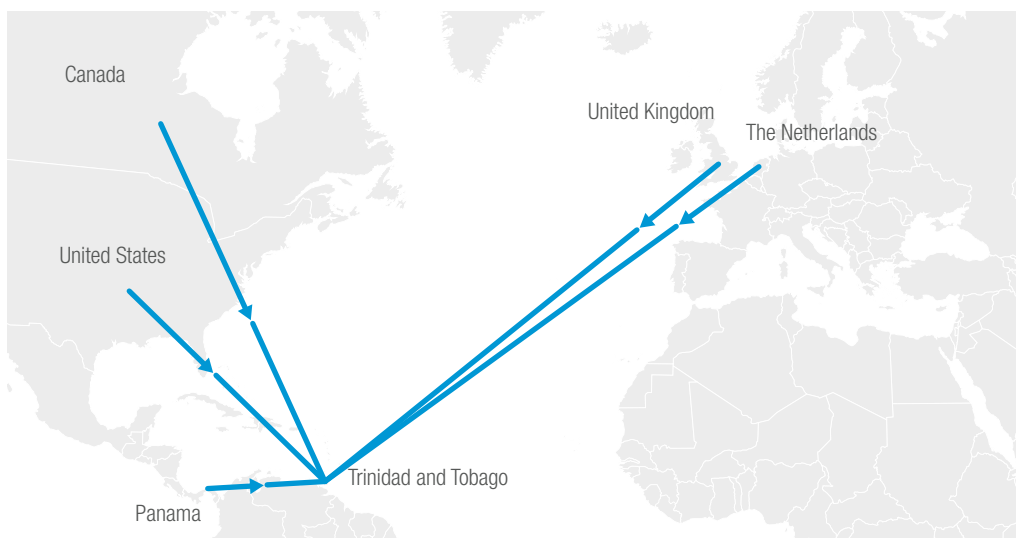
Source: ICAO, 2023

Trinidad and Tobago applies a progressive liberalization policy in air transport as a way to increase air connectivity by reducing unnecessary regulatory burden, lowering transport costs, and increasing overall productivity. The Department of Air Transport Economic Regulation (DATER) was established under the Trinidad & Tobago Civil Aviation Authority (TTCAA), which is governed by the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation [(No17) Economic] Regulations, 2016. It is responsible

for issuing international commercial air transport licences and permits and providing advice on policies and regulation for air connectivity, important for e-commerce.

The legal framework for transport of both passengers and goods by air in the country is determined by the Warsaw Convention of 1929, as amended by the Hague Protocol of 1955, which was ratified in 1983. Since then, the Warsaw Convention system has been replaced by the Convention for the

Joining the Montreal Convention can support e-commerce development through improved air connectivity, better liability protections and electronic records.

Unification of Certain Rules for International Carriage by Air (Montreal Convention of 1999 or MC99) which applies to cargo except for that classified as mail. MC99 offers specific benefits conducive to the development of e-commerce through improved air connectivity, liability protections, allowing for electronic records, as well as specific insurance for high-value, low-weight items and Trinidad and Tobago is encouraged to become party. Joining the convention will be beneficial for supporting export growth by providing a more reliable and efficient environment in the context of international trade and logistics. Trinidad and Tobago is also encouraged to register its air services agreements and amendments with ICAO in accordance with the Convention on International Civil Aviation to allow stakeholders access to regulatory information they need to assess the viability of potentially providing air cargo services that would benefit e-commerce development. The country is also a signatory to the Multilateral Agreement Concerning the Operation of Air Services within CARICOM and the Air Transport Agreement Among the Member States and Associate Members of the Association of Caribbean States, both of which can enhance air connectivity and boost e-commerce.

3.2 Logistics, postal and last mile services

TTPost, the government postal entity, provides services across Trinidad and Tobago. TTPost has implemented significant developments and is planning further initiatives to enhance its delivery, quality of service and overall efficiency. These initiatives, along with other strategic interventions will be outlined under the TTPost strategic plan currently under development. During stakeholder consultations for this assessment, TTPost also communicated that it is evaluating underserved communities to address gaps in technology and access to services. Efforts are ongoing to launch an online payment solution to facilitate the payment of duties, taxes and other fees.

The 2023 Universal Postal Union (UPU) State of the Postal Index Report (UPU, 2023) indicated that Trinidad and Tobago is classified at Postal Development Level 3, with an Integrated Index for Postal Development (2IPD) score of 21.07 out of 100, noting areas for improvement. The reach and relevance score were each recorded at circa 6, the reliability score at 7 and the resilience score at 63.9.

TTPost should continue efforts to enhance delivery, quality of service and overall effectiveness.

Figure 9 below provides additional information on how the country scores across these indicators in comparison with other Caribbean countries with a high comparative score in terms of resilience, but low or average scores regarding reliability and reach.

> **Figure 9**
> **Integrated Index for Postal Development (2IPD), Trinidad and Tobago and LAC (2022)**

a. 2IPD Score 2022

b. 2IPD Reliability

Jamaica	**52**
Panama (Rep.)	**29**
Aruba	**18**
Honduras	**16**
Costa Rica	**15**
Belize	**12**
Dominican Republic	**11**
Trinidad and Tobago	**7**
Suriname	**2**
Cuba	**1**
Barbados	**1**

c. 2IPD Reach

Jamaica	**22**
Honduras	**22**
Aruba	**17**
Costa Rica	**16**
Dominican Republic	**13**
Panama (Rep.)	**12**
Belize	**11**
Trinidad and Tobago	**6**
Suriname	**2**
Cuba	**1**
Barbados	**1**

d. 2IPD Relevance

Saint Lucia	**10**
Jamaica	**7**
Cuba	**6**
Trinnidad and Tobago	**6**
Barbados	**5**
Guyana	**5**
Bahamas	**4**
Saint Kitts and Nevis	**3**
Dominica	**3**
Aruba	**2**
Belize	**2**
Suriname	**1**
Costa Rica	**1**
Panama (Rep.)	**1**
Dominican Republic	**1**

e. 2IPD Resilience

Trinidad and Tobago	**64**
Barbados	**63**
Dominican Republic	**60**
Jamaica	**54**
Costa Rica	**54**
Bahamas	**48**
Guyana	**47**
Aruba	**46**
Saint Lucia	**43**
Dominica	**40**
Panama (Rep.)	**39**
Cuba	**38**
Belize	**29**
Honduras	**21**
Saint Kitts and Nevis	**20**
Suriname	**19**
Haiti	**16**

Source: UPU, 2022

Trinidad and Tobago features over 100 registered national and international couriers, some of the most notable industry players include Aeropost, DHL Express, eZone, Right Away Couriers, Web Source, B&H Tropicals Courier, Jet Box International, Angel Couriers, First Class Couriers and others.
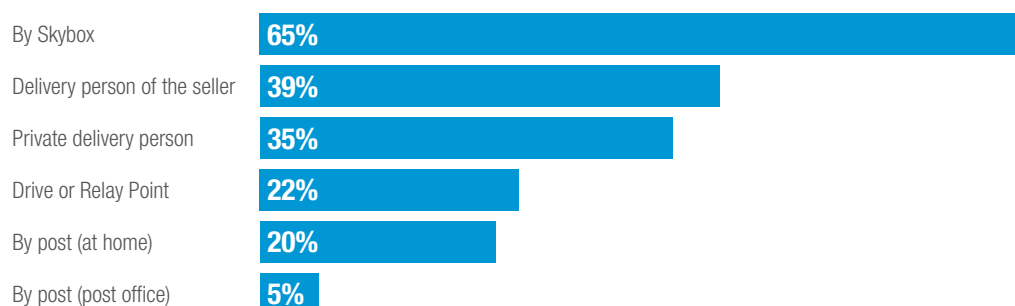
Importantly, surveyed consumers in the context of this assessment indicated a preference for private delivery methods as opposed to delivery by post (whether at home or post office). In fact, 65 per cent of respondents indicated they prefer skybox services followed by delivery person of the seller, as shown in Figure 9.

Skybox is a particular type of courier service that enables cross-border e-commerce activity from international retailers that do not provide delivery to the specific country (mainly those based in the United States, but also in Europe). Different skybox companies operate in the country including CSF Courriers, Tropical Express, SkyBOX, TTPost Courriers (through its Hummingbird Express service) and others. They typically provide their customers with an address based in the United States so that they can make an online purchase themselves. Upon receipt of the package, they facilitate the delivery directly to customers in Trinidad and Tobago, including tracking information, information on taxes and fees, and customs clearance.

Figure 10
Preferred delivery methods

Which delivery method do you prefer? (Consumer respondents, 193 answers)

By Skybox	65%
Delivery person of the seller	39%
Private delivery person	35%
Drive or Relay Point	22%
By post (at home)	20%
By post (post office)	5%

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

Company delivery services and private couriers are typically favoured for parcel delivery, whereas TTPost is often the preferred choice for mail delivery.

Conversely, private sector survey respondents of UNCTAD's survey (117 total) indicated that the post is the most

used delivery method for domestic deliveries (for mail and postal mail). For parcels, companies primarily rely on own delivery services. The post remains most used for international deliveries for mail, while private operators are preferred for international parcels.

3.3 Trade facilitation

The accelerated implementation of national trade facilitation measures is a key strategic intervention under the TTTP 2019-2023. It

aims to optimize cost effectiveness, increase border regulatory compliance and improve overall efficiency in transport logistics and trade facilitation. To ensure continued relevance, this policy framework should be reviewed and updated to reflect the global push towards digital transformation.

3.3.1 WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement

Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the WTO which establishes rules governing international trade in goods and services. The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) adopted at the 2013 Bali Ministerial Conference, aims to streamline the movement, release and clearance of goods, including those in transit. It accords special and differential treatment to developing and

least-developed countries, recognizing their unique inherent challenges. It allows for a phased approach to implementation by categorizing obligations into three groups: those that can be implemented immediately, those requiring a transitional period and those requiring technical assistance or other capacity-building support. The TFA also mandates members to establish a National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) to oversee its implementation and report to the WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation.

Trinidad and Tobago has commenced implementation of the Agreement which entered into force in 2017 and the country has achieved a 34 per cent implementation rate of its commitments under the TFA (WTO, 2024b). Actions implemented to date represent a coordinated effort to enhance trade facilitation processes. Key measures include the roll out the NAVIS system by the PATT, which has significantly enhanced the effectiveness and efficiency of cargo clearance operations. Despite the advancements, Trinidad and Tobago still faces notable challenges and requires policy reforms to further strengthen trade facilitation. Areas requiring attention include customs cooperation, the adoption of international standards, procedures for appeal and review, and the implementation of electronic payments. Full implementation of the TFA is expected by December 2027, according to WTO's assessment of the country's progress.

A comprehensive review and streamlining of customs policies and procedures related to the release and delivery of goods is necessary. In addition, the implementation of the World Customs Organization (WCO) Immediate Release Guidelines is recommended to expedite the clearance and release of goods. Enhancing the customs clearance process can be achieved by fully integrating ASYCUDA's risk management framework and tools.

The WTO ITA I and II, encompassing 81 WTO Members, excluding Trinidad and Tobago, is another pivotal accord. The ITA eliminates import duties on various technology and related products, including semiconductors, semiconductor manufacturing equipment, optical lenses, GPS navigation equipment, and medical equipment such as magnetic resonance imaging products and ultrasonic scanning apparatus. The Agreement aims to expand trade in technology and related products with a view to create affordable and accessible means through which companies, governments and individuals can leverage ICT and develop IT-enabled sectors (WTO). Joining the agreement is expected to "lower the cost of manufacturing and services and lower the cost of purchase of ICT goods, making countries more competitive in the market" (Rogaler, 2023).

3.3.2 National trade facilitation regulatory and institutional architecture

Trinidad and Tobago established its NTFC in 2016. The NTFC meets quarterly and is jointly chaired by MTI and the CED.

The CED represents a core element of the trade facilitation institutional framework. Governed by several national legislative instruments, the CED supports economic growth and development by streamlining trade and travel processes and implementing systems that ensure efficient revenue generation and collection. The key focus of the CED is trade facilitation, positioning it as a critical member of the NTFC.

Other representatives of the NTFC include the Tobago House of Assembly, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, MPD, Ministry of Attorney General and Legal Affairs, Ministry of Health, the Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, PATT, Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation Limited, and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

With a 34 per cent implementation of the TFA, Trinidad and Tobago should engage in further timely reforms.

Some of the core areas of work of the NTFC have been:

Monitoring the implementation, uptake, successes and challenges in respect of the Trade and Business Information Portal, TTBizLink, further described in Box 1 below;

- Enhancing compliance with the TFA requirement of the publication of monitoring of clearance times;

- Guiding Business Process Re-engineering initiatives to address regulatory gaps and ensuring heightened alignment between national and international best practices; and

- Strengthening the national legislative framework of Trinidad and Tobago to give effect to the principles and obligations under the TFA:

  – Port Authority Act Chapter 51:01,

  – Immigration Act 18:01,

  – Value Added Tax Act Chapter 75.06, and

  – Standards Act and subsidiary legislation made thereof in Chapter 82:03.

Efforts are ongoing under each of the strategic initiatives noted above, particularly within the legislative framework. Previous measures have been taken to strengthen trade facilitation, especially in the area of digital trade. These legislative reforms, however, have not been enacted.

Instead, the national legislative regime governing and interplaying with trade facilitation reflects the laws detailed below:

  – Customs Act Chapter 78:01,

  – Data Protection Act (Chapter 22:04),

  – ETA (Chapter 22:05),

  – Customs Brokers and Customs Clerks Chapter 78:03,

  – Bills of Lading Act Chapter 50.03,

  – Trade Description Act Chapter 82:04,

  – Trade Ordinance No. 19-1958,

  – Anti-Dumping and Countervailing Duties Act,

  – Food and Drugs Act Chapter 30:01,

  – Plant (Export Prohibition) Act Chapter 63:54,

  – Plant Protection Act Chapter 63:56,

  – Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Act Chapter 30:03, and

  – Metrology Regulations.

The trade and customs legislation and regulations affect import and export processes, customs administration, and the clearance of goods. Additionally, relevant acts and regulations on food, plants, pesticides, toxic chemicals and metrology set specific protocols for importing and exporting such items, while the laws on data protection and electronic transactions facilitate and regulate digital trade.

