



Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation

Building Digital Trade Ecosystem in APEC: Strengthening Cooperation and Encouraging Adoption

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Understanding digitalization in APEC

Digitalization is becoming an integral part of our daily lives



Financial transactions

(e.g., mobile payments, e-wallets)



Healthcare

(e.g., telehealth, telesurgery)



Education

(e.g., virtual classrooms)



Professional services

(e.g., remote services,
digital project management)



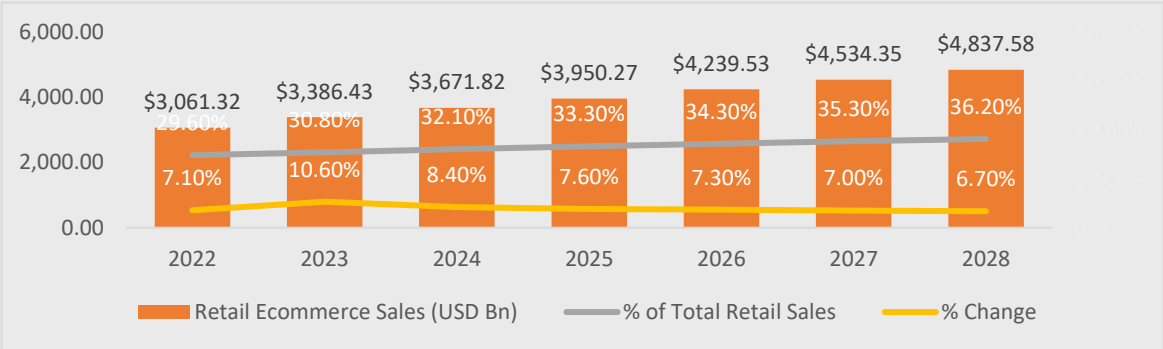
Tourism

(e.g., virtual tours)

Understanding digitalization in APEC

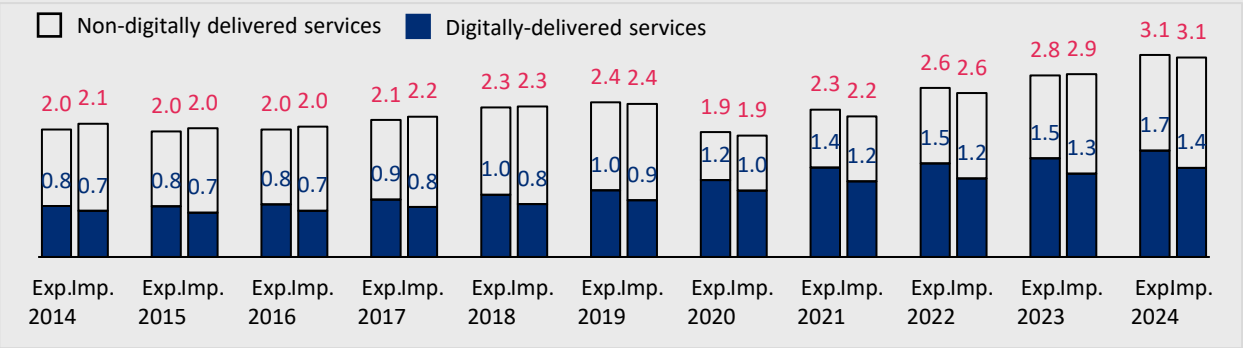
Digitalization is bringing convenience, efficiency and resiliency

Retail e-commerce sales in Asia-Pacific (billions USD)



Source: Emarketer forecast, July 2024 (accessed 16 August 2025).

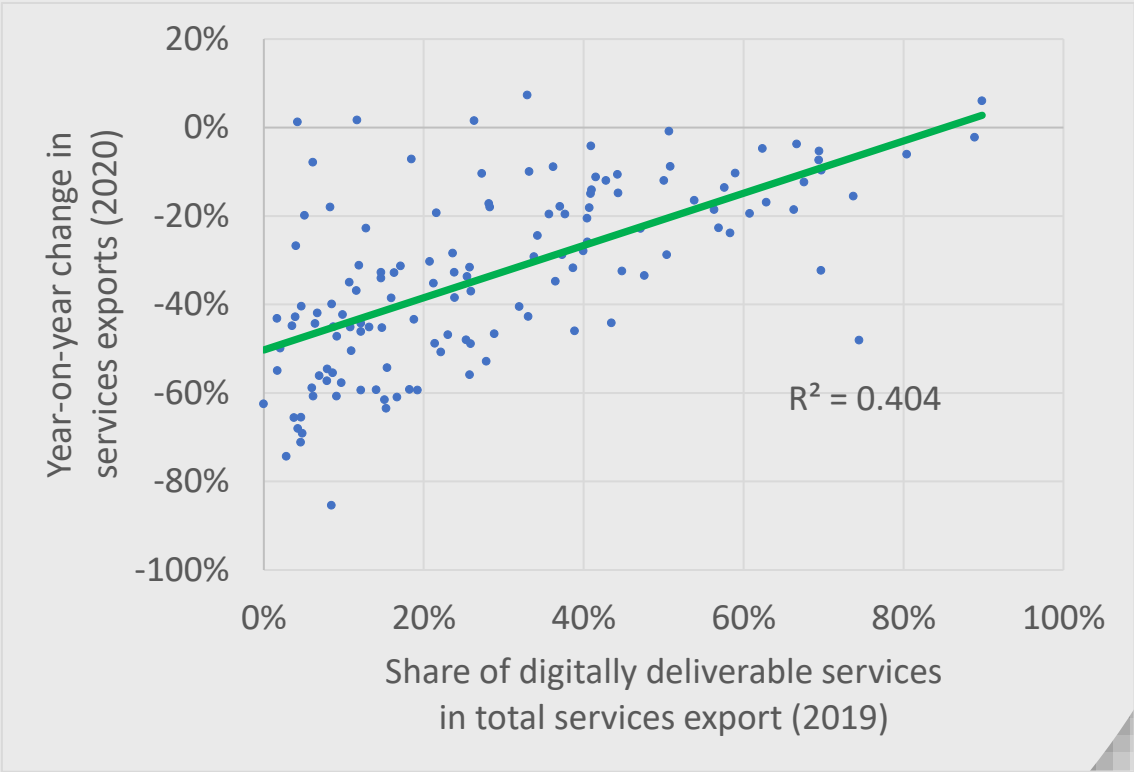
Trade in digitally-delivered services in APEC (trillions USD)



