

UNESCAP's Committee on Trade, Investment, Enterprise and Business Innovation, second session

Workshop on the trade elements of the Doha Programme of Action for LDCs (DPoA)

27-28 May 2025, Bangkok, Thailand

The Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022-2031 (DPoA) provides a framework to address key challenges faced by LDCs to achieve sustainable development. Trade features prominently in the DPoA, as evidenced through one of its six key focus areas aimed at enhancing international trade and the regional integration of LDCs.

The Doha Programme of Action for LDCs, with its emphasis on enhancing international trade and regional integration, highlights the potential of digital trade to level the playing field for LDCs. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, e-commerce presents a pivotal opportunity for these countries to leapfrog traditional trade barriers and integrate into global markets. By developing robust e-commerce ecosystems, LDCs can reduce trade costs, enhance access to global consumers, and foster economic growth. This is particularly crucial in the Asia-Pacific region, where UNESCAP's initiatives can support LDCs in leveraging digital platforms to boost exports and diversify their economies. However, challenges such as market power held by global platforms and the need for improved ICT infrastructure must be addressed. By focusing on e-commerce development within the DPoA framework, LDCs can harness the power of digital trade to accelerate their economic transformation and achieve sustainable development goals.

On the sidelines of UNESCAP's Committee on Trade, Investment, Enterprise and Business Innovation, the Workshop on the DPoA aims to take stock of key trade-related elements of the DPoA and provide an opportunity for LDCs in the Asia-Pacific region to share their experiences. The Workshop will also allow the participants to attend the trade sessions under the aegis of UNESCAP's Committee on Trade, Investment, Enterprise and Business Innovation with a view to furthering the trade-related objectives of the DPoA.

Tentative programme

Tuesday | 27 May

08:30 – 09:00	Arrival of participants
09:00 – 09:30	Opening session <i>Opening statements:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Rupa Chanda, Director of Trade, Investment and Innovation, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) • Mr Roland Mollerus, Director, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UNOHRLS) • Mr Taufiqur Rahman, Director of the Development Division, World Trade Organization (WTO)
	Interactive discussions

Global Focus

**09:30 –
10:45**

Session 1: LDC Graduation in Asia and the Pacific and trade elements of the Doha Programme of Action

This session will examine the status of LDC graduation in Asia and the Pacific and highlights the important role of trade for graduating countries. It will take stock of the progress in implementing the trade-related targets of the Doha Programme of Action. In particular, it will examine the longstanding LDC priorities including structural transformation, Duty-free Quota-free market access to LDCs, preferential rules of origin, the LDC services waiver, and trade facilitation. The discussion will explore strategies for graduating countries to maintain their trade competitiveness including through structural transformation, preferential market access, simplified rules of origin, and enhanced trade facilitation, while leveraging the services waiver to expand services trade. Additionally, the session will address TRIPS and IP regime issues, considering the potential challenges graduating LDCs may face in adapting to full compliance with intellectual property rights obligations. By addressing these critical trade elements, the session aims to provide insights into how the DPoA can support LDCs in navigating graduation challenges and maximizing their trade potential.

Moderator:

- Representative of the Solomon Islands

Speakers:

- **Mr Taufiqur Rahman**, Director of the Development Division, World Trade Organization (WTO)
- **Md Alim Abdul**, Team-lead, LDC Unit, United Nations Office of the High Representative of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (UN-OHRLS)
- **Mr Oliver Paddison**, Chief of Section on Sustainable Development and Countries in Special Situations, ESCAP

Interactive discussions

10:45 – 11:00

Coffee break

11:00 – 12:00

Session 2: Trade opportunities for graduating LDCs

This session will shed light on the ongoing discussions on LDC graduation, particularly in Geneva, and highlight the key priorities of the LDC Group in the run-up to the WTO 14th Ministerial Conference. Building on the Doha Programme of Action's emphasis on sustainable development and trade integration, the session will explore the challenges and opportunities facing graduating LDCs as they transition out of preferential trade arrangements. It will also examine the support mechanisms available to these countries, including extended technical assistance and smooth transition strategies, as agreed upon by WTO members to ensure a sustainable graduation process. The discussion will focus on how these mechanisms can help graduating LDCs maintain their development momentum and integrate effectively into the global economy, aligning with the DPoA's goals for structural transformation and enhanced trade opportunities.

Moderator:

- **Ms Nargis Murshida**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh

Speakers:

- **Mr Taufiqur Rahman**, Director of the Development Division, World Trade Organization (WTO)

- **Dr Yann Duval**, Chief, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)
- **Mr Dev Raj Joshi**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Nepal

Interactive discussions

12:00 – 13:15 Lunch break

Regional Focus

13:15 – 14:15 Session 3: Regional integration in Asia and the Pacific

This session will discuss the current landscape of regional integration in the Asia-Pacific region, by highlighting trends in preferential trade agreements as well as Regional Value Chain integration Using the tools like Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisor (TINA and Legal TINA), the session will analyse the implications of these trends and the impact of LDC graduation on regional trade dynamics. The discussion will highlight specific markets and products most affected by graduation, providing insights into areas that should be prioritized when considering regional integration as part of trade policies. Building on the Doha Programme of Action's emphasis on enhancing international trade and regional integration, the session will examine how regional integration can support graduating LDCs in maintaining market access and diversifying their economies, while also exploring opportunities for deeper regional cooperation and economic resilience in the face of global trade challenges.