3.3.3 Trade facilitation performance with respect to e-commerce

Under the AfT Strategy 2016-2019, Trinidad and Tobago has identified and prioritized key trade facilitation measures aimed at enhancing maritime transportation efficiency, increasing value-added services in port environments and leveraging e-commerce opportunities (MTI, 2017b). A notable achievement has been the reduction of customs declarations processing times, which decreased from an average of 23.7 hours per customs declaration in 2019 to 11.2 hours in 2021, marking a 52 per cent improvement (MTI, 2021). During stakeholder consultations, private sector representatives highlighted persistent barriers to export, especially for small business, along with a general lack of regional coordination and integration with supply chains.

Box 1
Women working in AI research

TTBizLink, the first SEW in the Caribbean, represents an innovative information technology solution developed to enhance trade facilitation. It currently integrates a trade and business information portal and an SEW for government e-services. Complemented by the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) used by the CED, TTBizLink serves as a one-stop portal that allows 24/7 access to services required to facilitate trade and business. It has facilitated doing business in Trinidad through the leveraging of technological advancements and implementation of digital transformative measures to improve the trade and business environments. TTBizLink accepts online payment for its services which is supported by the e-Cashbook software which was developed by TTIFC.

In 2023, TTBizLink was enhanced to include a modernized, mobile responsive interface, enhanced security, signed and stamped approval documents that can be downloaded, document verification via QR Code, increased processing efficiency and knowledge sharing among multiple agencies, improved interoperability with other government systems such as the CED ASYCUDA system and the Immigration Division's Border Management System, and the possibility for users to make online payments for permits and licences (MTI, 2023b). In September 2024, 48 e-services were available on the platform with others expected in the future.

Source: UNCTAD on the basis of TTBizLink open information, MTI discussions and stakeholder consultations

Recognizing that several key measures still to be implemented to align with the WTO TFA, the GoRTT is encouraged to continue effective coordination and facilitate a whole-of-government approach to further strengthen trade and e-commerce initiatives. While advancements under TTBizLink, are to be commended, research and stakeholder consultations have highlighted that greater interoperability between and among trade facilitation platforms should be pursued. It would be particularly important to strengthen the interoperability and data exchange of TTBizLink, the customs systems (ASYCUDA), postal CDS system and the PCS to improve trade facilitation processes.

Carrying out complementary initiatives, such as the implementation of a more efficient port operation system, is also essential. The PATT and the CED are key stakeholders in the trade facilitation landscape, playing a crucial role in the supply chain network. The forthcoming implementation of the PCS will significantly boost collaboration and data exchange between these two entities, streamlining the border clearance process.

To support these new operations, relevant border regulatory personnel must also provide requisite services to facilitate customs clearance and other trade facilitation processes on a 24/7 basis. Addressing the CED's staffing shortage should be an urgent priority. These operational changes must be accompanied by relevant legislative reforms to ensure their effectiveness.

From a legal and regulatory perspective, it is essential to reform laws, including customs legislation, to enhance operational efficiency and create a more user-friendly legislative framework that is easily understandable by the average businessperson.

> Enhancing interoperability among trade facilitation platforms, improving port operations, and streamlining customs processes can further support e-commerce.

4. Payment Solutions

With its progressive policies, robust infrastructure and well-developed telecommunications systems providing high coverage, Trinidad and Tobago is well positioned to achieve a cashless ecosystem in the near future. MSMEs can benefit from online banking, and the Government is actively promoting digital payment initiatives, including the recent launch of the FinTech Innovation Centre. Despite this promising landscape for advanced payment solutions, cash transactions still dominate the country's payment ecosystem. Moving forward, achieving a cashless society will require further adjustments, including a heightened focus on digital financial inclusion and literacy at the national level, as well as stronger alignment with international trends and innovations at the regional level.

4.1 Financial system penetration and inclusion

The National Financial Inclusion Survey and Report 2023 provides crucial insights regarding financial inclusion in Trinidad and Tobago. The survey sought to reach a deeper understanding of the local financial landscape and the demand-side implications regarding the access and use of formal financial services. Data was collected from 2,000 households across the country, revealing that 25 per cent of the population remains financially excluded, primarily due to a lack of access to basic transaction accounts (TTIFC, 2024). This marks an increase from the 19 per cent financial exclusion rate reported by the World Bank's Findex Report in 2017, highlighting a possible decline in access to formal, regulated transaction accounts over time (World Bank, 2018). Among the primary barriers, cost concerns were the most significant reasons cited by individuals for not owning accounts. Additionally, the gender disparity in account ownership was approximately 61 per cent of women owning a personal account compared to about 69 per cent of men.

> The payment landscape is still characterized by cash usage and the majority of MSMEs (86 per cent) face difficulties in accessing digital payments.

The findings revealed that 77 per cent of MSMEs lack access to a dedicated business bank account. Focus group discussions identified that a majority of the MSMEs face challenges with cumbersome documentation requirements, which often seem unattainable. Further, 86 per cent of MSMEs do not utilize digital payments due to their inability to secure a business bank account and the associated high fees (TTIFC, 2024).

The report also revealed that cash remains the predominant payment method for bills, purchases, educational expenses, and taxes. Specifically, 63 per cent of low-value transactions, such as bill payments and mobile top-ups, are paid in cash, while only 12 per cent are made using debit cards. These findings suggest that the low adoption of electronic payment methods can be attributed to high fees, access barriers, a lack of trust and awareness, and the convenience of cash transactions (TTIFC, 2024).

The insights from this report will guide the development of a National Financial Inclusion Strategy, offering a comprehensive framework to address the pressing issues and obstacles highlighted in the survey. This strategy will act as a roadmap for

removing obstacles to financial inclusion and access, ultimately fostering a more inclusive financial system that benefits individuals, communities and the broader economy.

Key priority areas for the strategy include enhancing access to financial services, promoting digital financial education and literacy, strengthening consumer protection, and encouraging innovation and collaboration. To improve access, the strategy will focus on developing innovative and affordable financial products tailored to the needs of underserved populations. In terms of education and literacy, it aims to integrate financial education into the national curriculum. Regarding consumer protection, it will establish rules and safeguards against fraud, misinformation, and unfair practices. At the same time, it will encourage innovation and collaboration among financial institutions, fintech companies and regulators (Imbert, 2024).

4.2 Payment systems and trends in payment solutions

CBTT is responsible for oversight and regulation of the payment system. The National Payments System consists of all systems which facilitate the clearance and settlement of payments, including large-value systems such as the Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system, the Government Securities Settlement (GSS) system, and retail payment systems such as the Cheques Clearing House, the Automated Clearing House (ACH) and various card payment schemes (CBTT, 2024c).

Supporting the development of e-payments is a priority reflected in several policy documents. The CBTT's strategic plan for 2021-2026 set a monetary policy objective to "modernize monetary operations to advance and cater for digitalization" (CBTT, 2021b). To bolster this initiative, specific budgetary measures have also been outlined in national budgets. The National Budget 2024, in particular, emphases facilitating

e-money activity, promoting digitalization in the financial services sector, and pursuing the goal of reducing the use of cash to position Trinidad and Tobago as a fintech-enabled financial services hub (Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Finance, 2024a). This illustrates the Government's commitment to promote digital payments in the country and supporting private sector initiatives, especially within the fintech realm.

Recent developments in the banking sector are propelling the country towards a cashless society. A significant milestone was the introduction of an electronic cheque-clearing facility in 2023, which has enhanced the e-payments infrastructure supported by many banks. This advancement has greatly improved the ease and efficiency of digital banking. The launch in 2022 of the Visa-LINX debit card also marked an important milestone for consumers and merchants, streamlining access to e-commerce solutions and facilitating touch-free payments for online shopping and sales.

Online payment mechanisms are well established in Trinidad and Tobago, with major banks offering both desktop and mobile phone applications for smartphones or tablets to facilitate EFT. Through specific banks, users can make payments to a variety of commercial and government entities such as the National Insurance Board, which manages the country's National Insurance System (NIS). In addition, four e-money issuer[2] applicants have been granted provisional registration, and one bank has been authorized to issue e-money under the Financial Institutions Act (FIA) 2008. The public sector is also embracing cashless transactions through various methods, such as bank transfers, credit/debit cards, ACH, and RTGS.

Furthermore, the fintech ecosystem has been growing significantly with the advent of the Electronic Money Issuance Order (2020), which broadens the eligibility criteria for e-money issuance beyond traditional licensees and EMIs.

> The government is committed to facilitating e-money activity, promoting digitalization of the financial services sector and reducing cash usage.

> The payment landscape is still characterized by cash usage and the majority of MSMEs (86 per cent) face difficulties in accessing digital payments.

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[2] Paywise Limited, PESH Money Limited, Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, and MyCash Limited are the four EMIs.

In 2023, TTIFC hosted the first FinTech Sprint geared at attracting local and foreign firms to collaborate on innovative solutions for industry-wide problems.

TTIFC has also partnered with Visa to develop infrastructure that empowers local fintech companies to swiftly create and scale their solutions, with the goal of positioning Trinidad and Tobago as a leading fintech hub in the region. Key initiatives include:

- leveraging Visa's CyberSource Payments Platform: this platform allows local fintech companies, financial institutions and merchants to securely accept and scale digital payments. This platform provides a foundation with API-based capabilities, such as interoperable tokenization, 3D Secure 2.0, and funds management; and
- establishing a FinTech Innovation Centre, One FinTech Avenue, a technology-enabled workspace that fosters collaboration among stakeholders, key digital finance players, and fintech, encouraging the exchange of ideas, the development of market-relevant solutions and the demonstration of technologies that can address industry-wide challenges.

In addition to the collaboration with Visa, Trinidad and Tobago, through TTIFC, has worked with Mastercard to implement solutions that drive financial inclusion, support small businesses, and enhance digital transformation readiness in the country.

With the shift towards a cashless society, the country has made significant advancements in enhancing the security of its payments ecosystem against cybercrime. Recent milestones include the migration of the magnetic stripe debit cards to a Visa Debit Card secured with EMV[3] contactless technology, merchants' rapid transition to 3DS 2.0 secure (an advanced e-commerce authentication protocol), and local issuers are also working closely with Visa Advanced Authorization and other AI-enabled transactional scoring tools (Salum, 2024).

There are different options for payment solutions for e-commerce entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago. Major commercial banks, including First Citizens Bank, Royal Bank of Canada, Republic Bank and Scotiabank, offer website payment integration options through First Atlantic Commerce, a regional e-payment provider. This partnership enables businesses to efficiently accept payments from both local and international customers (MTI, 2020).

WiPay is another popular e-payment solution in the Caribbean. Its WiPay plugin seamlessly integrates with e-commerce sites, while the WiPay Top Up Voucher System enables users to make online payments wherever WiPay is accepted. Additionally, the SCAN2PAY feature utilizes QR code technology, enabling contactless payments at the point of sale. WiPay also offers a Colour card for payments online (WiPay, 2024).

Non-bank institutions, such as credit unions and EMIs, do not yet have direct access to certain payment infrastructures. This limitation is particularly significant as many MSMEs prefer to open accounts with these non-bank entities, which limits their ability to offer online payment options to customers. Stakeholder consultations in the context of the assessment raised this issue and underscored the need to expand payment infrastructure and integrate non-bank institutions into the ecosystem. Key incentives could include encouraging and creating alternative cost-effective payment solutions that can be easily and effectively integrated into MSMEs operations.

The consumer survey conducted for purposes of this assessment shows that among the consumers that pay upon delivery, nearly 50 per cent may elect to pay cash because an online

> Expanding payment infrastructure to integrate non-bank institutions is essential for enabling online payment options for MSMEs.

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3 EMV is short for Europay, Mastercard and Visa: the three companies that created the EMV standard. EMV cards store cardholder information on a metallic chip instead of in a magnetic stripe. These chips can only be authenticated by special readers, making them more secure than stripe-only cards.

payment option is not available or due to lack of trust in the site or merchant.

When looking more closely at methods of payments for online purchases, the consumer survey reveals that credit and debit cards are the preferred options for online transactions.

Figure 11
Preferred methods of online payments

For your payments when ordering your online purchases, what payment methods do you use? (Consumer respondents, 196 answers)
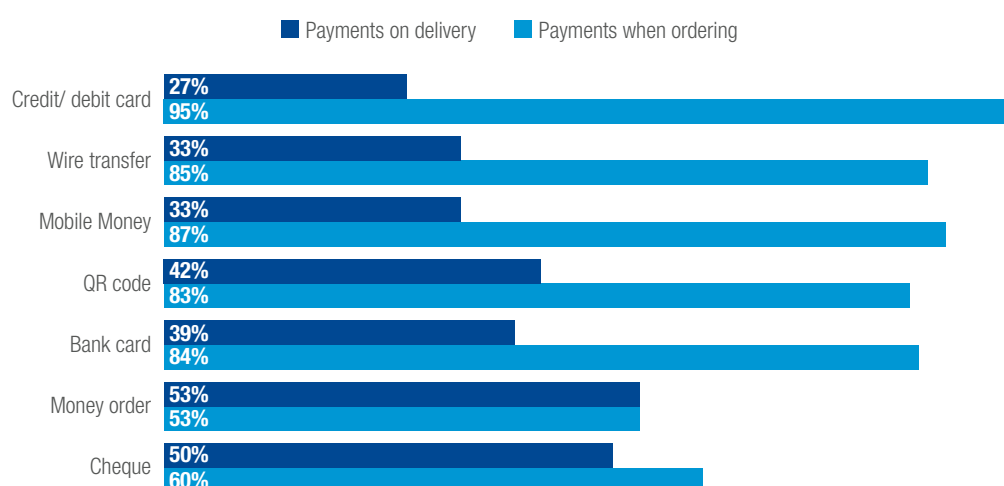
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

Payment security was among the three primary factors that survey consumers identified as influencing their online purchasing decisions. The other two factors mentioned were price attractiveness and website clarity.

The survey of the private sector revealed that when ordering they provide customers with the possibility to pay by credit or with debit card payments (77 per cent), followed closely by wire transfers (75 per cent) and cash (74 per cent) during the ordering process. For deliveries, the private sector identified cash as the primary provided method of payment, followed by credit/debit card and cheque.

