

CSSO Geneva completes first hybrid capacity-building training course on Digital Trade and E-commerce Policy, Rules and Governance Frameworks course with Diplo Academy

Overview

In December 2025, the Geneva Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO) concluded a hybrid capacity-building course on 'Digital Trade and E-commerce Policy, Rules and Governance Frameworks'. The course was offered in collaboration with Diplo Foundation and the Geneva Internet Platform, under the guidance of CSSO Trade Adviser, Kim Kampel, who was supported by Diplo's Director of Digital Trade and Economic Security, Marilia Maciel.

This first of its kind capacity-building training course to be offered by the CSSO, ran over five successive weeks, from 31 October to 12 December 2025. Initially oversubscribed, ultimately, 43 officials were participated on the course, representing Commonwealth LDC and small states members' Geneva and capital-based senior and technical officials, from across the Asia Pacific, Caribbean and African regions.

Design and format

Designed as an interactive and collaborative learning experience, the capacity-building activity tackled key thematic topics in relation to digital trade and e-commerce agreements, over five weeks. Employing an accessible, modular and flexible format, supported by DIPLO's cutting edge technology and online tools, both in person and remote-based participants were able to benefit from the capacity-building training activity at their own pace, regardless of time zone, to ensure assimilation and long-term retention of the course content and material, generating significant value in terms of lasting institutional and sustainability benefits for Commonwealth member states.

Face-to-face training modules were informed by technical inputs from DIPLO and the Commonwealth Secretariat, complemented by enriching lectures by subject experts from UNCITRAL, the WTO, the Geneva Graduate Institute and University of Lucerne. Participants also shared their own experiences and perspectives throughout the course with respect to their own digital trade landscapes.

Context

The rapid evolution and explosion of the digital economy post COVID-19 is one of the most significant developments on the current international economic agenda. However, for Commonwealth small, vulnerable economies and LDCs considerable, persistent digital divides continue to prevail, comprising gaps in regulatory and legal frameworks, digital skills and human capital and under-developed and unreliable digital connectivity. Accordingly, the implementation of robust digital strategies, regulatory and policy approaches, in order to take advantage of the digital revolution and transform their economies to trade in a rapidly evolving online market-place, are becoming national and regional imperatives for smaller economies.

At the launch of the training course on 31 October 2025, Mr Collin Zhuawu, Head of International Trade Policy, Economic Development, Trade and Investment, speaking on behalf of the section's Director at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Dr Ruth Kattamuri, outlined the potential of the digital sector for smaller vulnerable economies, noting that 'E-commerce and digital trade offers vast opportunity for small states and LDCs to trade their

goods and services cross-border on global market-places, reducing geographic distance and trading costs, thereby facilitating diversification, boosting their economic competitiveness, resilience and economic growth.'

Diplo Foundation's Executive Director, Jovan Kurbalija, recalled the DIPLO/Commonwealth historical partnership shared a common focus on providing assistance to small states, and particularly SIDS to participate meaningfully in international relations. He emphasised that digital technology had become the critical infrastructure of our societies and SIDS are particularly dependent on connectivity to engage in the digital economy. At the same time, there is a gap in terms of their inclusion in diplomatic negotiations. Ms Kim Kampel, Trade Adviser at the CSSO Geneva, speaking at the onboarding session of the course, noted that *'the fast-evolving digital trade governance and regulatory landscape has created a pressing need for smaller economies to be able to understand the implications of an emerging complex web of digital trade rules.'*

Course objectives

This timely, uniquely curated training initiative aimed to make complex e-commerce and digital trade governance and regulatory issues substantively more accessible to small economy and LDC governmental representatives, negotiators and policy-makers, equipping them with the requisite technical, policy and regulatory skills in relation to cross-border e-commerce and digital trade agreements, policies and frameworks. At the same time, the course remained anchored in the specific realities of their economies, empowering participants to bridge gaping digital divides, demonstrating its value-add for the Commonwealth's smallest and most vulnerable member countries. Framed within the contours of contemporary, new generation digital trade and e-commerce agreements, the capacity-building training activity was uniquely curated to cater specifically to the pressing economic and developmental needs, priorities and interests of Commonwealth small and LDC economies, with the course syllabus being conceptualised, designed and implemented in alignment with Commonwealth small states' and LDCs' specific interests and priorities.