Moderator:

- **Mr Chansamone Vongphaisit**, Deputy Director General at the Lao Academy of Social and Economic Sciences, Lao PDR

Speakers:

- **Mr Alexey Kravchenko**, Economic Affairs Officer, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)
- **Dr Mohammad A. Razzaque**, Chairman, Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID)
- **Mr Nam Lynal**, Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Commerce

Interactive discussions

14:15 – 15:30

Session 4: Enhancing digital trade integration of LDCs in Asia and the Pacific

This session will delve into evolving landscape of digital trade integration in the Asia-Pacific region, focusing on the key opportunities, and unique challenges faced by LDCs. It will examine the critical barriers to digital trade adoption, such as infrastructure limitations and the lack of robust regulatory frameworks. Building on the Doha Programme of Action's emphasis on enhancing international trade and regional integration, the session will explore strategic solutions to help LDCs overcome these challenges and realize their full trade potential. Some success stories from the region will be highlighted, showcasing effective strategies and partnerships that have enabled LDCs to leverage digital platforms for economic growth and sustainable development. The discussion will also consider the role of international cooperation and capacity-building initiatives in supporting LDCs to harness the benefits of e-commerce and digital trade.

Moderator:

- **Mr Pasuna Tuaga**, Deputy Secretary, Tuvalu

	<p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Nathalie Raschka, Policy Economist, International Growth Centre • Dr Hilman Palaon, Research Fellow, Indo-Pacific Development Centre, Lowy Institute, Australia • Mr Mohammed Rehan Uddin, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh <p>Interactive discussions</p>
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee break
National Focus	
15:45 – 16:45	<p>Session 5: Progress in trade capacity building support to LDCs in the Asia-Pacific region</p> <p>This session will take stock of the dedicated programmes aimed at strengthening LDCs' trade capacity in the Asia-Pacific region. Building on the Doha Programme of Action's commitment to support LDCs, the session will highlight trends in Aid for Trade to LDCs. The discussion will highlight how Aft has helped LDCs integrate into the multilateral trading system, address supply-side constraints, and overcome trade barriers. It will also explore the role of initiatives like the EIF and other capacity-building efforts in strengthening LDCs' trade capabilities, particularly in the context of digital trade and regional integration. The session will provide insights into how these support mechanisms can be optimized to meet the evolving needs of LDCs in the region, aligning with the DPoA's goals for enhanced trade integration and sustainable development.</p> <p><i>Moderator:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Ruui Tabutoa, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Commerce, Industry & Cooperatives, Kiribati <p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Renita Bhaskar, Minister Counsellor, Head of the Economic and Trade Section, European Union Delegation to Thailand • Ms Sabrina Varma, Team Leader, IPEF Fund for Technical Assistance and Economic Cooperation (IFTAEC), Australia • Mr Ezaquiel Da Costa Babo, Director of Investment Promotion, Timor-Leste <p>Interactive discussions</p>
16:45 – 17:00	Wrap-up and closing remarks

Wednesday | 28 May

10:00 – 12:00	<p>UNESCAP's Committee on Trade, Investment, Enterprise and Business Innovation, second session</p> <p>The workshop participants will attend the first day of the second session of UNESCAP's Committee on Trade, Investment, Enterprise and Business Innovation. The session will cover trends in trade and cooperation for sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region.</p>
----------------------	---

**13:00 –
16:00**

UNESCAP- ERIA- UNOHRLS Workshop

Closing Regulatory Gaps for Digital Trade Integration

The participants will attend the workshop organized by UNESCAP in cooperation with ERIA and UNOHRLS. This workshop aims to support policymakers in addressing regulatory gaps, and fostering greater digital trade integration across the Asia-Pacific region. It will equip policymakers from LDCs with the knowledge and technical resources necessary for evidence-based digital trade policymaking. Additionally, the workshop will serve as a platform for dialogue and collaboration between LDCs and other Asia-Pacific economies, helping to advance the objectives of the Doha Programme of Action, which highlights the critical role of digital trade and e-commerce in driving economic transformation and global integration.

13:00 – 14:20

Addressing Regulatory Fragmentation for Regional Integration 4.0

13.00-13.20 Overview of Asia-Pacific Digital Trade Policy Trends and Landscape

Ms. Witada Anukoonwattaka, Economic Affairs Officer and Coordinator of ESCAP Initiative on Regional Digital Trade Integration, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section (TPFS), Trade, Investment and Innovation Division (TIID), ESCAP

13.20-14.20 Panel Discussion

Mr. Lurong Chen, Senior Economist, ERIA

Ms Nathalie Raschka, Policy Economist, International Growth Centre

Ms. Prewprae Chumrum, Executive Director, Bureau of Trade in Services and Investment Negotiations, Ministry of Commerce of Thailand, and Chair of ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) negotiations

Open discussion, Q&A

Moderator: **Dr. Yann Duval**, Chief TPFS, TIID, ESCAP (TBC)

14:20 – 15:30

Learning from Each Other - Digital Trade Policy Experiences Sharing

Ms. Ainur Amirbekova, Deputy CEO, QazTrade Center for Trade Policy Development, Ministry of Trade and Integration of Kazakhstan

Mr. Enkhbold Vorshilov, Counselor of the Department of International Trade and Economics, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia

H.E. Ms. Chea Ratha, Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce of Cambodia (TBC)

Ms. Anna M. Robeniol, Senior Policy Fellow, ERIA

Open discussion, Q&A

Moderator: (TBC)

15:30 – 16:00

Demonstration of the Regional Digital Trade Integration Index (RDTII) Dashboard