Access to electronic and cashless payments is critical consideration for private sector businesses looking to sell products online.[4] When asked about barriers to adopting e-commerce solutions, private sector respondents indicated that among the most important factors are lack of electronic payment solutions, unavailability of logistic solutions for e-commerce, and lack of funding to develop online services and insufficient legal and regulatory frameworks (Figure 12).

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[4] Companies that responded to the survey are mainly SMEs (with less than 10 employees), male-led, and only 50 per cent of them sell goods online.

Figure 12
Factors that may create obstacles for businesses to transition to e-commerce
If you decided not to use e-commerce solutions, how important were the following factors in your decision? (Private sector respondents, 123 answers)
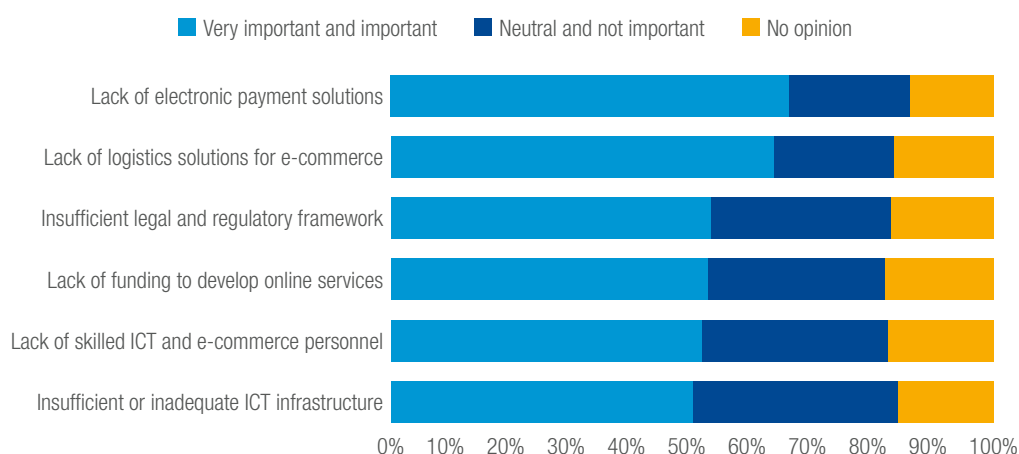
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

Stakeholder consultations have revealed several gaps that may exacerbate the current situation. These include limited access to banking services, low credit card penetration, inadequate financial literacy, underdeveloped mobile payments infrastructure, low adoption rates, as well as security and fraud concerns.

The Alliance of Rural Communities (ARC) highlighted that local vendors in rural areas often prefer foreign-based payment solutions for international customers,

viewing the local banking system as a barrier to conducting their business effectively. Generally, the complexity of the banking system coupled with the lack of information about available options were flagged as issues during consultations in the framework of the assessment. Furthermore, private-sector representatives highlighted issues regarding the high charges for online payment solutions. An example of one MSMEs journey with online payments is described in Box 2 below.

> **Box 2**
> **Challenges and opportunities for MSMEs in e-commerce**

A cost-effective path that offers easy access to markets was what motivated D'Market Movers, a farm-to-table distribution company, https://www.dmarketmovers.com/, to turn to e-commerce and become an online marketplace.

When D' Market Movers launched activities in 2009, access to an online payment platform in Trinidad and Tobago was not run-of-the-mill. One indigenous bank at the time had launched a payment solution specifically targeted to small businesses, using the bank's consumer online banking portal. D' Market Movers explored this option but could not meet the requirement to put up a bond to the tune of TTD75,000.00 (over $11,000.00). Like many other start-ups, the firm did not have access to this kind of funding.

D'Market Movers, therefore, had to become resourceful and look beyond Trinidad and Tobago. The owners did this by opening a bank account in the US which then allowed them to pursue PayPal as a payment solution. In order to manage technology-related costs, the core team upskilled, including by learning some basic coding to be able to easily integrate the payment gateway and other third-party functionality into their website without having to rely on a contractor or by bringing on additional staff. D' Market Movers also had to carefully manage cash and creditors, due to the 21-day hold on funds applied by PayPal.

D' Market Movers soon realized that in addition to the costs associated with the payment gateway, other costs initially considered to be reasonable soon added up: Internet costs; website costs; transaction costs; platform costs; hosting costs; security and others. The business therefore had to resort to pushing volume sales to cover these costs if it intended to be competitive and sustainable. D' Market Movers grew the number of suppliers and businesses on its marketplace, as it shifted focus to promoting volume sales and was able to grow exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Today, D' Market Movers has also added another payment gateway, First Atlantic Commerce (FAC), as a payment solution, allowing it to serve its markets more flexibly.

Some of the key aspects that have brought success to the company so far, which they would recommend for other MSMEs, include investing in research, building and leveraging a network, building DIY capacity, and engaging with government programmes.

Source: UNCTAD, based on an interview with David Thomas of D' Market Movers

4.3 The development of payment solutions for government services

GovPayTT, an e-payment solution implemented by iGovTT, facilitates cashless payment for government services. Currently in its second phase, this initiative focuses on developing a standardized method to implement GovPayTT. This approach aims to enhance scalability, expedite deployment, reduce implementation costs, and improve support through standardized reporting for the Treasury. The standardized system will be easily adaptable across all MDAs utilizing this service (Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Finance, 2024b).

The acceleration of digital payments across government agencies is a key mandate of TTIFC. In partnership with the Ministry of Finance's Treasury Division, it has developed and implemented the e-Cashbook Suite Solution, which has successfully processed over TTD 4.6 million in digital transactions, demonstrating its effectiveness in various use cases at different stages of implementation.

TTIFC estimates that revenue collected through digital payment methods will surpass TTD 200 million by the end of the 2025 fiscal year. It currently provides strategic support and development resources to various GoRTT institutions, including the Tobago House of Assembly, MTI, Environmental Management Authority, MOWT, Ministry of National Security, Housing Development Corporation, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, with more stakeholders expected to join. This ongoing effort to seamlessly integrate online payment capabilities aims to enhance the efficiency and transparency of digital payment solutions across the Government.

> Recent policies have improved the regulatory landscape for e-payments, providing a strong momentum to build on.

Several MDAs now also offer electronic payment options to enhance convenience and efficiency. For instance, the Inland Revenue Division (IRD) accepts payments via cash, cheque, debit card (via Linx®) and wire transfer payments, as well as via TransACH for transactions between TTD 100,000.00 and TTD 499,999.99 and Safe-TT for those of TTD 500,000.00 and above through the CBTT (IRD, 2024).

Similarly, the CED aims to provide a user-friendly and efficient payment experience. Currently, the CED accepts payments for customs duties based on assessed amounts on declarations. All payments are registered in ASYCUDA, which helps generate trade data that can be used for statistical economic analysis.

As the Government increasingly adopts digital payment methods, it is essential to strengthen key platforms to build a culture of trust and confidence in online transactions. Stakeholder consultations held in the context of this assessment highlighted the need for a unified digital interface that integrates multiple service providers and offers improved service delivery channels and control of fees.

4.4 Regulations enabling e-payments

The ETA sets the stage for the legal framework regarding electronic payments, while the Exchequer and Audit (EFT) Regulations 2015 clarify and prescribe rules in respect of EFTs. Regulation 31 specifically prescribes instructions for electronic funds transfer methods, whereby it is clearly established that the Treasury shall issue instructions for each method of receipt of money electronically, namely, ACH, RTGS, debit card and credit card payments, or any other method of receiving funds electronically as approved by the Treasury.

More recently, the regulatory landscape to enable e-payments has improved significantly with the introduction of policies such as the: (i) E-Money Policy (2018)[5] (CBTT, 2018a), (ii) FinTech Policy (2019) (CBTT, 2024), (iii) E-Money Issuer Order (2020) (CBTT, 2020b), (iv) Draft Guidelines for Non-Bank Non-Financial Institutions in Retail Payments (2020) (CBTT, 2020a), and (v) Simplified Due Diligence Requirements (2021) (CBTT, 2021a) with its companion guidance to apply simplified due diligence requirements for basic bank accounts.

The E-Money Policy introduces a new category of retail payment issuers, promoting competition and the adoption of electronic payments. This initiative aims to reduce the amount of cash in circulation, reduce cheque usage and enhance financial inclusion (CBTT, 2018a). The FinTech Policy addresses several key areas: (i) the emergence of new financial products and technological developments, such as digital wallets, which can lower transaction costs, increase efficiency and lead to a stronger financial system, (ii) risks and consumer protection issues related to fintech, and (iii) the potential development of digital currencies (CBTT, 2018b).

The E-Money Issuer Order regulates e-money and EMIs, including e-wallets, e-money cards as well as digital payment

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[5]   Final policy document is not published online, so specific reference is made to the draft for consultations.

platforms operated by fintech and wireless operators. It establishes a framework for managing digital transactions and money exchanges through online platforms (Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 2020). To keep pace with technological innovations taking place in the financial services industry particularly in payments systems, the Central Bank has updated its guidelines governing payment systems. The Draft Guidelines for Non-bank Non-Financial Institutions in Retail Payments of 2020 set standards of conduct for participants, covering e-money, as well as debit and credit cards. They also provide guidance on the acceptance and processing of payments for merchants, customer payment service facilitation, and payment transactions (CBTT, 2020a). Additionally, the Simplified Due Diligence Requirements of 2021 aim to simplify due diligence measures for basic banking accounts for vulnerable groups in society, thereby further supporting financial inclusion (CBTT, 2021a). Currently, the Central Bank regulates EMIs as provided for under the

2020 EMI Order, which authorizes entities to issue electronic money and provide e-Money accounts. Examples of EMIs in Trinidad and Tobago are Paywise Limited, PESH Money, TSTT and MyCash Limited (TTIFC, 2024).

The full promulgation and implementation of these policies and orders will help the country build on existing momentum and achieve the objectives of the many initiatives geared towards full connectivity and cashless transactions (Gradstein, 2023).

The importance of an enabling regulatory framework for e-payments in Trinidad and Tobago is highlighted in the responses of both public and private stakeholder surveys. When asked to identify the key factors for creating an enabling environment for e-commerce in terms of payment solutions, public and private sector respondents identified three primary areas: access to foreign currency accounts, regulations allowing electronic payments, and protections for users of online payment solutions.

Figure 13
Priority factors enabling e-commerce in terms of online payment solutions

In your opinion, how important are the following factors for creating an enabling environment for e-commerce in your country, when it comes to payment solutions? (Public and private sector respondents, 182 answers)
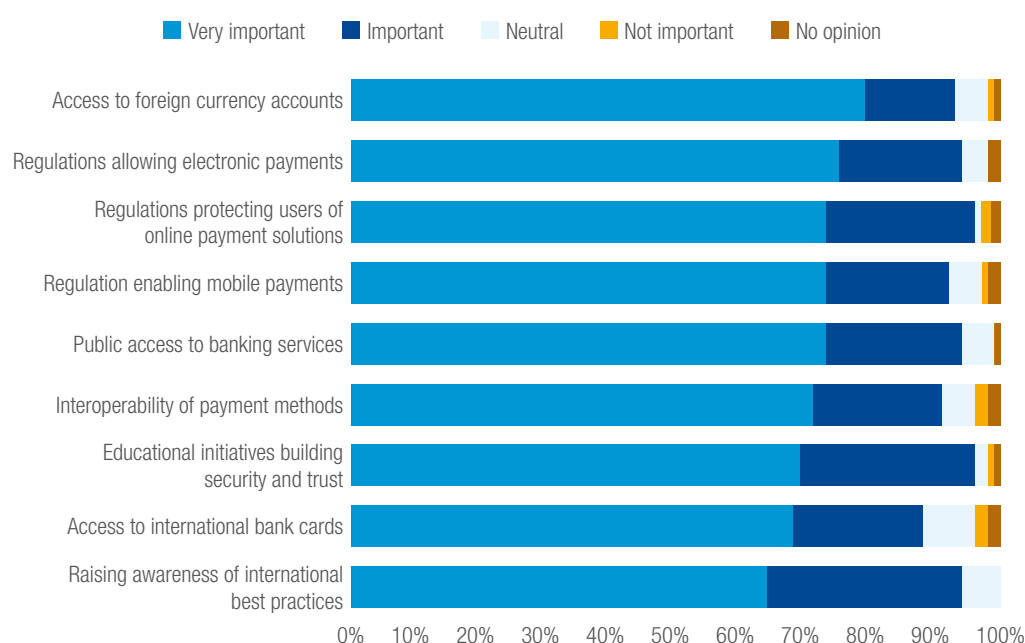
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

4.5 Financial education

Financial and digital financial literacy have become essential in the digitization trend of financial products and services. These skills are crucial for empowering citizens and businesses to actively engage in the digital economy and to transition to electronic payments.

The 2022 National Financial Literacy Survey commissioned by the CBTT, reveals that while 62 per cent of persons use digital financial products and services, 35 per cent have experienced financial fraud. This highlights significant gaps in the population's financial capability and underscores the need to strengthen financial literacy initiatives (CBTT, 2022).

To address gaps, the CBTT offers several educational programmes, such as the National Financial Literacy Programme (NFLP), which aims at enhancing public knowledge of sound financial decisions and promoting financial well-being. The NFLP disseminates its communications through various channels such as group presentations, articles and other educational material (CBTT, 2024b). Through such initiatives individuals learn about the benefits of the formal financial sector, as well as debt management, budgeting and financial fraud. They are also informed of the risks of the informal financial sector, helping to reduce the likelihood of falling victim to scams, robberies or obtaining counterfeit money. The overall goal is to promote the transition away from the informal financial sector and support informed financial decisions.

During the consultations held in the framework of this assessment, stakeholders emphasized the importance of national campaigns to educate consumers about the benefits and security of e-commerce. Such efforts are essential for building trust and increase consumer participation. Additionally, stakeholders noted the reciprocal benefit for businesses, which can strengthen consumers trust through transparent and secure practices. Small businesses also suggested that regional cooperation is needed to facilitate access to international payment platforms, facilitating their integration in the global digital economy.

5. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

The legal and regulatory framework for e-commerce in Trinidad and Tobago is primarily governed by several pieces of legislation, including the ETA, Computer Misuse Act (and related Interception of Communications Act), Consumer Protection Law and the Data Protection Act. While the Data Protection Act intersects with the Freedom of Information Act, it remains only partially promulgated. Certain sections of this Act, such as those addressing data privacy principles and data protection for e-government, are currently in force. The current Consumer Protection Act along with the Trade Descriptions Act and Sale of Goods Act, are outdated. The newly drafted Consumer Protection Law has not yet received approval from the Attorney General and Parliament. Additionally, enforcement of cybercrimes relies on the Summary Offences Act. It is crucial to address the partial promulgation of several key pieces of legislation, including the ETA and the Data Protection Act, to strengthen the legal framework for e-commerce in the country.

5.1 Current legislation

The main piece of legislation for e-commerce is the Electronic Transactions Act 2011 or ETA (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011). The Act is key in enabling e-commerce as it aims to facilitate electronic transactions, eliminate barriers to electronic commerce and promote the development of the legal and business infrastructure necessary to implement secure electronic commerce, promote public confidence in the integrity and reliability of electronic records and e-commerce, and to foster the development of e-commerce using electronic signatures. While there are certain sections of the Act that are not yet operational, the sections of the Act that are active contain the requisite provisions of several of the UNCITRAL model laws as well as the United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts (Electronic Communications Convention or ECC).

Furthermore, formal accession to the ECC can also be recommended, since it removes any doubt concerning the acceptability of using electronic communications to satisfy written form requirements arising under the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods, 1980 (the CISG). The ECC also contains a provision on the cross-border recognition of electronic signatures.

The purpose of the current ETA is "to give legal effect to electronic documents, electronic records, electronic signatures and electronic transactions (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011b)." Other notable purposes of the Act include the unification of laws regarding electronic transactions, giving legal effect and making electronic transactions admissible evidence in court procedures and legal disputes, making the formation and enforceability of contracts via electronic methods legal, and officialising the validity of electronic signatures. The ETA also allows public bodies to accept electronic filings, electronic versions of documents, and electronic signatures without having to amend their internal procedures (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011b). The definition

The Electronic Transactions Act 2011 contains requisite provisions of several UNCITRAL model laws but would benefit from specific amendments.

of electronic signature in the ETA, as well as in Sections 29 and 30 of the Act, clearly provides for the legal equivalence of all types of electronic signatures.

In 2020, MTI, MPA and MDT reviewed the Act as part of a wider programme to modernize the legal framework governing trade and business and the operation of the SEW. The review focused on drafting legislative amendments in an effort to modernize the ETA. Two key recommendations from this initiative are the adoption of the MLETR and the removal of exceptions.

Adopted in 2017, the MLETR (UNCITRAL, 2018) enables the use of Electronic Transferable Records (ETRs), which provide a single ecosystem for logistics, finance, and customs single window. If adopted MLETR would enable e-logistics and e-trade financing, as well as facilitate the use of a single ETR with all trade-related data.

Regarding exceptions, Section 6 of the ETA, under the title "Inapplicability of the Act," establishes exceptions that apply to various matters, keeping the legal requirement for writings, signatures and original documents valid for the areas set out under this section. These exceptions include "the production of documents relating to immigration, citizenship or passport matters; or the recognition or endorsement of negotiable instruments." Some of these areas may be interpreted widely or do not have a clear definition, leading to possible constraints to the flow of electronic transactions. The review recommended removing these exceptions to allow the country to take advantage of new technologies and improve operations and public service delivery.

According to the surveyed public and private sector respondents in the context of this assessment, cybercrime legislation and data protection are the two most important factors for creating a legislative and regulatory framework conducive to e-commerce. These two areas will be reviewed in detail in the next sections. Figure 14 below provides a breakdown of the additional factors identified by surveyed stakeholders.

Figure 14
Most important factors for creating a legislative and regulatory framework conducive to e-commerce

In your opinion, how important are the following items for creating a legislative and regulatory framework conducive to the development of electronic commerce? (Public and private sector respondents, 174 answers)
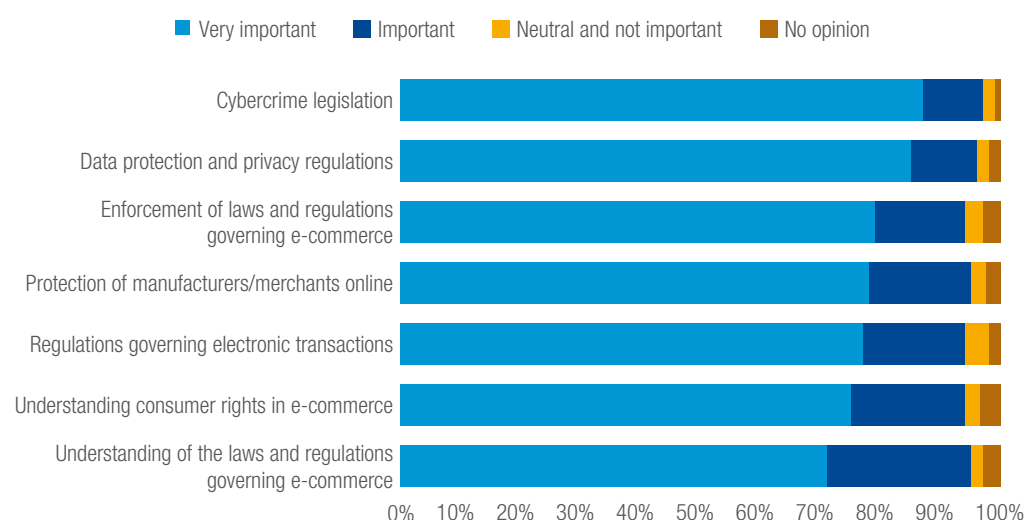
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

When asked whether the regulations currently in place are sufficient to guarantee the safety of the producer, most respondents said, "I don't know" (46 per cent) or "no" (44 per cent). This suggests that citizens are not aware of the existing regulations in place. Additional educational and awareness campaigns on relevant legislation were also suggested during stakeholder consultations.

Most respondents indicated that laws concerning cybercrime and data protection are not enforced, while they noted that consumer protection laws are applied more flexibly, and secure payments regulations are generally enforced more consistently.

5.2 Cybercrime and cybersecurity

The Government has implemented several key legislative instruments and regulatory reforms to govern cybersecurity and cybercrime. The key legislative instruments include several laws and acts. For cybercrime, the primary laws are the Computer Misuse Act of 2000 and the Interception of Communications Act of 2010. Related crimes are addressed through the Data Protection Act of 2011, which is partially promulgated. Other relevant laws include the Children Act of 2012 and the Accessories and Abettors Act of 1975. Specific provisions under these laws address issues such as illegal access (Section 3 of the Computer Misuse Act, 2000), illegal interception (Section 6 of the Computer Misuse Act, 2000, and the Interception of Communications Act, 2010), data interference (Section 5 of the Computer Misuse Act, 2000), system interference (Sections 7 and 11 of the Computer Misuse Act, 2000), and computer-related fraud (Section 4 of the Computer Misuse Act, 2000). The Computer Misuse Act, 2000, also outlines procedures for cybercrime investigations, including search and seizure under Section 16. Additionally, the handling

of electronic evidence is governed by the ETA of 2011, the Evidence Act (Chap. 7:02), and the Evidence (Amendment) Act of 2021.

While the advancement of ICT has brought substantial benefits to many countries and regions, it has also led to the rise in the sophistication of cybercrime. In response, countries around the world have implemented a variety of systems and strategies to combat these threats and protect their citizens from such criminal activities.

Trinidad and Tobago developed a national cybersecurity strategy in 2012, which sought to guide all operations and initiatives related to cybersecurity in the country. It recognized the critical need for an overarching governance framework, appropriate cybercrime legislation and the establishment of a national Cyber Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT) in 2015, through the Ministry of National Security, to respond to cyber incidents. It also acknowledged the importance of building awareness among all stakeholders of their roles and responsibilities in establishing a secure ICT environment. While the CSIRT has been established, the cybercrime regulatory and legal environment remains to be strengthened. In light of the rapid developments within the ICT sector, a revised cybercrime policy will be needed in parallel to revisions to the legal framework.

In addition to the initiatives identified, the CBTT has issued the Cybersecurity Best Practices Guidelines, applicable to institutions regulated by the Bank, while other companies were encouraged to adopt the guidelines (CBTT, 2023).

Trinidad and Tobago is not yet a signatory to the Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention). The country has been invited to accede and the process to join has started. The convention supports building cybercrime resilience and improves information sharing, as well as enhancing international cooperation[6].

> Awareness campaigns on the existing legal framework are essential for empowering individuals to engage in e-commerce.

> Trinidad and Tobago requires a comprehensive new cybercrime policy and an updated legal framework to effectively address cybercrime and enhance cybersecurity.

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[6]   In addition to the Budapest Convention, a draft United Nations Convention against Cybercrime has also recently been finalized and will be considered by the UN General Assembly.

At regional level, CARICOM is currently implementing a Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Action Plan focusing on public awareness, building sustainable capacity, technical standards and infrastructure, the legal environment and regional and international cooperation. While CARICOM Member States have made significant progress in enhancing cybersecurity, there is still a need for a more unified approach and stronger institutional cooperation within the region.

The CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) is engaged in initiatives involving cybersecurity training courses for the police in Trinidad and Tobago. The agency noted an increase in online scams, misinformation, online extortion and other cyberthreats during the pandemic. In 2023 alone, 52 successful cyberattacks were reported in the country (information provided during multi-stakeholder consultations in the context of this assessment).

Stakeholder consultations have highlighted challenges related to the protection from cybercrime within the existing framework. The importance of further strengthening the security protocols for e-payment systems to guard against fraud and breaches was notably highlighted. There is an urgent need to bolster national critical infrastructure and harmonize legislation across CARICOM Member States. The introduction of a specific cybersecurity bill was also suggested to address these issues effectively.

5.3 Data protection

The development of a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework governing data protection and data security issues is a key priority for policymakers. The Government must prioritize the development and implementation of responsible data governance practices to mitigate the potential adverse effects of data usage. This involves pursuing transparent data architectural frameworks, designed to

meet specific data needs alongside adopting an inclusive and people-centred approach to the management, storage, integration, and processing of data. Such measures aim to strike a balance between regulatory adequacy, creativity, innovation, effective utility, and overall functionality. One of the most effective mechanisms to implement safeguards is through robust data protection legislation.

The Data Protection Act, 2011 was partly promulgated on 6 January 2012. Several provisions of the Act are in force, including the general privacy principles along with the establishment of Office of the Information Commissioner. Part III of the Act, which governs the use and handling of personal information held by public bodies, was brought into force, while Part IV of the Act, which governs the use and handling of personal information held by the private sector, is not in force (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 2011a).

MTI, MPA and MDT have been involved in drafting legislative amendments for the modernization of the Data Protection Act in the framework of a project on strengthening the SEW. The Data Protection (Amendment) Act, however, has not yet been enacted due to issues and concerns with certain provisions. This proposed legislation incorporates several new elements to modernize the legislative framework and align with international best practices and standards, including:

- Lawfulness of processing personal information;
- Prevention of Abuse of Power and Implications of Freedom of the Press;
- Introduction of definitions for key terms such as biometric data, data processor, data controller, genetic data, and sensitive personal information;
- Enhancement of the General Privacy Principles;
- Establishment of the duty of the data controller to comply with General Privacy Principles;
- Establishment of the rights of data

subjects;

- Establishment of exceptions for small businesses;
- Framework for data sharing in the public sector; and
- Inclusion of relevant elements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In this context, it is necessary to enable an approach to privacy and information protection that considers both the importance of safeguarding individual data and the practicalities of different organizational contexts.

The analysis in the context of the draft amendments also noted that compliance costs with extensive frameworks, such as those underpinning the GDPR, are extremely high, notably for smaller markets like Trinidad and Tobago, compared to larger markets such as the EU or the US. These costs need to be weighed against the benefits that a robust data protection system could provide, such as increased trust from consumers and improved data security for businesses. In designing data privacy legislation, it is also essential to strive for focused frameworks that enable both data protection and innovation promotion.

Stakeholder consultations held for purposes of this report signalled a general lack of knowledge around the Data Protection Act and its scope. Despite this, there was consensus on the importance of data protection as it plays a critical role for different sectors. For example, in the area of tourism, robust data protection can help build trust and confidence. Stakeholders also expressed concerns that the current draft of the Act is not well-suited to the local context where the majority of the companies are SMEs. With more government agencies adopting e-commerce platforms to enhance service delivery, such as the Ministry of National Security's upcoming e-portal for student permits, visas and passports, finding the right balance between data protection and data sharing on governmental portals will be key for the successful implementation of e-government services. Engaging in discussions with the private sector is also important to ensure their needs are reflected.

5.4 Consumer protection

At present, the functions and mandate of the Consumer Affairs Division are governed by the Trade Descriptions Act Chapter 82:04 (1984) (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 1984) and the Consumer Protection and Safety Act Chapter 82:34 (1985 as amended in 1998) (Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, 1985). Part II of the Consumer Protection and Safety Act addresses the Protection of Consumers and Part IV addresses Consumer Safety. However, while the Act provides a foundation for safeguarding consumer rights, it lacks targeted provisions for online transactions as well as comprehensive measures to address the complexities of modern commerce, particularly in the context of distance selling. Specific issues related to distance selling are those tied to the security and protection of all e-commerce stakeholders, as well as obligations for online vendors in terms of information provision, contract formation, security of payment and personal information.

Additionally, and in relation to the right of redress, the Consumer Protection and Safety Act does not adequately provide for an expedient, accessible and affordable mechanism for the settlement of disputes. Furthermore, there are no legislative provisions granting the Consumer Affairs Division self-initiating investigative powers to investigate legislative breaches in the absence of receiving a complaint.

The National Consumer Policy 2018-2023, modelled after the CARICOM Model Bill, aimed at implementing various policy measures to strengthen the powers and expand the duties of the officers within the Consumer Affairs Division and address the handling of complaints (MTI, 2018a). The policy also intended to inform the development of a new Consumer Protection and Empowerment Law but no information

> Data privacy legislation that considers both economic realities and the importance of protecting personal data is needed.

is available on progress regarding the law.

