Foreword

E-commerce has been high on the agenda of policy makers since the mid-1990s. In 1998, the OECD and the Government of Canada jointly organised a Ministerial Conference on Electronic Commerce in Ottawa, calling together leaders from national governments, heads of major international organisations, industry leaders, and representatives of consumer, labour and social interest groups, to discuss the development of global e-commerce. Participants unanimously recognised that e-commerce offered a radically new way of conducting commercial transactions and could become a global driver of growth and economic development. They also recognised that business would have to play a key role in developing and implementing solutions essential for the development of e-commerce.

More recently, at the 2016 OECD Digital Economy Policy Ministerial in Cancún, Ministers declared they would "stimulate and help reduce impediments to e-commerce within and across borders for the benefits of consumers and business". This declaration is in part a reflection that almost 20 years after the Ottawa Ministerial, e-commerce has spread across the globe, altering the ways in which economic actors engage with one another. As predicted, firms continue to invent new business models that dramatically change the e-commerce landscape, resulting in new market players and ways of doing business. It is critical to understand these new developments in order to consider whether the current policy settings are well suited to e-commerce today.

Several international e-commerce initiatives have emerged. In December 2017, the World Trade Organization, the World Economic Forum and the Electronic World Trade Platform jointly launched the Enabling E-commerce Initiative to initiate a global discussion on how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can better leverage e-commerce. In July 2016, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development officially launched the e-Trade for All initiative, bringing together key public and private stakeholders to consider how e-commerce can support developing countries to implement the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development.

This report recognises these and other related initiatives, and builds on previous and ongoing work from the OECD and other institutions. It analyses how e-commerce has evolved across a range of dimensions and examines new and emerging business models, including how emerging technologies are driving changes across the e-commerce landscape. It also identifies how policies may need to be adapted to remain fit for purpose in a dynamic e-commerce landscape.

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