



Call for Papers

Enabling Accessibility and Inclusion through Digital Trade and E-commerce

Asian Think Tank Network Forum 2025

Background

Since the advent of the IT-infrastructure and digital technology, countries in the Asia and Pacific region have undertaken economy-wide digital transformation to improve accessibility and inclusivity among people and businesses. Digital trade, which refers to digitally ordered and physically or digitally delivered goods and services, is considered inclusive in nature, as it offers opportunities to all economic entities to participate in and benefit from international trade. It improves accessibility to goods, services, and livelihood opportunities for low-income individuals.

Under digital trade, cross-border e-commerce or digital commerce has grown among and across many subregions of the Asia and Pacific region. As digitalisation reduces transaction costs of doing business across borders, it offers opportunities to small businesses to be part of several e-commerce marketplaces operated by major platforms (such as Alibaba, Amazon, eBay, Flipkart and Rakuten), connecting them with customers and suppliers across the world.

Over time, cross-border e-commerce has enabled the inclusion of under-represented groups, such as women, small firms and rural enterprises. For example, Alibaba is said to have more than 10 million small businesses on its platform, providing them with the means to transcend geographic boundaries. Reports suggest that it has created 30 million job opportunities among the youth, rural population, and marginalized groups.

Nevertheless, e-commerce faces several challenges in developing countries, including the lack of the requisite regulatory framework, infrastructure and talent, among others. It suffers from the absence of the right digital public infrastructure, such as the payment system. Cross-border e-commerce in the Asia and Pacific region is also constrained by divergent regulations among countries, inadequate mechanisms for settling cross-border disputes, security issues, restrictions on cross-border data flows, and inadequate transport and logistics networks for transporting goods bought online.

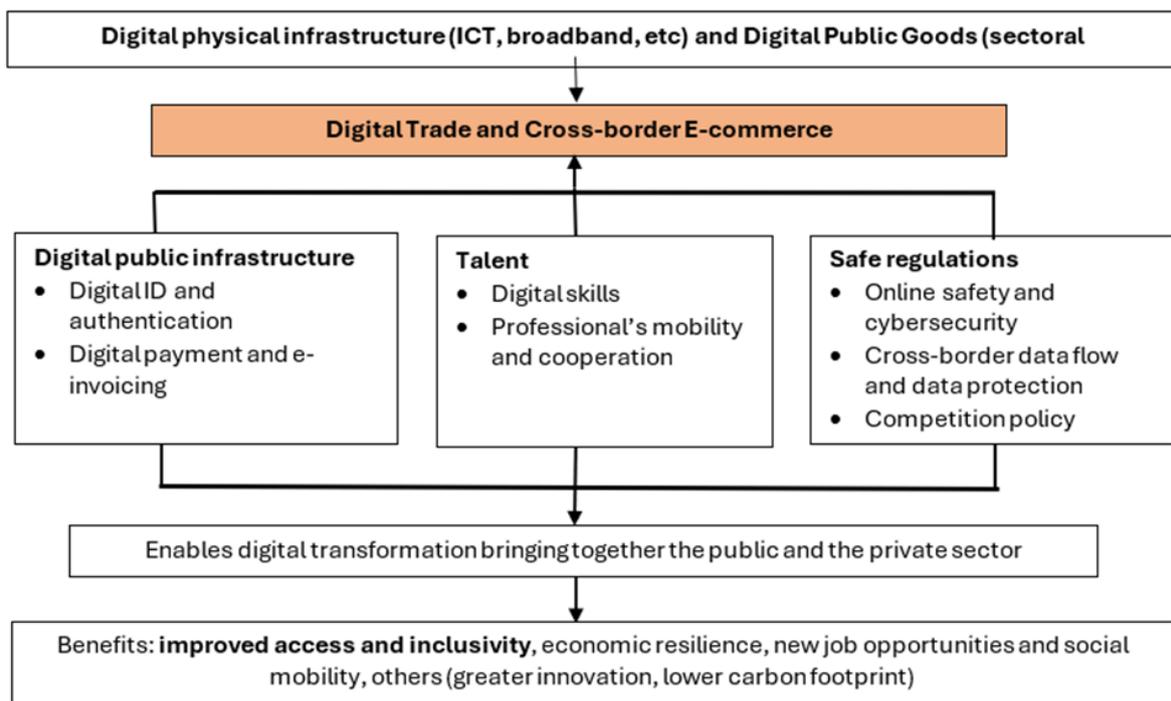
Trade negotiations at multiple levels - bilateral, regional, and multilateral - are vital for enabling cross-border e-commerce with resulting benefits in terms of accessibility and inclusion of all economic entities. Besides the World Trade Organization forum, which has included Global Electronic Commerce in its work program, the proliferation of preferential trade agreements has enabled proponents of e-commerce to pursue their rule-making objectives at the bilateral and regional levels. There are preferential trade agreements that include chapters on information and communication technologies, e-commerce, small and medium-sized enterprises, digital trade facilitation, and other provisions related to e-commerce. The ASEAN, for example, is negotiating a Digital Economy Framework Agreement, which is expected to cover the issue of digital transformation in a comprehensive manner, i.e., issues such as digital public infrastructure,

talent, regulations, and connectivity, which will promote a cross-border e-commerce ecosystem in the region.