In view of these shortcomings, it is important to address the critical gaps in consumer protection by reviewing and updating the legislation in alignment with the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNCTAD, 2016).

In parallel, the development and implementation of a National Consumer Policy, designed to complement the revised legislation, is crucial. This policy would ensure that the regulatory framework is equipped to meet the demands of the digital economy, protecting vulnerable consumers, ensuring online product safety, safeguarding consumer data and privacy, and providing accessible mechanisms for dispute resolution. By enacting these reforms and creating a cohesive policy, Trinidad and Tobago can offer consumers the same level of protection in electronic commerce as in traditional commerce, addressing current gaps and future challenges effectively.

5.5 Other related laws, acts and regulations

The current legal framework of Trinidad and Tobago supports an effective electronic evidence regime. Electronic evidence may be used as a complement to paper documents, photographs, magnetic recordings and other physical evidence. It includes emails, server logs, documents on a personal computer, laptop, smartphone or any other electronic device, instant messages, websites, locational evidence and voicemail messages. The principal laws governing electronic evidence are the ETA, Evidence Act Chapter 7:02 and the Evidence (Amendment) Act 2021. The Interception of Communications Act Chapter 15:08 adds to this framework and addresses the admissibility of electronic evidence and defines electronic signatures.

Other concerns in the legal framework relevant to e-commerce include the lack of de minimis threshold, or a minimum value of goods below which customs do not charge duties, lack of progress regarding the amendment of legislation on public procurement and issues with the enforcement of intellectual property regulation (Rogaler, 2023). Regarding the latter, during consultations in the context of this assessment, stakeholders advocated for adequate protection of Intellectual Property Rights associated with advancements and the use of AI.

UNCTAD surveys of the public and private sectors indicate that data protection is perceived as the least enforced area, followed by cybercrime, while consumer/producer protection and secure payments are perceived as enforced more comprehensively and with greater flexibility (Figure 15).

> By reviewing and updating consumer protection legislation along with the necessary regulatory framework, Trinidad and Tobago can address future challenges effectively.

Enforcement of the legal framework

For each of the following dimensions, would you say that the law is applied strictly (with sanctions), broadly (reminder of the rule), flexibly (awareness) or not at all? (Public and private sector respondents, 166 answers)

Legend: Secure payments | Data protection | Consumer/producer protection | Cybercrime

Not enforced
- Secure payments: 21%
- Data protection: 44%
- Consumer/producer protection: 30%
- Cybercrime: 41%

Flexible
- Secure payments: 30%
- Data protection: 26%
- Consumer/producer protection: 42%
- Cybercrime: 32%

Broad
- Secure payments: 17%
- Data protection: 23%
- Consumer/producer protection: 22%
- Cybercrime: 21%

Strict
- Secure payments: 12%
- Data protection: 7%
- Consumer/producer protection: 7%
- Cybercrime: 6%

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

6. E-commerce Skills Development

Trinidad and Tobago has high literacy levels and a supportive environment for increasing e-commerce skills. Digital literacy is prioritised by the National Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027, which aims to increase digital skills through targeted programmes that are easily accessible in convenient locations. However, a digital divide persists, and challenges remain in harnessing local talent to develop a labour force capable of competing in the evolving global economy. Global indicators highlight gaps in creativity and innovation which are critical for the country to position itself competitively on the innovation and digital frontiers.

To ensure successful digital transformation, digital skills must be prioritized within the framework of digital inclusion. This involves not only enhancing ICT skills among public servants, but also focusing on developing skills within the private sector and the broader population through targeted educational initiatives.

6.1 Identification of skill-related gaps

Trinidad and Tobago has consistently invested in education, resulting in a high adult literacy (age 15 and above) rate of 98 per cent as of 2020 based on data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. This provides the country with fertile ground for the further development of relevant ICT and e-commerce skills, critically important for developing a digitally inclusive society. At the same time, the percentage of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) graduates has decreased from 2022 to 2023, from 35.35 per cent to 24.36 per cent (UNESCO, 2023).

Data from the National Digital Inclusion Survey 2021 (TATT, 2022) reveal that ICT competencies are more prevalent among the youth (aged 15-24) compared to the adult population. Among youth, 86 per cent possess basic ICT skills, 41 per cent have standard skills, and 4 per cent demonstrate advanced skills. For adults,

these figures are 73 per cent, 30 per cent, and 4 per cent, respectively. The relatively low levels of advanced skills, particularly among the youth, suggests the need for targeted interventions across educational institutions and workplaces to further enhance digital capabilities.

The UNDP Digital Readiness Assessment also identified weaknesses in the local digital workforce. Innovation initiatives often fail to engage young citizens and many private sector respondents believe that local universities are not equipping students with the digital skills needed for the labour market. Additionally, there are limited opportunities for STEM graduates to contribute to digital innovation (UNDP, 2022). In 2023, Trinidad and Tobago ranked 102nd out of 132 economies on the Global Innovation Index, lower than expected for its development level (Dutta2023). The 2022 Labour Skills Assessment for the Information Communication Technology Platform and Services Sub-Sector provides further insights regarding the possible skills related

Low levels of advanced ICT skills (at 4 per cent for both youth and adults) call for targeted interventions.

gaps in these areas (MPD, 2022). Its main objective is to match skills demand and skills supply by providing recommendations for mitigating skills gaps. Within the ICT platforms and services sector, the Assessment found that the most commonly reported positions that provided recruitment challenges included programmers and software developers, senior software developers, technical salespersons and cybersecurity specialists. The main reasons for these challenges were related to lack of experience, talent flight, intense competition for talent from both the private and public sectors and the attractive compensation from foreign competition present in the local market. In order to overcome some of these challenges and shorten the recruitment cycle, many employers rely on referrals as their main recruitment strategy (MPD, 2022).

A key deliverable of the assessment is a forecast of occupational areas, positions and skills that will be in demand over the next five years within the ICT sector. Identified emerging trends in terms of labour skills include the use of open-source technologies, AI, robotic process automation (RPA) and intelligent automation (IA), big data and cloud computing, blockchain, cryptocurrencies and bitcoin, and a growing prevalence of ransomware attacks. Other areas include knowledge of green ICT technologies, as well as cybersecurity skills (MPD, 2022). It would be important, following up on these findings, to identify areas with growing demand to analyse the consumer and business demand and evaluate how regulations, government policies, and incentives might influence market opportunities, especially in sectors like AI and big data. Conducting a targeted market analysis to understand industry trends, growth potential, and emerging technologies would provide valuable guidance in navigating these developments.

The national educational system must also be viewed as a core vehicle, through which challenges in respect of e-commerce skills development can be addressed for all national stakeholders. The assessment of the ICT platforms and services sector demonstrated significant issues in education and training systems, such as poor resource allocation for technical and vocational education training (TVET) activities, siloed operations among departments, and a lack of a competency-based framework. To address the shortcomings, the assessment recommended reform of the education system to better align with labour market needs and new ICT technologies, with targeted planning, improving training quality, and fostering stronger partnerships between educational providers and the industry (MPD, 2022).

In terms of gender gap, there is no gender-disaggregated data regarding levels of ICT skills in the Digital Inclusion Survey. The available findings from the UNDP Digital Readiness Assessment highlight that women are less satisfied with their digital skills and less engaged in the potential of digital developments in comparison to men, highlighting a need for targeted efforts to increase women's participation in the digital space. The Labour Skills Assessment also indicated gender-specific issues. It noted that the ICT services and platforms sector is largely male dominated in the technical areas, with women only accounting for 33 per cent of those positions, while more than 50 per cent of administrative roles are held by women.

Responses from public and private stakeholders collected in the context of this assessment highlighted several key factors essential for fostering the skills needed to advance e-commerce. These include capacity-building programmes for MSMEs, awareness on opportunities for SMEs and e-commerce consumer awareness programmes, and knowledge of digital marketing (Figure 16).
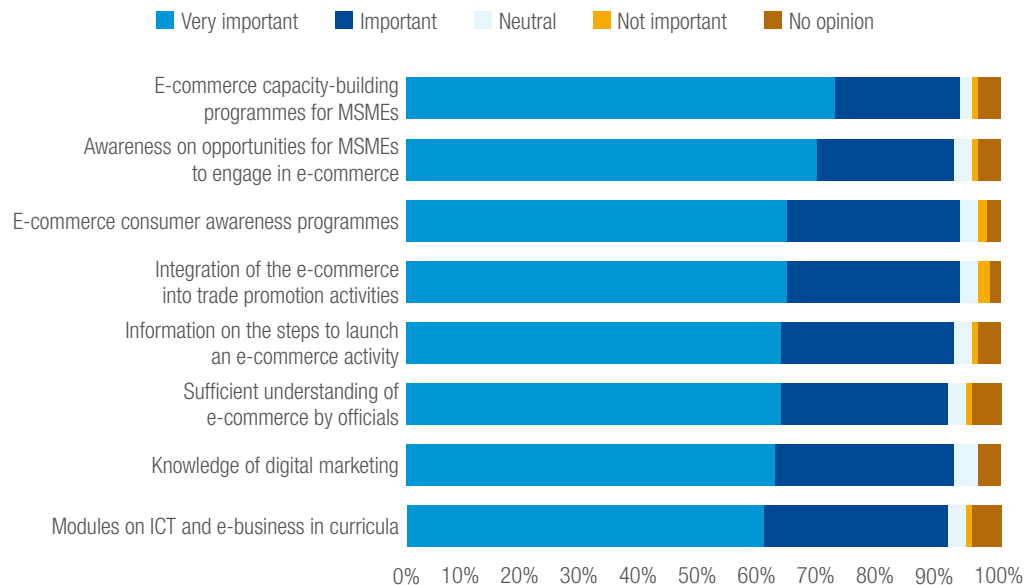
> Lack of experience, talent flight, and attractive compensation from foreign competition are among the causes for the lack of various specialists.

> There is potential for women to be more actively engaged in the digital space, which can drive greater participation in e-commerce.

Most important factors in ensuring an adequate level of skills conducive for e-commerce
Please evaluate the following items according to their level of importance for ensuring an adequate level of e-commerce skills in your country (Public and private sector respondents, 169 answers)

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

> E-commerce training does not currently meet the country's needs for e-commerce and digital economy development.

According to private sector stakeholders, the current ICT training and educational system does not meet the country's needs for the development of e-commerce and the digital economy, neither at the University Technical Training level nor at the level of training programmes dedicated to start-ups or MSMEs or continuing education programmes (Figure 17).

Current ICT training versus needs in terms of e-commerce and the digital economy
Does current ICT training offer meets the country's needs for the development of e-commerce and the digital economy? (Private sector respondents, 98 answers)

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

Importantly, in terms of mastery of their own skills for running a business, private sector responses revealed that respondents felt they had complete mastery directly related to their specific field of business. For other skill sets, there was a general perception of limited proficiency, with many identifying these areas as priorities for improvement (Figure 18).

Figure 18
Skills required for running a business

How would you rate your own mastery of the following skills for running your business? (Private sector respondents, 108 answers)
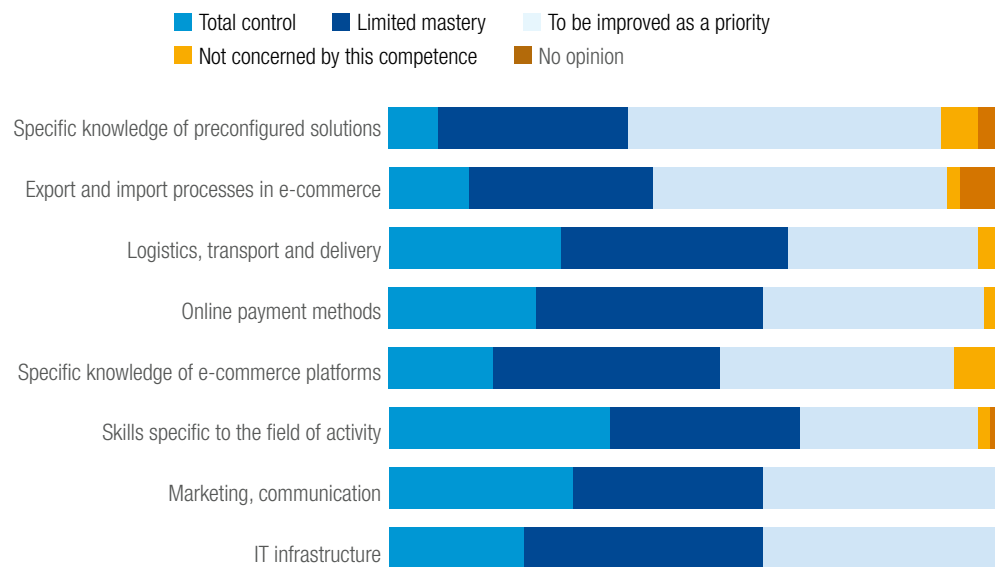
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

6.2 Initiatives aimed at the development of skills

The National Digital Transformation Strategy led by MDT demonstrates the country's commitment to fostering digital skills development as a cornerstone of its growth. Identifying and developing the right set of skills and competencies within government and society at large are among the core values of the strategy.

In this context, one of MDT's important initiatives is the Digital Skills Development Programme, WeLearnTT, which provides access to training and mentorship in the use and application of digital technology. The programme aims to bridge the digital divide by providing accessible and comprehensive training to all citizens from diverse backgrounds. WeLearnTT offers a range of opportunities open to all citizens, which include ICT Vacation Camps, Digital Literacy Programmes and technical training through one of the Ministry's flagship projects, Developers Hub (D'Hub), and partners, such as Linux Foundation, CISCO, Coursera and Commonwealth of Learning (Simplilearn). By tailoring these initiatives to meet a wide range of backgrounds, skill levels and interests, the Ministry is creating a more inclusive digital ecosystem. Moreover, recognizing the unique challenges faced by women in the technology sector, the Ministry has already launched specific programmes to enhance women's ICT skills, further advancing its vision of a digitally empowered society.

In response to the identified need for more development opportunities for local talent, MDT launched the D'Hub with the primary goal of empowering the country's software development community and nurturing a future generation equipped to lead the digital transformation journey. This initiative serves as a vibrant platform for both seasoned and aspiring developers to deepen their expertise in software development and acquire the essential skills, tools and opportunities to advance their careers or successfully launch their own businesses. Members of D'Hub benefit from a range of valuable resources, including specialized courses and mentorship, positioning them to thrive in the evolving digital landscape (MDT, 2023b).