Note: Total services values in red

Source: APEC PSU calculations based on WTO data (accessed 19 August 2025).

Services trade resilience amid the pandemic



Source: APEC PSU calculations based on UNCTADStat data for 134 economies (including 18 APEC economies).

Supportive frameworks is key to sustain digitalization efforts



Laws and regulations
(e.g., electronic transactions,
cross-border data flows,
consumer protection and
dispute resolution)



Technical standards
(e.g., data/document format,
cybersecurity, e-payment,
cloud, AI management)



**International cooperation
and collaboration**
(e.g., harmonization,
alignment, interoperability of
laws, standards, regional
single windows)

Impact of facilitating trade digitally and of digital trade provisions

CTI (2023)

- Flows of digitally deliverable services increased by 2.3 percent for every additional digital trade provision that came into force between two trading partners on aggregate.
- Adoption of specific digital trade provisions (e.g., e-authentication and e-signatures, e-invoicing, paperless trading, privacy protection) was found to increase the flows of digitally ordered and digitally deliverable trade by between 11 and 44 percent in successive years.

NZIER (2021)

- Facilitating trade digitally would enable supply chain participants to gain between USD5.6 to USD11.2 billion.

CTI (2025)

- Adoption of paperless trade platforms reduced exporting firms' total trade costs by 3.8 percent on average, which pertain to costs associated with border compliance and time in transit.

State of supportive frameworks in APEC

Laws and regulations (non-exhaustive)



Electronic authentication (e.g., e-contract, e-signature)

- Many economies recognize e-contracts as valid and enforceable.
- Electronic records alone may be insufficient to meet all formality requirements.
- Requirements for valid e-signature could vary between economies.



Cross-border data flows

- Varying conditions under which cross-border flows of personal data are allowed (e.g., consent, similar levels of protection).
- In some cases, regulations for transfer of personal data apply horizontally.



Consumer protection and privacy

- Scope and coverage of consumer protection laws differ.
- Definition of personal information may vary.
- Aspects covered by data privacy laws differ (e.g., data breach notification, appointment of data protection officers).

State of supportive frameworks in APEC

Technical standards (non-exhaustive)



Electronic invoicing

- Standards may differ between economies (e.g., PEPPOL, domestic standards).
- Could affect semantics (e.g., codes, data format) and readability between systems.



Customs and trade data

- Formats used by economies could differ (e.g., WCO Data Model).
- Customization may affect comparability at the granular level.



Cybersecurity

- Gamut of standards (e.g., ISO/IEC 27000 series, NIST frameworks).
- Fragmentation creates compliance challenges.

State of supportive frameworks in APEC

International cooperation and collaboration



Approaches are
non-mutually exclusive



APEC initiatives

- Range from overarching frameworks to targeted roadmaps and agendas (e.g., APEC Putrajaya Vision, APEC Internet and Digital Economy Roadmap).
- Operationalized by fora/working groups through various projects involving relevant partners and cross-fora collaboration.



Partner initiatives

- Participation in UNCITRAL model laws (e.g., MLETR, MLEC, MLES) and WTO JSIs.
- Sharing of knowledge and best practices (e.g., ICC DSI Key Trade Documents & Data Elements).



Bilateral and regional initiatives

- Range from trade facilitation initiatives (e.g., ASEAN Single Windows) to agreements (e.g., CPTPP, RCEP, DEPA, DEA).
- Collaborations between platforms in various forms (e.g., interoperability, pilots, rulebooks).



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Food for thought

Role of APEC



1. Platform for Dialogue & Exchange of Best Practices

- Promote understanding & peer learning
- Document and disseminate innovative practices (e.g., *interoperability of e-invoicing systems*)



2. Support Capacity Building & Encourage Adoption

- Explore uptake of various initiatives (e.g., *APEC CBPR, UNCITRAL model laws*)
- Encourage experimentation and reform



3. Advance Cross-Fora Collaboration & Strengthen Cooperation

- Coordinated dialogues between relevant fora (e.g., *CTI, DESG, SCCP*)
- Strengthen cooperation with stakeholders and partners



4. Foster Monitoring & Evaluation

- Monitor implementation through existing initiatives (e.g., *AIDER*)
- Transparency: Encourage reporting on adoption of model laws



5. Support Forward-looking Research

Undertake studies on emerging issues
(e.g., *digital technical standards*)

Find out more about the APEC Policy Support Unit (PSU)

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