

Facebook privacy debate shows most countries not ready for digital economy – UN

Internet user growth is booming and with more people than ever purchasing goods and services online, protecting their privacy must be a top priority, the United Nations has said.

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Organization's main agency dealing with the economics of globalization, said Wednesday the privacy concerns raised after the discovery that a political data firm gained access to millions of Facebook without their consent "vividly illustrates that most countries are ill prepared for the digital economy."

This is all the more worrying given that about 90 per cent of new Internet users over the last five years live in developing countries – about half of which currently lack legislation to protect their privacy.

In addition, with global e-commerce estimated to have reached \$26 trillion in 2016, ensuring that no one is left behind in enjoying its benefits is vital.

"We know that the digital economy can bring great benefits to developing countries, but [we need to address some critical questions to ensure that digitalization leads to the future we want](#)," said Mukhisa Kituyi, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD.

Mr. Kituyi's call coincides with the agency's [E-Commerce Week](#) – the leading forum for Governments, private sector, development banks, academia and the civil society to discuss development opportunities and challenges before the evolving digital economy.

Being held from 16-20 April, in Geneva, under the theme *Development Dimensions of Digital Platforms*, the E-Commerce Week will look into the role of evolving technologies to strengthen sustainable development.

Some of its highlights include a high-level dialogue on these platforms as well as Ministerial roundtable discussions.

The Week will also feature events on digital identities and protection of consumers online, conducting trade and e-commerce in the digital era; blockchain technologies; and role of regional banks.