The Ministry of Education is also taking steps in implementing strategies to enhance school connectivity and digital literacy through devices and programmes, fostering a supportive ecosystem for e-learning.

> According to national stakeholders, key areas for e-commerce training are digital marketing, online customer service, e-commerce platforms, and logistics management.

Stakeholder consultations in the context of the assessment emphasized the critical need to align education with the evolving demands of the digital and e-commerce sectors, from consumers to producers, providers and the labour force. An in-depth analysis of e-commerce skills, building on existing assessments, could be a starting point to identify remaining gaps. The promotion of digital literacy among consumers and businesses is key for leveraging the benefits of e-commerce and the digital economy. Raising awareness and understanding of the benefits and risks associated with e-commerce among the broad population is essential for fostering a more informed and engaged society.

Some specific suggestions by stakeholders included:

- Developing targeted e-commerce training, covering topics such as digital marketing, online customer service, e-commerce platforms, and logistics management, with interventions at different levels of education;

- Integrating digital literacy and basic e-commerce education into the school curriculum to ensure students in rural areas have access to essential skills;

- Including e-commerce or other on-the-job training programmes through the national employment services;

- Providing government support through funding for training programmes and incentives for businesses to invest in digital skills training;

- Offering continuous professional development through online courses and workshops on the latest e-commerce trends and technologies; and

- Engaging in community outreach to raise awareness of the benefits of e-commerce and available training opportunities by advertising on local media, engaging community leaders and holding events to engage residents.

Specific support for women, youth, rural communities and persons with disabilities will promote further inclusion in relevant e-commerce skills. Rural communities highlighted the lack of government presence in those areas as a particular challenge, hampering access to information, training and overall e-commerce engagement. Programmes for persons with disabilities were discussed in the context of this assessment and remain an area for development. The Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of Disabled People International highlighted the need for assistive technology and increased accessibility requirements, as well as improved access to the government.

6.3 Digital skills in higher education

Relevant digital skills, as well as business and entrepreneurship skills have been increasingly prioritized by higher education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. A prime example of this commitment is the University of the West Indies (UWI) Research Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem. This initiative fosters research and promotes entrepreneurship by leveraging a network of

faculties, specialized units, industry experts, and entrepreneurship training programmes. It is an example of the focus placed on tertiary education and its entrepreneurial dimensions. During stakeholder consultations, UWI flagged the importance of including e-business and e-commerce in higher education as well as to engage smaller businesses in fully understanding the relevance and impact of e-commerce at the national, regional and global levels.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) presents valuable opportunities through its Caribbean Cybersecurity Institute launched in 2023. The ICT programme offers Diplomas, a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Computer Engineering and a Master of Science (MSc). The university's partnership with stakeholders in industry is a crucial factor that ensures the merit, appeal and importance of the programme for potential undergraduate students in society. The curriculum was designed with leading business and industry partners

such as IBM, Microsoft, Fujitsu, the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago and Digicel Corporation to ensure the programme can supply graduates that meet the demand for ICT professionals in the Government, as well as private and public sectors of the economy.

In addition, the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAAT), offers various courses that provide instruction on IT and e-commerce. Finally, as regards technical and vocational education, opportunities are offered by the MIC Institute of Technology, which has a Multi-Sector Skills Training (MuST) Programme and features a Centre for Renewable Energy & Associated Technologies (CREATe), as well as the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC) and the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme.

7. Access to Financing

Trinidad and Tobago has witnessed a gradual shift in the mindset of consumers and businesses with respect to digital banking transactions, supported by an increasingly innovative banking sector offering a diverse array of financial products. Significant strides have also been made for promoting start-ups, creating financing opportunities for MSMEs, and promoting the country as a fintech hub. However, MSMEs still face numerous challenges in accessing the support conducive to e-commerce, often leading to financial exclusion especially from traditional sources of finance. The requirements MSMEs face in accessing finance are often onerous, creating additional challenges for their growth and sustainability.

7.1 Scope and depth of the financial system

Trinidad and Tobago has an estimated 25,000 MSMEs, representing 90 per cent of all registered businesses.

The banking sector is regulated by CBTT. The Financial Institutions Act 2008 regulates eight commercial banks, supported by an extensive network of 123 branches (Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, 2024). Additionally, the sector includes 16 regulated non-bank financial institutions and four regulated financial holding companies. The products and services offered by the banking sector include TTD- and $- savings and investment instruments, foreign exchange dealings, money market instruments, trade financing, project financing, as well as the floating and underwriting of shares and bonds. The commercial banks remain the single largest group of financial institutions in terms of assets. Two of the locally owned banks have established a commercial presence in various territories in the Caribbean (Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, 2024).

The banking sector offers a diverse range of products and services, including retirement plans denominated in US currency, individual annuity plans, and mutual funds including offshore equity funds. Banks are also playing a central role in the development of the money market. Migration to chip and pin technology, which provides an additional security layer in cards and online transactions, also demonstrates the country's resolve to counter card fraud (Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, 2024).

Within the financial system, MSMEs play a vital role, contributing significantly to economic growth and job creation. While official data on the size and contribution of the MSME sector is difficult to source, the CSO conducted its Business Establishments Statistics Survey in 2018, the latest publicly available data, dividing business establishments according to region and employment size group. Table 2 below presents a comprehensive overview of the survey results, highlighting the dominance of smaller business establishments. Notably, the largest segment consists of businesses with the smallest employment sizes (CSO, 2018).

Table 2
Employment in Trinidad and Tobago

Region Employment size group	0-1	2-4	5-9	10-24	25-49	50-99	100-249	250-500	501-999
Tobago	609	168	101	64	12	11	5	3	0
Port of Spain	799	792	561	465	160	107	69	24	11
Mayaro/Rio Claro	276	53	29	25	16	5	1	1	0
Sangre Grande	407	94	60	46	12	6	1	0	1
Princes Town	456	124	65	49	17	12	5	0	0
Penal/Debe	455	229	122	94	36	18	8	3	1
Siparia	485	128	66	58	25	11	5	6	1
San Fernando	369	387	209	206	83	40	17	8	3
Arima	229	116	64	53	18	12	12	3	0
Chaguanas	290	258	120	118	32	16	8	5	3
Point Fortin	144	61	28	15	13	4	2	0	0
Diego Martin	428	324	155	116	51	27	11	5	0
San Juan/Laventille	755	389	234	200	90	58	31	19	8
Tunapuna/Piarco	804	474	214	185	99	38	44	19	3
Couva/Tabaquite/ Talparo	1045	400	196	163	89	43	36	19	6

Source: CSO, 2018

According to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, an estimated 25,000 registered businesses or 90 per cent of all registered businesses in Trinidad and Tobago were recognized as micro or small in 2020. Their most significant economic activities are retail and distribution (60 per cent), personal services (16 per cent), finance, insurance, real estate and business services (11 per cent) and construction (6 per cent) (Ministry of Labour, 2020). This represents a significant proportion of businesses that can expand their opportunities through e-commerce.

7.2 Key challenges faced by MSMEs in accessing finance

When surveyed, private sector respondents (the majority of which are MSMEs) indicated the following as key factors for creating access to finance conducive to the development of e-commerce in the country: awareness of bank loan officers to the particularities of MSMEs, availability of instruments for access to finance, and awareness of MSMEs of the different types and modes of financing (Figure 19).

Figure 19

Most important factors for creating access to finance conducive for e-commerce

Please evaluate the following items according to their level of importance for creating access to finance conducive to the development of e-commerce in your country (Private sector respondents, 91 answers)

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

> An estimated 77 per cent of MSMEs do not own a business bank account, a major impediment for access to finance.
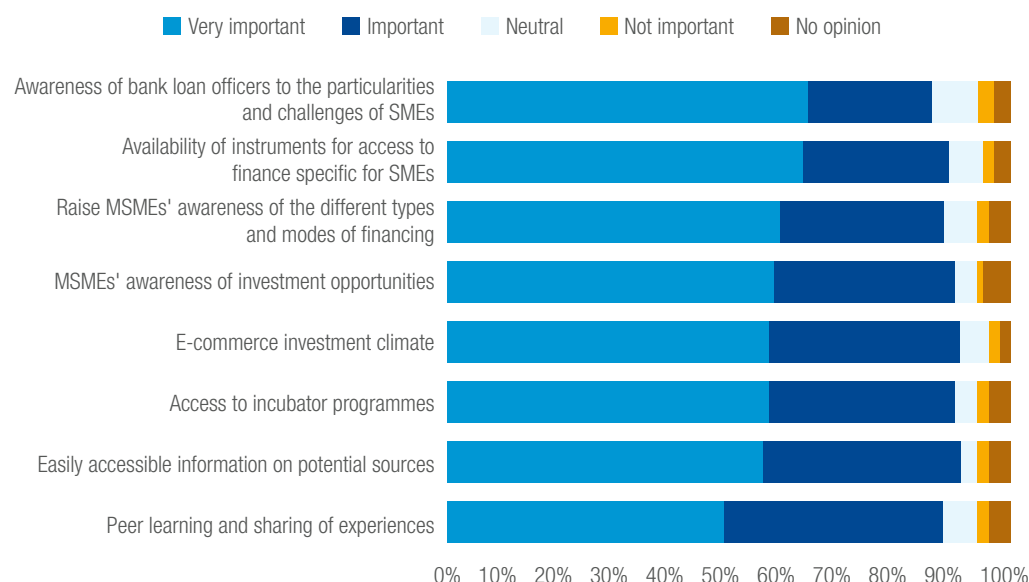
MSMEs face challenges in accessing financial products and services, with a significant portion of these businesses unserved or underserved by the financial system (Dhanessar, 2023)

The National Financial Inclusion Survey Report 2023 consolidated the findings indicating that approximately 77 per cent of MSMEs (the survey focused on responses from MSMEs at the household level) do not own a business bank account. The report further identified that there are significant challenges for MSMEs in accessing business accounts and being able to participate in the formal economy. Challenges faced include the inability to meet the application requirements due to complicated application processes and a lack of documentation (TTIFC, 2024).

In addition, the requirements and conditions for financing pose significant barriers for MSMEs seeking access to funding. Many financial institutions mandate the submission of business registration documents, including VAT, tax and Board of Inland Revenue (BIR) registration. While this may not be an issue for large and many medium-sized businesses, it can be a deterrent for numerous MSMEs that are unregistered or unincorporated (Dhanessar, 2023). A criterion for some financial support programmes is that the firm must be in operation for a minimum number of years, which can present issues for new business entrants to the market. Another obstacle is the requirement of evidence of financial ability to satisfy costs related to certain projects or even to fully fund a project and before applying for reimbursement. Lack of awareness regarding available financing options is another potential reason identified in the Dhanessar 2023 analysis. Supporting this, the 2024 Private Sector Survey by UNCTAD reveals that a significant 78 per cent of the 91 MSME respondents primarily rely on self-financing.

In an effort to deepen the capital markets and improve the attractiveness of listing on the equity market, the GoRTT enacted legislation via the Finance Act on 17 December 2021, to include tax incentives to encourage MSMEs to seek alternative equity financing by listing on the Stock Exchange. These tax incentives became applicable from January 2022.

Newly listed SMEs will automatically benefit from:

- A full tax holiday for the first five years (exemption from the payment of Corporation tax, Business Levy and Green Fund Levy), and
- A 50 per cent reduction in taxes for the second five-year period (Corporation Tax, Business Levy and Green Fund Levy).

MPD proposed several additional support mechanisms during stakeholder consultations in the framework of this assessment, including the establishment of a secured transactions and collateral registry system. MPA also proposed expanding government-backed loan programmes with more favourable terms and simplifying loan application processes. Overall stakeholder feedback converged on the usefulness of simplifying loan processes, offering grants, providing opportunities for lower-tier business bank accounts and financial literacy programmes.

7.3 Types of financing

While access to credit is crucial for the growth and development of MSMEs, many firms experience financial exclusion and a financing gap, especially from traditional sources of finance. A survey conducted by the CBTT in December 2022 revealed that most MSMEs intended to use financing for growth and expansionary investments. However, access to financing was a major challenge with firms receiving approximately 16.3 per cent to 25.3 per cent of the requested funding. The survey determined that the large financing gap was due to several factors, such as collateral requirements, company age, document deficiencies and credit history. The main reason for rejections was insufficient collateral (Dhanessar, 2023).

Recent data indicates that credit to the private sector has been steadily increasing from 2012 to 2020, with the commercial banking sector serving as the main provider. However, private sector credit as a percentage of total loans underwent a slight decline from 89.8 per cent in 2012 to 83.6 per cent in 2020. Medium to large enterprises retain a large proportion of credit from the banking sector, while unincorporated or micro and small businesses, account for a very small share of loans from commercial banks and national financial institutions (NFIs). As a result, these smaller players often rely on alternative funding sources including personal savings, capital from family and friends (Dhanessar, 2023).

An analysis of alternative financing in Trinidad and Tobago, indicated that traditional sources of credit such as banks and credit unions remain the most well-known across all firm sizes and years of operation. According to the data, 95 per cent of respondents identified banks, and 87 per cent recognized credit unions as familiar credit sources. Government programmes and development banks were also popular, particularly among microenterprises. While the majority of firms were less familiar with innovative sources of financing, the study noted that over one-third of respondents (34 per cent) were aware of crowdfunding as a source of financing, while around 27 per cent had heard of the capital markets, and venture capitalists or angel investors. Firms in operation for less than 10 years demonstrated high awareness of Internet-based financing, which aligns with the digital platforms where these sources are often advertised. This trend mirrors the global shift towards online financing innovations. In contrast, a greater proportion of older firms showed the greatest familiarity with capital markets, which have traditionally been a more established and recognized

> The simplification of loan processes, the provision of grants, the introduction of lower-tier business bank accounts and financial literacy programmes will assist MSMEs engagement in e-commerce.

source of financing (Duke, 2023).

