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[ITC launches flagship publication on SME Competitiveness Outlook on 20 September](#)

On **Thursday 20 September 2018**, the International Trade Centre (ITC) will launch the SME Competitiveness Outlook (SMECO) 2018, which focuses on [Business Ecosystems for the Digital Age](#). Digitalization and the rise of the platform economy are rapidly changing the way firms do business. A strong business ecosystem is necessary to manage this change. This year's SMECO tells how to build it.

The launch will take place at the **World Trade Organization, Room W, from 13:30 to 15:00**. A distinguished panel of policy makers and business leaders will discuss key messages of SMECO 2018 including those highlighted in this [2-minute video](#).

Participants are required to RSVP by sending an email to chiefeconomist@intracen.org, indicating the participant's name, position and affiliation **by Monday, 17 September**. Registered participants without UN or WTO accreditation need to bring official identification.



[The 2018 World Export Development Forum \(WEDF\) takes place in Lusaka on 11-12 September](#)

[WEDF](#) is a unique global conference and business-to-business (B2B) matchmaking platform dedicated to supporting trade-led development. As ITC's annual flagship event, WEDF brings together business leaders, policymakers, heads of trade and investment support institutions and international trade development officials to address international competitiveness for developing countries. The conference will take place on 11 and 12 September in Lusaka, with side events running from 10 to 13 September. For more information on the programme and registration, click [here](#). You can follow events live [here](#).

BUSINESS NEWS

[New York City freezes new ride-hailing licenses](#)

New York's City Council [passed legislation](#) in August to freeze new ride-hailing licenses, such as Uber, for a year. The Taxi & Limousine Commission can also set minimum pay standards for drivers of this kind of service, which will require companies to make up the difference between the pay floor and the driver's hourly fee that is at US\$ 17. These measures intend to keep the number of drivers down, balancing the supply and demand of these services. App-based ride-hailing vehicles jumped from 12,600 in 2015 to more than 80,000 this year.

[AT&T and Verizon plan for 5G rollout this year](#)

AT&T and Verizon are deploying [mobile 5G service coverage](#) this year. On 20 July, AT&T announced they are planning to include Oklahoma City, as well as Charlotte and Raleigh, both in North Carolina, among the dozen markets they are supposed to cover in 2018. AT&T's initial focus is both on large and medium size cities as "all Americans should have access to next-gen connectivity to avoid a new digital divide", as put in a company statement. T-Mobile and Sprint will launch 5G service early next year.

[Google interested in going back to China](#)

After almost a decade of inactivity in China, Google executives [shared](#) in a staff meeting in August their intentions to explore going back to this 750 million-Internet-user market. Google pulled out of the Chinese market in 2010 concerned about censorship. The company is now adjusting its operations to regulations in different target markets, e.g. anti-hate speech rules in Germany, limitations on content about the royal family in Thailand, and the right-to-be-forgotten under EU GDPR. This recent trend may suggest their reconsideration for entering back into the Chinese market.

REGULATORY AND TRADE NEWS

[The European Union and Japan agree to recognize each other's data protection systems as equivalent](#)

"With this agreement, the EU and Japan affirm that, in the digital era, promoting high privacy standards and facilitating international trade go hand in hand", states the [press release](#) of the European Commission. On 17 July, the European Union and Japan concluded talks to recognize as equivalent their data protection system, the General Data Protection Regulation and the Act on the Protection of Personal Information (APPI) respectively.

Japan will implement additional [safeguards](#) to comply with EU's GDPR standards, including strengthening the protection of sensitive data and the conditions under which EU data can be transferred to a third country. The

Commission is planning on adopting the adequacy decision this autumn, thus closing the dialogue started with Japan in January 2017 to reach such outcome.

[United States of America seeks to revise international postal rates for goods](#)

On 23 August, US President Donald Trump addressed a [memo](#) to the Secretary of State and Chairman of the Postal Regulatory Commission, among others, regarding the modernization of the monetary reimbursement model for the delivery of goods through the international postal system. The envisioned revision aims to ensure that rates charged for delivery of foreign goods do not favour foreign over domestic providers. The memo asks for further discussion at meetings of the Universal Postal Union in September in Ethiopia. It also states that if no progress is made at this forum, action needs to be taken no later than 1 November, “including the possibility of adopting self-declared rates”. Among other countries, potential measures might hit [China](#), notably given the current ePacket Program between the US Postal Service and China Post that allows for favourable rates for packages sent from China.

[The West Midlands in the UK to be their first 5G region](#)

In the United Kingdom, the West Midlands have been chosen as [their first 5G region](#). This “testbed” area will explore connecting ambulances, where live video streaming could allow for immediate specialist’s advice to paramedics, as well as driverless cars and autonomous vehicles, in collaboration with car manufacturer Jaguar Land Rover. £75 million of public investment will go into Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton for this purpose.

[G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Conference](#)

A G20 Digital Economy ministerial [meeting](#) took place on 23–24 August in Salta, Argentina. The [joint declaration](#) builds from the consensus achieved under the Chinese and German G20 presidencies, and recognizes the need to keep working “towards improving digital market access for consumers and businesses, particularly in developing countries, as well as our understanding of the market impact of emerging technologies and new business models, like online platforms”. Recommendations touch upon reducing the digital gender divide, accelerating digital infrastructure, and measuring the new digital economy. The declaration also includes “G20 Digital Government Principles”, addressing services, data, security and digital skills, among other issues.

[APEC business community calls for action to reduce services trade restrictions](#)

The Asia Pacific Services Coalition [called](#) for APEC economies to address the increasing services trade restrictions at a Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) in the margins of the 3rd APEC Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) in August in Port Moresby. The PPD focused on Cross-border E-commerce in Services, and the implementation of the 2016-2025 APEC Services Competitiveness Roadmap (ASCR). “The business community is eager to see positive results. We consider there are low-hanging fruits where APEC should be able to see quick gains, like enhancing the APEC Business Travel Card,” said Ho Meng Kit, CEO of the Singapore Business Federation. Businesses also look forward to the outcome on APEC Principles on Domestic Regulation in the Services Sector, while acknowledging that “best practices” in the digital era might differ from those in the traditional economy. ITC participated in several meetings during the SOM, sharing ITC’s approaches in helping SMEs to engage in services trade and sustainable tourism.

[The Pacific Alliance signs the first plurilateral MRA for customs operators](#)

On 21 July 2018, members of the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru) [signed](#) a mutual recognition agreement (MRA) of their Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) at the XIII Presidential Summit of the bloc. This means that companies recognized as AEO in one Member will also have that status in the others, thus having access to a package of trade facilitation benefits designated by customs programmes. While there are already 57 bilateral agreements for the mutual recognition of AEO and 35 under negotiation, this is the first conducted on a plurilateral basis.

UN Secretary-General convenes High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation

UN Secretary-General António Guterres convened a [High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation](#) on 12 July. The panel's task is to explore how to strengthen cooperation in the digital space among different stakeholders, including the public and private sectors, civil society, international organizations, academia and the technical community. A thorough consultation process will be held, and a final report with actionable recommendation is expected within 9 months.



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