A framework for e-commerce, with the necessary conditions of regulations (cybersecurity, and others), public infrastructure (digital ID and digital payments) and talent, which can benefit the greater population and firms, is presented below (Figure 1). Developing these elements and creating a safe online environment at the national level, while enhancing regulatory interoperability can enhance the capacity of businesses, particularly micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, across countries to participate in cross-border e-commerce, and would allow individuals and consumers to benefit from increased access of goods and services.

It is thus evident that the development of the digital economy is inherently related to issues of trade and inclusion and requires policy coordination and coherence across multiple line ministries and agencies. Such coordination in policy making and implementation has become critical at a time when a growing number of countries are aiming to increase their participation in cross-border e-commerce given its potential for fostering inclusive societies and businesses.

Figure 1: Framework for Digital trade and E-commerce for an Inclusive Society



Source: ATTN Secretariat.

ATTN Forum 2025

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), under its Asian Think Tanks Network (ATTN) platform, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), is organizing the ATTN Forum 2025 under the theme, “Enabling Accessibility and Inclusion through Digital Trade and E-commerce”. The objective is to narrow the knowledge gap with respect to the role of digital trade in enabling inclusion and to enhance the capacity of researchers and think tanks in developing

countries to conduct research in emerging areas concerning the digital economy. The project looks at digital trade and particularly cross-border e-commerce in three perspectives: (a) trend of cross-border e-commerce at regional and sub-regional levels; (b) impact (or potential impact) of cross-border e-commerce (goods and/or services) on inclusion and accessibility outcomes; and (c) regulatory gaps at national and regional levels to facilitate cross-border e-commerce.

Using the above guiding framework, researchers from think tanks and universities are invited to submit papers that could use theoretical, empirical, or any appropriate research methodology. Preferably, **all submissions should be original and not under consideration for publication elsewhere at the time of submission.**

Paper topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Impact of digital transformation measures (such as DPI, regulatory measures, and others) on cross-border e-commerce activities in developing countries
- State, drivers, opportunities and challenges in cross-border e-commerce for goods
- State, drivers, opportunities and challenges in digital cross-border services trade (e.g., education, healthcare, tourism, financial, etc)
- Empirical and/or case study evidence of impact of e-commerce on economic efficiency/ productivity and market accessibility (this can be either goods or services trade)
- Empirical and/or case study evidence of impact of e-commerce on inclusion, affordability, and equitable accessibility related outcomes (this can be either goods or services trade)
- Similarities and differences in e-commerce regulations across countries in sub-regions and the way forward for cross-border e-commerce
- Trade facilitation as an enabler for cross-border e-commerce (sub-regional case studies, customs, border procedures and regulations)
- Trends, developments, gaps and challenges in digital economy cooperation / trade agreements on cross-border e-commerce for equity and efficiency

Submission and Selection Procedure

Authors should submit their **[extended abstract through this link](#)**, in English, by 18 April 2025. The deadline will not be extended. The abstract should be about 750 words, including the title, name of author(s), affiliation(s), research motivation, research question(s), methodology, and expected policy implications. Successful applicants will be notified by 16 May.

Selection process will be in two steps:

- First step - up to **15 abstracts** will be selected by the Project Organizing Committee (POC). Authors of selected abstracts should submit their draft papers (at least 5,000 words) by 16 July. Submissions should contain the following sections: abstract, introduction, main text (methodology, results, analysis, conclusions), policy recommendations, and references. The POC will assign a mentor to each author. The mentor will share their review and comments on the draft paper by 5 August. Authors should then submit their revised paper on or before 5 September.

- Second step – Using the draft final papers as basis, only 10 papers will be chosen for technical paper presentation at the ATTN Forum 2025. Authors will be notified by 15 September. Draft presentations should be submitted to the ATTN Secretariat not later than 30 September.

After the ATTN Forum 2025, authors of the 10 papers should further revise their papers and submit them to the ATTN Secretariat within 2 months of the forum. The POC and the ATTN Secretariat will consider the revised papers for publication in ESCAP’s Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network (ARTNeT), ADB, and ADBI’s Asian Development Review, or any other suitable knowledge format.

For the other 5 papers not selected for presentation, ADB-sponsored participation at the ATTN Forum 2025 will be offered to one author of each paper. Submission of revised full drafts within the same timeframe, to be considered for publication, is optional.

The final revised paper should be 6,000-8,000 words and clearly address the research questions stated in the initial submission.

IMPORTANT DATES:

Submission of extended abstract (750 words)	18 April 2025
First cut: Notice for successful submissions	16 May 2025
Submission of full draft	16 July 2025
Mentor’s feedback	5 August 2025
Submission of final draft paper	5 September 2025
Second cut: Notice for selected papers for presentation	15 September 2025
Draft Presentations	30 September 2025
Presentation at Forum proper	8-10 October 2025
Revised final paper	2 months after the Forum

Participation at the ATTN Forum 2025

The ATTN Forum 2025 will bring in researchers, experts, and policy makers together to discuss the policy issue and the papers. It will be held on **8-10 October 2025**. Venue will be announced later.

Only one author, who must be from an ADB member country, from each of the selected 10 papers will be invited to present at the forum. An honorarium will be paid to the author upon fulfilment of each milestone - (i) \$500 for presentation at the forum; and (ii) \$500 for submission of the revised full draft within 2 months of the forum. In addition, ADB will provide airfare, accommodation, and daily subsistence allowance to the author, in accordance with ADB guidelines.

Project Organizing Committee

Sanchita Basu Das, Economist, ERDI, ADB

Rupa Chanda, Director, Trade, Investment and Innovation; and ARTNeT Coordinator, ESCAP

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Contacts

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