According to the same study, 44 per cent of firms reported not applying for financing within the last five years. Of those, 70 per cent cited overwhelming requirements or a belief that they lacked essential documentation, such as financial statements or sufficient operational history, as the primary reasons for not applying. Another finding of the study is that many firms preferred to seek financial support from family and friends rather than development banks and other non-bank financial institutions. Additionally, applicants flagged that they had more success securing financing from credit unions, family, and friends compared to non-traditional credit

providers. Key recommendations of the study to promote alternative means of financing for MSMEs included improving financial literacy among MSMEs, building awareness around alternative finance options, and enhancing the regulatory framework as solutions (Duke, 2023).

These findings align with the more recent survey results held in the context of this assessment. When asked about their sources of direct monetary financing, private sector survey respondents indicated as the three biggest primary sources: banks, family/friends and state aid. In contrast, the majority reported receiving little to no funding from venture capital, seed fund and micro-funding options (Figure 20).

Figure 20

Source from which private sector entities are able to secure direct monetary financing

Have you already secured direct monetary financing from one of the following entities? (Private sector survey 91)
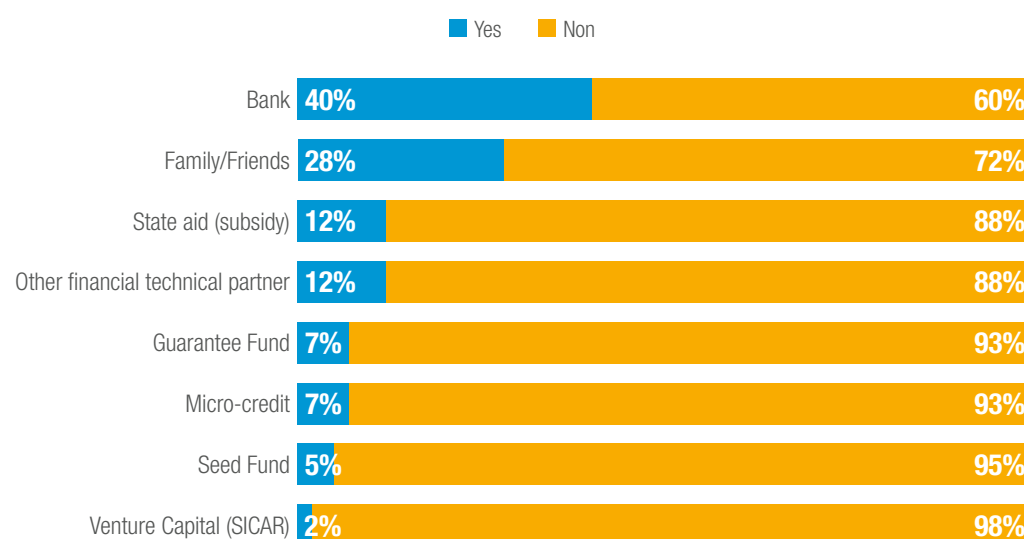
Source: UNCTAD, 2024

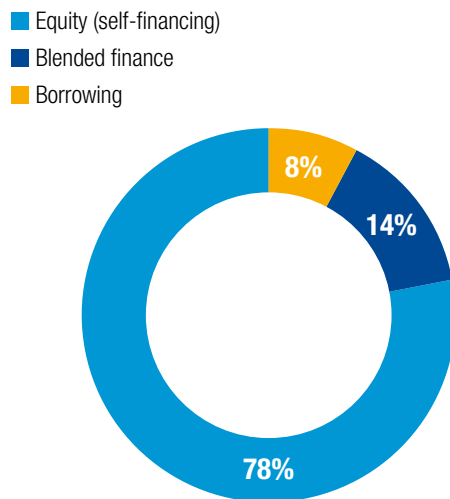Regarding e-commerce specifically, the private sector surveys reveal that the majority (78 per cent) of private sector entities had to self-finance.

Figure 21
How did you finance your investment in e-commerce?
(Private sector respondents, 91 answers)

- Equity (self-financing)
- Blended finance
- Borrowing

Source: UNCTAD, 2024

Stakeholder consultations indicated the critical need for MSMEs to understand business and financial planning, as well as the availability of services available such as mentorship programmes. They also pointed to the importance of training investors to better engage with small businesses and understand the unique characteristics of MSMEs in the local context.

Addressing collateral challenges could involve bolstering the national framework for the efficient use of a movable collateral registry. The Government could play a pivotal role in supporting such efforts by building on previous initiatives and incorporating lessons learned from both domestic and international experiences.

7.4 Country's entrepreneurial and start-up ecosystem

Trinidad and Tobago has made significant strides in fostering entrepreneurship and early-stage innovation, while expanding its range of financing schemes. The National Integrated Business Incubator System (IBIS), established in 2011 by the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and implemented by the National Economic Development Company (NEDCO), remains a cornerstone of the country's growing business ecosystem. By providing crucial support to SMEs, IBIS has contributed to the sustainable development of local businesses.

Despite ongoing challenges in accessing traditional financing, Trinidad and Tobago is well positioned to capitalize on the fintech movement in alternative finance with the launch of supportive initiatives such as the Innovation Hub and the Regulatory Sandbox of 2020 (Duke, 2023).

Trinidadian start-ups like AnglPay, Drop and Weeve are at the forefront of enabling digital commerce across the Caribbean, working to ensure fast, reliable, and secure digital payments for citizens and businesses of all sizes. In a major step towards modernizing the payments landscape, Visa, Infolink and most of the leading national financial institutions have recently completed the migration of their debit cards to the first dual-branded Visa-LINX debit contactless chip card. This milestone establishes the foundation for further digitalization of payments, the integration of new technologies and enable fintech and other stakeholders to grow their businesses (TNT&T, 2023).

Various other initiatives at the regional and national levels were put in place to accelerate digital transformation and promote digitally-enhanced business ecosystems and start-ups, such as:

- Unit Trust Corporation's 'Urpreneur' initiative,
- ScaleUp Trinidad and Tobago.
- Start-Up Accelerator established by Tech Beach Retreat.
- UTT uSTART physical incubator, and
- UWI BizBooster virtual incubators.

> Trinidad and Tobago has made strides in entrepreneurship with a dynamic start-up ecosystem supported by incubators, government policies, and initiatives.

7.5 Support from incubators, accelerators, venture capitalists and donors

Trinidad and Tobago boasts a dynamic start-up ecosystem supported by numerous incubators, government policies, and initiatives designed to foster entrepreneurship. The Government, along with private sector partners, have launched programmes and initiatives to support the growth of tech start-ups. Incubators and accelerators provide mentorship, funding, and resources to budding entrepreneurs, helping them transform their ideas into viable businesses. Of note are initiatives like Shaping the Future of Innovation and the Youth Innovation Lab, UWI's St. Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and the Chocolate Factory. This entrepreneurial spirit led by innovation leaders CARIRI, UWI, UTT, the Innovation Association of Trinidad and Tobago and others is fostering innovation in various sectors, including fintech, e-commerce, healthcare and education (Herbert, 2023).

Several support programmes for MSMEs across all sectors are implemented. The National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO, 2024) is geared towards supporting MSMEs in achieving their business goals. It assists them to be financially capable and competitive, while ensuring their business operations are compliant with the requirements specific to their sector. NEDCO provides small business financing to MSMEs, a business accelerator, as well as a range of training options for entrepreneurs. Additional support entities include the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) and the Enterprise Development Division of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

The Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, an implementing agency of MTI, also facilitates initiatives to promote MSME exports as part of its overall goal to provide services to strengthen a sustainable and diversified export sector. One key initiative is the Export Booster Initiative which supports

several key programmes. Among these is the export accelerator, designed to develop the export capabilities of companies with limited export experience but significant growth potential. Another key programme is the in-market promotions which provides support for companies' market development activities (ExporTT, 2024a).

Furthermore, support to the start-up ecosystem is also provided through donors and UN partners. In particular, the European Union is funding an initiative on digital financial inclusion in partnership with UNCDF, as well as the Ministry of Finance and TTIFC. The recent developments on financial inclusion such as the 2023 Financial Inclusion Survey, informing the future financial inclusion strategy, as well as One FinTech Avenue are supported through this initiative (UNCDF, 2024). Other key support programmes for financial inclusion are provided by IDB and CAF. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has supported the development of the fintech ecosystem (e.g., the Joint Regulatory Hub, launching a Regulatory Sandbox, developing the payment system, and strengthening cybersecurity).

In line with the National Innovation Policy, which has promoted greater private investment towards innovation, the Shaping the Future of Innovation project (2021), backed by the MPD, and in partnership with the EU, IDB Lab and CARIRI aims to spur private sector-led innovation that can contribute to new growth, exports and direct and indirect jobs/livelihoods. The project has strengthened the local innovation ecosystem through its annual innovation challenges (with four annual calls for grant proposals to date), its matching platform for research, development and innovation, as well as support for reporting on innovation indicators to facilitate planning and policymaking (CARIRI, 2024).

FIT 4 Europe II is a project to prepare exporters to increase business in the European Union, using market access opportunities under regional integration agreements like the Economic Partnership

Agreement (EPA) and the CARICOM Single Market Economy (CSME). It also supports initiatives to internationalizing MSMEs via a collective approach to business upgrading, standards-setting, certification, and capacity-building.

Trinidad and Tobago is also benefiting from the International Trade Centre's SheTrades initiatives since 2015. This initiative aims to unlock markets and create an enabling business environment for female-owned SMEs, in particular through gender-responsive policies, gender-lens investments, women as economic actors, women entrepreneurs and stakeholder networks. It facilitates market access and access to finance for women. The SheTrades initiative has so far generated a pipeline of over 30 impact investors, committing over $75 million to gender-lens investment globally (ExporTT, 2024b).

Enhanced information regarding available programmes and financing can be important in strengthening entrepreneurs in the country. About 84 per cent of the respondents to the private sector survey conducted in the context of this report stated that they have never benefited from an incubation programme/start-up support programme. Of those that did benefit from such a programme, most relied on a public programme.

> Raising awareness about available support programmes and financing opportunities is essential.

Box 3
The experience of a rural small enterprise with e-commerce

The Alliance of Rural Communities of Trinidad & Tobago (ARC) founded in 2014 has increasingly focused on e-commerce to support rural businesses. After initially concentrating on cacao and chocolate-making, ARC launched an online ordering and purchasing platform in 2021, utilizing Google forms and social media to reach out to customers. Payments were made either by cash on delivery or via online banking transfer. This approach expanded the range of clients. In 2022, ARC further extended its reach by developing a website (www.chocolaterebellion.com) mainly targeting US customers, which has boosted export opportunities.

As a facilitator and advocate for rural communities, ARC has observed that government and the private sector support programmes for MSMEs rarely reach rural areas. This is due to several factors such as lack of information, prohibitive costs associated with opening a bank account, the complexity of preparing necessary documentation, poor Internet connectivity, and a general lack of trust. To level the playing field, it is important to recognize that rural communities have distinct culture, needs and profit margins compared to businesses in urban areas and tailored solutions are necessary to support their growth.

To further promote e-commerce in rural areas, ARC advocates for better Internet access, simplified business registration, and increased trust-building initiatives with financial and governmental entities.

Source: UNCTAD on the basis of an interview with Kelly Fitzjames of the Alliance for Rural Communities

More can be done also in terms of inclusion to ensure that women, youth, people in rural areas and persons with disabilities are aware of opportunities for financing and become engaged in scaling up businesses. Further information on the challenges facing rural communities is available in Box 3 above.

In the case of women entrepreneurs, for example, despite existing initiatives to promote women-led businesses in the country, approximately 90 per cent of private sector respondents to the survey by UNCTAD indicated they were not aware of any programmes to promote women's involvement.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, Trinidad and Tobago has made significant strides in its digital transformation. These advances have been driven by a series of policy, institutional and regulatory reforms, shaped by national, regional and international commitments. At the national level, the National E-commerce Strategy 2017-2021, along with its implemented interventions, has enhanced the country's standing in e-commerce and cross-border trade.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the vital role of online activities, especially e-commerce, in boosting the national business environment and accelerating the digital economy's growth. These efforts have positioned Trinidad and Tobago as a more resilient, digitally-integrated economy.

However, several challenges still need to be addressed by the upcoming E-commerce Strategy 2025-2030 to further propel Trinidad and Tobago on its trajectory of digital economy growth. Strengthening institutional cooperation among key stakeholders will ensure that policy and strategy interventions are complementary, reduce the incidence of duplication of efforts and prevent inefficient resource allocations.

There has been notable progress in respect of the development of ICT infrastructure. However, efforts are still required to strengthen access for underserved areas and affordability for lower-income households. The implementation of the Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2027 will be essential for addressing these issues.

Customs procedures/port customs should also be transformed in order to leverage e-commerce fully with a reported lack of coordination among public sector agencies. Despite the progress achieved, further interoperability and data exchange among trade platforms will be necessary to improve trade facilitation.

The national payment landscape is principally characterized by cash usage with little confidence placed in online payments and related transactions. Consideration must be given to the means for building a culture of trust and confidence in the online payment regime, as well as expanding payment options for MSMEs. The areas of e-Money and fintech can be further strengthened by the endorsement of national policy frameworks.

Legislative reform is also needed to strengthen regimes that relate to electronic transactions, cybercrime and cybersecurity, as well as data protection to address concerns presented by the advancement of technology.

While the Consumer Protection and Safety Act establishes a foundation for safeguarding consumer rights, it lacks the comprehensive measures needed to address the complexities of e-commerce and updating the regime is needed to ensure adequate protection. Prioritizing legal reform should also be accompanied by strengthening the enabling regulatory environment to promote e-commerce.

Regarding relevant e-commerce skills, there are notable barriers to innovation and other shortcomings. The national educational system must be viewed as a core vehicle, through which challenges in respect of e-commerce skills development can be addressed for all national stakeholders. Promoting enhanced information on e-commerce and inclusion efforts for women, youth, people in rural areas and persons with disabilities should be considered as a cross-cutting priority.

Access to financing continues to be a challenge confronting businesses, particularly MSMEs. Greater emphasis must be placed on developing policies, which consider the realities and vulnerabilities of MSMEs and strategic recommendations are to be advanced within this context.

