

DIGITAL TRADE AND THE ROLE OF STANDARDS IN ASEAN



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN ASEAN

ASEAN's digital transformation agenda, demonstrated – among others – by the following plans, underscores the recognition of the importance of digital trade and the critical role that digitalisation plays in:

- Supporting trade facilitation and digitalisation;
- Enhancing greater interconnectivity and integration of the regional economy; and
- Strengthening social inclusion, particularly MSMEs, women and persons with disabilities.

- **Bandar Seri Begawan Roadmap:** Outlines the commitment to transform the region into a leading digital economy, prioritise the use of technology to jumpstart the region's economy; and promote access to and trust in the use of digital applications and transactions.
- **ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025:** Envisions ASEAN as a leading digital community and economic bloc, powered by secure and transformative digital services, technologies and ecosystem.
- **ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy 2021–2025:** Supports the establishment of an open, rules-based, secure, stable, accessible, interoperable multilateral order.

WHAT IS DIGITAL TRADE?

- 'Digital trade' is more than 'e-commerce'. It encompasses the digitalisation of almost all economic and social sectors, the use of digital technologies in supply chains and logistics, the invention of new, commercially valuable communications and market access channels, and the value of the data that is created, transferred, and processed.
- Digital trade has the potential to empower micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), including women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses, as well as individual consumers to increase efficiency and productivity, reduce costs, and access regional and global markets.
- An active pursuit of regional cooperation, particularly on the harmonisation of digital standards across the region, can help to unlock significant opportunities and realise potential gains for ASEAN.

WHAT ARE STANDARDS?

Standards are fundamental building blocks of a national digital economy and play a crucial role in facilitating interoperability, consumer trust and market confidence. It provides businesses and consumers a 'common language' to effectively trade in, both within and across borders. When used poorly or unfairly, standards can also act as trade barriers.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HARMONISED STANDARDS?

The adoption of harmonised digital trade standards can benefit the overall regional economy by facilitating access to larger (potentially global) markets and enabling economies of scale, including enhancing productivity and reducing costs.

The adoption of common standards will not only help to set out specifications and procedures to ensure consistent implementation of processes, technologies, and methods, but – when developed properly and deployed well – also helps to enable a high benchmark for the quality, reliability, safety and security of goods and services being delivered into a market.

Harmonised standards also promote an inclusive digital economy by ensuring digital products and services are designed to be user-friendly and inclusive, including for older persons and persons with disabilities.

CURRENT INITIATIVES BY ASEAN



ACCSQ and DTSCWG

ASEAN, through the ASEAN Consultative Committee for Standards and Quality (ACCSQ), is working towards addressing technical barriers to trade to ease movements of goods across the region, and with other trade partners.

The Digital Trade Standards and Conformance Working Group (DTSCWG) under ACCSQ was established in March 2020 to:

- Exchange information on standards, regulations, procedures, policies, best practical, technical requirements and governance.

- Identify areas for harmonisation of standards, regulations, technical requirements, procedures and best practices.
- Build capacity and provide technical assistance.
- Engage industry, relevant regulatory institutions, private sector organisations, and ASEAN sectoral bodies.

The DTSCWG's 2021–2025 Work Program focuses on three pillars:

- **Facilitating digital transactions** – including e-commerce/digital platforms, e-invoicing, e-payments.
- **Facilitating digital trade, logistics and delivery** – including last mile delivery.
- **Facilitating digital trust** – including digital identity, e-signature, cybersecurity.

ASEAN has identified the development and adoption of a Roadmap on Digital Trade Standards in ASEAN to be a priority economic deliverable under the Lao PDR Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2024.

ASEAN has also been collaborating with key dialogue partners, including Australia, in its efforts on digital trade standards.

ASEAN-AUSTRALIA DIGITAL TRADE STANDARDS (DTS) INITIATIVE

The ASEAN-Australia DTS Initiative is a leader's level initiative, which was announced at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney in March 2018. It was established to support the greater implementation of digital trade standards by ASEAN Member States to increase digital trade for regional prosperity and security. It also seeks to capture ASEAN and Australia's strategies to advance gender equality, women's empowerment and disability and social inclusion.

The Initiative aims to supporting ASEAN in raising awareness on digital trade standards, engaging in international standards fora, and adopting priority digital trade standards. This is achieved primarily through the conduct of research, capacity-building, and engagement and awareness programmes.

For more information:

🌐 DTS website: <https://asean-au-dts.org/>

📺 DTS videos: [@asean-australiadtsinitiati4738](https://www.youtube.com/@asean-australiadtsinitiati4738)