Outcomes and Feedback

Course feedback revealed that all course objectives were met and exceeded. In terms of participants' evaluation of the usefulness and relevance of the training course, 94% of respondents indicated that the course met the highest indicator of 'very useful'. 84% of respondents reflected that the course had 'significantly' increased participants' knowledge regarding the course content, relative to their prior level of knowledge at the beginning of the course. 89% of respondents indicated that the course would be useful for their work. 75% of respondents confirmed that the course had met their expectations, whilst 25% indicated that it had exceeded their expectations. All respondents indicated that they would recommend the course to others.

Some specific feedback from participants describing the course:

'Finally we managed to complete the most educative sessions on Digital Trade!!'

'Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the course. The sessions was highly valuable and we would welcome the chance to join future iterations.'

'I really enjoyed this course as it was very interesting and engaging throughout. The structure of the program was well designed, as we were given enough time each week to reflect on and digest the lecture content. It is difficult to choose a favourite part of the course because every module taught me something new, and all of them will be valuable in my field of work. I would definitely recommend this course to others, and trade officials can particularly benefit from the knowledge and skills it provides.'

'The course provided valuable perspectives on data governance and digital trade disciplines, which continue to shape how policy and regulatory discussions are approached in professional settings. The focused exploration of paperless trade and e-payments offered practical reference points, while the professionals who guided and responded during the [online] discussions (...) significantly enriched the experience through their depth of expertise and real-world insights.'

'The CSSO/DiploFoundation Course on Digital Trade and E-commerce Policy, Rules and Governance Frameworks was a highly enriching experience that deepened my understanding of key digital economy issues, including artificial intelligence, data protection, and digital transmission concepts. Particularly valuable were the insights into how countries and international bodies approach governance and policy formulation for digital trade, gained through thoughtful exchanges with technical and diplomatic practitioners from diverse contexts. The course strengthened my confidence and capacity to articulate developing country perspectives on the technical dimensions of digital trade in support of sustainable development and economic diversification.'

'The Digital Trade and E-Commerce Policy, Rules and Governance Frameworks blended course was highly relevant, timely, and practical for professionals working on trade and development policy. It provided a strong conceptual and legal grounding in digital trade while translating complex global rules into actionable policy insights for developing countries and LDCs. I particularly valued all the modules and their alignment with WTO and regional digital trade negotiations, data governance, e-commerce regulation, and the policy trade-offs faced by governments in balancing openness, development objectives, and regulatory sovereignty. The course design successfully combined theory, case studies, and peer exchange, which enriched learning and allowed participants to contextualise lessons within their national and regional realities. Overall, the course significantly strengthened my technical capacity to engage in digital trade policymaking and negotiations. I would strongly recommend future iterations of this course for trade officials, negotiators, and policymakers from developing countries and small states seeking to navigate the evolving digital economy with confidence and strategic clarity.'

'The Digital Trade and E-Commerce Policy, Rules and Governance Frameworks course proved highly valuable in deepening our understanding of the evolving global digital trade landscape and its implications for national policy development. The balanced combination of technical content, comparative experiences, and expert-led discussions provided practical insights that will support our engagement in multilateral processes on digital trade and data governance. We believe that future iterations of this course would be of considerable benefit to Botswana and to other delegations seeking to enhance their capacity in this increasingly important area of international economic cooperation.'

‘Our delegation would find it highly valuable to participate in future iterations of this course. The course provides essential insights into digital trade regulations, technologies, and practical applications, which are directly relevant to our work. Continued participation would help to stay updated on evolving trends, enhance digital trade competencies, and apply best practices in real-world scenarios.’

Such capacity-building activities are part of the broader Trade Adviser Project, based at the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva, that serves to provide technical and strategic trade policy support to enable small states to engage more effectively and to articulate and assert their interests in the multilateral trading system.