The Way Forward: Action Matrix

1.	E-commerce Readiness Assessment and Strategy Formulation			
No.	**Indicative Action**	**Expected Results**	**Priority Level**	**Potential Support by**
1.1	Further enhance the coordination and implementation of e-commerce related policies through the national e-commerce committee and improved governance mechanisms for e-commerce.	Coherent and effective coordination achieved among stakeholders and national strategic frameworks.	High	MTI in collaboration with other relevant Ministries, UNCTAD
1.2	Reflect an inclusive participatory and cross-sectoral approach with collaborative interventions from the private sector, civil society and academia.	An inclusive ecosystem with contributions from public and private sector, civil society and academia.	High	MTI in collaboration with other relevant Ministries, UNCTAD
1.3	Implement the National E-commerce Strategy 2025-2030 in alignment with the envisaged actions of other relevant policy frameworks.	E-commerce reforms implementation aligned with relevant national and sectoral strategies.	High	MTI in collaboration with other relevant Ministries, UNCTAD, ECLAC
1.4	Develop comprehensive statistics on domestic and cross-border e-commerce. Join the Task Group on measuring e-commerce value, established under UNCTAD's Working Group on measuring e-commerce and the digital economy.	Statistics and data-collection processes enhanced across concerned government agencies.	High	CSO, MTI, UNCTAD, ECLAC
1.5	Enhance regional collaboration on e-commerce and digital trade with regional institutions, agencies and frameworks such as the CARICOM Secretariat and other CARICOM institutions, the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean and others.	Regional cooperation and coordination strengthened in respect of digital trade, and synergies pursued to yield greater benefits.	Medium	MTI, other relevant public sector institutions, regional organizations, ECLAC

2.	ICT Infrastructure and Services			
No.	**Indicative Action**	**Expected Results**	**Priority Level**	**Potential Support by**
2.1	Engage in further development of underserved areas in terms of: • data access and quality of service; • distribution of mobile Internet data; and • cost assessment and monitoring.	Accessibility to and affordability of connectivity improved.	High	MDT, TATT, private sector, civil society, UNDP, ECLAC

2.2	Develop ICT affordability programmes through subsidization of Internet access points and specific subsidy programmes for low-income, underprivileged and rural communities.	Increased affordability, access and uptake of ICT.	High	MDT; TATT, Ministry of Finance and MPD

3.	**Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation**			
No.	**Indicative Action**	**Expected Results**	**Priority Level**	**Potential Support by**
3.1	Continue postal reform including efforts to promote the reach and reliability of TTPost.	More reliable and effective postal operations.	Medium	TTPost, UPU
3.2	Facilitate further interoperability and the exchange of data among government trade and related online systems such as TTBizLink, ASYCUDA, the postal CDS and the PCS.	Efficiency of trade facilitation processes improved through the full leveraging and interoperation of online system.	High	Port Authority, Ministry of Trade, TTPost, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Finance, Customs and Excise Division, and key transport agencies, UNCTAD
3.3	Implement outstanding commitments under the WTO TFA.	Global trade competitiveness heightened and ease of doing business in and with Trinidad and Tobago enhanced, through improved and efficient trade facilitation measures.	High	Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Finance, Customs and Excise Division, other relevant agencies
3.4	Implement WCO Immediate Release guidelines to expedite the clearance/release of goods.	Improved clearance/release of goods.	High	Customs and Excise Division
3.5	Enhance effectiveness of the customs clearance procedure by fully adopting ASYCUDA's risk management framework and tools.	Improved effectiveness of the customs clearance procedure.	High	Customs and Excise Division, UNCTAD
3.6	Join the WTO ITA I and II.	Tariff free import of ICT goods.	High	Ministry of Trade, WTO
3.7	Continue the introduction and implementation of the Port Community System and ensure overall efficiency (including the necessary border regulatory personnel to facilitate customs clearance).	Improved efficiency of import and export processes resulting from institutional operational reforms.	High	Port Authority, Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Transportation, Customs and Excise Division, any other relevant agencies
3.8	Improve air transport and logistics by: • Signing and ratifying the Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules for International Carriage by Air (Montreal Convention), and • Registering air services agreements and amendments with ICAO.	Modernized and harmonized liability protections for e-commerce and traditional traders, as well as further support for national efforts to digitalize trade, as well as improved international collaboration on air connectivity.	High	Ministry of Transport, MTI, TTCAA, ICAO

4.	**Payment Solutions**			
No.	**Indicative Action**	**Expected Results**	**Priority Level**	**Potential Support by**

No.	Indicative Action	Expected Results	Priority Level	Potential Support by
4.1	Fully promulgate and implement updated legislation and policies geared to facilitate digital transactions (FinTech Policy, Simplified Due Diligence Requirements, EMI, and One FinTech Avenue and other areas).	Improved connectivity and heightened security in cashless transactions	High	CBTT, TTIFC, Ministry of Finance, other relevant ministries, UNCDF
4.2	Strengthen key government payment platforms such as GovPayTT.	Culture of trust and confidence built in the online payment regime.	High	MDT, iGovTT
4.3	Develop initiatives to promote financial literacy and trust in financial systems.	User confidence heightened.	High	CBTT, Ministry of Finance, business hubs, UNCDF
4.4	Streamline implementation of online payments across government agencies to improve coordination and effectiveness.	Heightened cost effectiveness and improved user experience.	High	MTI, MDT, TTIFC, Ministry of Finance, MPD and other key Ministries and agencies
4.5	Invest in the development of and access to payments infrastructure for MSMEs, matched with educational and awareness-raising campaigns on e-payment functionality and its benefits.	Development and access to payments infrastructure improved (including non-bank institutions).	High	MDT, Ministry of Finance, other key Ministries, Business hubs, UNCDF

5.	**Legal and Regulatory Frameworks**			
No.	**Indicative Action**	**Expected Results**	**Priority Level**	**Potential Support by**
5.1	Enhance national enabling framework governing electronic transactions by: • Adopting the MLETR provisions, and • Removing restrictions and exceptions.	Enabling the use of ETRs to facilitate e-logistics and e-trade financing. Improved operations and public service delivery.	High	Ministry of Trade, MDT, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, UNCITRAL
5.2	Accede to the UNCITRAL Convention on the Use of Electronic Signatures (ECC) and the United Nations Convention for Contracts of the International Sale Of Goods (CISG).	Further improve the regulatory framework regarding electronic communication and support cross-border recognition of electronic signatures.	Medium	Ministry of Trade, MDT, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, UNCITRAL
5.3	Improve data protection and data governance frameworks by: • Establishing appropriate data protection, data privacy and data-sharing legislation; • Adapting the Data Protection Act with suitable updates and amendments to the context of the country, with particular focus on not having onerous requirements for small businesses and having data sharing to enable digital transformation; and • Developing responsible data governance practices and transparent data architectural frameworks, including the development of a national data strategy.	Free flow of information enhanced, and digital trade improved through a balanced approach between data protection, and innovation and promotion.	High	MDT, Office of the Prime Minister, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs

No.	Indicative Action	Expected Results	Priority Level	Potential Support by
5.4	Enhance the national cybersecurity enabling environment by: • Finalizing the Cybercrime Bill and updating the National Cybersecurity Framework; • Strengthening national critical infrastructure on cyber-resilience; • Strengthening monitoring and evaluation frameworks governing incident response by establishing monitoring systems to detect and respond to suspicious activities in real time; • Developing and implementing a comprehensive cybersecurity capacity-building for the public sector; • Acceding to the Budapest Convention; and • Promoting regional harmonization and cooperation on cybercrime and related issues.	Legal and regulatory framework governing cybercrime enhanced.	High	MDT, Office of the Prime Minister, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, Ministry of National Security
5.5	Strengthen the national regulatory framework governing consumer protection by: • Updating the consumer protection legislation in line with the UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection and to specifically address shortcomings regarding e-commerce (lack of targeted provisions for online transactions, distance selling and others); • Developing and implementing a National Consumer Policy to complement the revised legislation; and • Strengthening the powers of the Consumer Affairs Division with self-initiative investigative powers.	National consumer protection regime enhanced to ensure the same level of protection in e-commerce as in traditional commerce.	High	Ministry of Trade, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, UNCTAD
5.6	Develop and implement a stakeholder awareness programme on e-commerce enabling legislation.	Improved stakeholder awareness in respect of e-enabling legislation.	High	Key Ministries, private sector, civil society groups

6.	E-commerce Skills Development			
No.	**Indicative Action**	**Expected Results**	**Priority Level**	**Potential Support by**
6.1	Identify skill gaps through an in-depth assessment, including a market analysis of industry trends, growth potential and emerging technology and ensure availability of gender-disaggregated data.	Targeted and forward-looking analysis for e-commerce skills needs is available.	High	Ministry of Education, MTI, MDT, MPD, Ministry of Finance, Business associations, UNCDF, ECLAC

6.2	Integrate digital literacy and e-commerce skills in the education curriculum to ensure students across Trinidad and Tobago (including rural areas) have essential skills.	Local talent and the broader population equipped with the needed know-how to leverage e-commerce effectively	High	Ministry of Education, MTI, MDT, MPD, Ministry of Finance, UNCDF
6.3	Craft a national capacity-building programme targeting learners at various stages of education and in the workplace to support the development of e-commerce, ICT and innovation skills. The programme should consider including the following: • Targeted e-commerce training, covering topics such as digital marketing, online customer service, e-commerce platforms, and logistics management, with interventions at different levels of education; and • Continuous professional development through online courses on latest e-commerce trends, including on-the-job training programmes through the national employment services.		High	Ministry of Education, MTI, MDT, MPD, Ministry of Finance
6.4	Engage in community outreach to raise awareness of the benefits of e-commerce and available training opportunities by advertising on local media, engaging community leaders and holding events to engage residents.	Awareness of e-commerce and relevant opportunities is enhanced.	High	MTI, relevant civil society and business organization
6.5	Establish regular public-private sector dialogue on digital skills and enhance targeted interventions where the private sector and industry support skills development.	Stronger public-private sector dialogue and cooperation on digital skills.	High	Business associations and private sector representatives, Ministry of Education, MTI, MDT
6.6	Provide government incentives for businesses to invest in digital skills training.	Increased offering of digital skills training by the private sector.	Medium	Business associations and private sector representatives, Ministry of Education, MTI, MDT
6.7	Increase the local capacity for tech research and development for local STEM professionals.	Capacity for innovation in technology nationally is increased.	Medium	Ministry of Education, MDT
6.8	Improve the availability and access to government programmes in rural areas to enhance information and training. Develop e-commerce training opportunities for youth, women, rural communities, and persons with disabilities.	Digital divide constraints addressed for rural areas and vulnerable groups.	High	MDT, Ministry of Education, MTI

7.	**Access to Financing**			
No.	**Indicative Action**	**Expected Results**	**Priority Level**	**Potential Support by**
7.1	Develop public education campaigns to inform MSMEs and entrepreneurs of access to financing options.	Increased understanding and willingness to explore alternative means of financing.	High	MTI, Ministry of Finance, CBTT, business hubs, UNCDF

7.2	Improve financial literacy among MSMEs, develop mentoring and partnership programmes.	Enhanced financial literacy and business growth opportunities.	High	MTI, Ministry of Finance, CBTT, business hubs other key Ministries and agencies, UNCDF
7.3	Leverage lessons learned to support the efficient and effective use of a movable collateral registry.	Access to financing for MSMEs improved.	Medium	MTI, Ministry of Finance, CBTT, business hubs other key Ministries and agencies
7.4	Undertake policy reforms to support increased access to finance by MSMEs including considering the following options: • Introduction/expansion of government-backed loan programmes; • Simplification of loan application processes; • Modifying the eligibility criteria for financial support programmes to accommodate new business entrants; and • Offering low tiered business bank accounts to MSMEs	Strengthened policy frameworks and facilitation mechanisms to support increased access to financing for MSMEs.	High	MTI, Ministry of Finance, CBTT, business hubs other key Ministries and agencies, UNCDF
7.5	Promote synergies, coordination, and overall awareness on support programmes by the public and private sectors, as well as international partners. Consider developing a regular coordination framework and central repository for all support information.	Awareness of business support programmes is improved. Coordination among the public and private sectors as well as international partners is ensured.	High	MTI, Ministry of Finance, CBTT, business associations, incubators, international partners, as well as other relevant stakeholders
7.6	Develop investment incentives for women-led businesses, youth businesses, rural businesses and start-ups.	Access to financing improved.	Medium	Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Finance, CBTT, business hubs other key Ministries and agencies

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Annex I: List of UNCTAD eTrade Readiness Assessments

- Mauritanie: Évaluation de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (March 2024).
- Ghana: eTrade Readiness Assessment (November 2023).
- Perú: Evaluación sobre el estado de preparación para el comercio electrónico (November 2023).
- Mongolia: eTrade Readiness Assessment (June 2023).
- Member States of the Economic Community of West African States: eTrade Readiness Assessment (September 2022).
- Kenya: eTrade Readiness Assessment (June 2022).
- Tunisie : Évaluation de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (February 2022).
- Jordan: eTrade Readiness Assessment (February 2022).
- Côte d'Ivoire : Évaluation de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (February 2022).
- Iraq: eTrade Readiness Assessment (November 2020).
- Member States of the West African Economic and Monetary Union: eTrade Readiness Assessment (November 2020).
- Niger : Évaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (July 2020).
- Bénin : Évaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (June 2020).
- United Republic of Tanzania: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (April 2020).
- Mali : Évaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (December 2019).
- Malawi: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (December 2019).
- Kiribati: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (October 2019).
- Tuvalu: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (October 2019).
- Lesotho: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (March 2019).
- Bangladesh: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (March 2019).
- Afghanistan: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (March 2019).
- Madagascar : Évaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (January 2019).
- Zambia: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (December 2018).
- Uganda: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (December 2018).
- Burkina Faso : Évaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (September 2018).
- Togo : Évaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (September 2018).
- Solomon Islands: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (July 2018).
- Vanuatu: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (July 2018).
- Sénégal : Évaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique (July 2018).

- Lao People's Democratic Republic: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (April 2018).
- Liberia: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (April 2018).
- Myanmar: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (April 2018).
- Nepal: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (December 2017).
- Samoa: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (October 2017).
- Bhutan: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (April 2017).
- Cambodia: Rapid eTrade Readiness Assessment (April 2017).

All reports are available on the following website: https://unctad.org/topic/ ecommerce-and-digital-economy/etrade-readiness-assessments-of-LDCs

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