Opening Ceremony and Plenary Session
Objectives

The digital economy is revolutionising the global economy, creating new opportunities for growth and improved public welfare. At the core of this transformation, is the free flow of information. The ongoing transition to the digital economy holds many promises to spur innovation, foster trade, enable global value chains, generate efficiencies and improve services throughout the economy. At the same time, the transformation of the economy and society through the process of digitalisation can be disruptive. Benefiting from new technologies rests on the ability of firms, workers and society to adjust to these changes and to effectively leverage these new technologies.

National governments and stakeholders understand the importance of the digital world. They are encouraging its strategic development with a view to leveraging its capacities to meet challenges such as fostering sustainable and greener growth and development, meeting the needs of ageing populations and reducing inequalities. Enhancing access to, and participation in, the digital economy requires all stakeholders to collaborate and governments, in developed and developing countries, to find new, economy wide, approaches to policy development.

Ministers in charge of the digital economy can play a central role in emphasising the importance of a whole-of-government approach to the increasing digitalisation of the economy and society. This Ministerial initiates a cross-government dialogue on actions to stimulate the digital economy and to turn its disruptive effects, notably on labour markets, into opportunities. Given the cross-cutting nature of the Ministerial themes - Internet openness, digital innovation, global connectivity, trust, and jobs and skills - input from all stakeholders is necessary to a successful outcome. Throughout the Ministerial we will hear the views of OECD Members and non-Member countries, international organisations, the business community, civil society, academia, labour and the Internet technical community.

Key issues

Digitalisation is transforming the economy and society.

Over the last few decades we have seen the Internet and digital technologies create new products and services, and change how we consume them. They are also transforming businesses and governments in ways that enhance efficiency and increase productivity, economic competitiveness, and social well-being. Digital policy can no longer be viewed as separate from policies for innovation, competition, taxation, privacy, digital security, consumer policy, intellectual property, education and jobs and skills. Policy needs to become more holistic if the benefits of digitalisation are to be maximised in the future.

Communications evolve and convergence is changing the dynamics of this market.

As more of the world connects to broadband networks, both fixed and mobile, the tools and frameworks that guide these markets need to be re-assessed. There is a need to address digital divides that otherwise act as barriers to inclusion, and to deploy the ‘Internet of Things’ in areas such as health, transport and energy with a view to improving economic competitiveness, the environment and people’s daily lives. Means to achieve these objectives include increased innovation, competition and investment in communication markets to meet the growing demands generated by the digital economy.
The openness of the Internet is a catalyst for trade, innovation, entrepreneurship, and social well-being.

The Internet is fundamentally designed to be open and global, which has enabled it to be an engine of economic growth and innovation. All stakeholders have a role to play in determining how the Internet develops and in helping to ensure its openness. Governments in particular will need to take into account the impact of their decisions and actions on Internet openness in order to achieve a balanced approach while addressing legitimate concerns. Reducing Internet openness can be economically and socially costly because it reduces opportunities for trade gains, social and civic inclusiveness, exchanges, and enrichment. Continuing to approach these issues in a multi-stakeholder manner is critical.

Trust is fundamental to achieving the economic and social potential of the digital economy.

Trust underpins business as well as institutional and personal relationships; it is particularly important in a global online environment. More needs to be done to strengthen trust in an age of increasing connectivity and data-intensive activities that are beyond the control of any single jurisdiction or organisation. Addressing digital security and personal data protection as an economic and social risk at the highest level of leadership should become the norm. Effective consumer protection in a world in which commercial activity increasingly occurs online is also instrumental in building trust in the digital economy.

Creating more and better jobs in the digital economy and ensuring that all people have the needed skills should be a priority.

Use of digital technologies creates new job opportunities but exposes workers in some sectors to the risk of unemployment or lower wages. They increase demand for foundation skills, such as information processing, self-direction and problem solving, which many people lack. Policies need to help workers effectively transition to new, quality jobs and to foster learning opportunities created by information and communication technologies (ICTs), promoting a lifelong learning culture among employers and employees, improving skills development systems and enabling all individuals to make effective use of digital technologies in their daily life. The active engagement of governments, employers, trade unions, education and training institutions as well as individuals is crucial to achieving quality job creation in the digital economy.