



WORLD INVESTMENT REPORT 2017

INVESTMENT AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY



PREFACE

In 2016, global flows of foreign direct investment fell by about 2 per cent, to \$1.75 trillion. Investment in developing countries declined even more, by 14 per cent, and flows to LDCs and structurally weak economies remain volatile and low. Although UNCTAD predicts a modest recovery of FDI flows in 2017–2018, they are expected to remain well below their 2007 peak.

These developments are troublesome, especially considering the enormous investment needs associated with the Sustainable Development Goals, detailed in UNCTAD's Action Plan for Investment in the SDGs. Progress on sustainable development – and lasting peace – requires more investment in basic infrastructure, energy, water and sanitation, climate change mitigation, health and education, as well as investment in productive capacity to generate jobs and income growth.

Now more than ever it is important to ensure that the global policy environment remains conducive to investment in sustainable development. UNCTAD plays an important role in this, by providing guidance on national and international investment policy regimes. Its Investment Policy Framework and Roadmap for Reform of International Investment Agreements have been used by more than 130 countries in formulating a new generation of investment policies. This year's *World Investment Report* builds on that track record and presents policy advice on how to deal with close to 3,000 old-generation investment treaties.

A key challenge for policymakers in today's global economy is digital development. The theme chapter of the *Report* this year shows that the digital economy is having a major impact on global patterns of investment. It provides important insights on the implications of the digital economy for investment policies designed for the analogue era, and suggests how investment policy can support digital development.

I commend this *Report* as an important tool for the international investment and development community.



António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations

FOREWORD

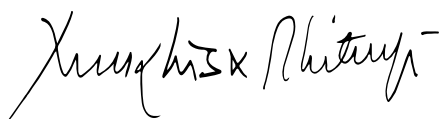
The digital economy is becoming an ever more important part of the global economy. It offers many new opportunities for inclusive and sustainable development. It also comes with serious policy challenges – starting with the need to bridge the digital divide. Both the opportunities and challenges are top policy priorities for developing countries.

The digital economy is fundamentally changing the way firms produce and market goods and services across borders. Digital multinationals can communicate with and sell to customers overseas without the need for much physical investment in foreign markets. Their economic impact on host countries is thus more ethereal and less directly visible in productive capacity generation and job creation. And, today, the digital economy is no longer just about the technology sector and digital firms, it is increasingly about the digitalization of supply chains across all sectors of the global economy.

The digital transformation of international production has important implications for investment promotion and facilitation, and for regulations governing investor behaviour. Rules designed for the physical economy may need to be reviewed in light of new digital business models. Some countries have already taken steps to modernize policies; others face the risk of letting rules become obsolete or of unintentionally slowing down digital development.

Because it is not just about digital multinationals. It is also about developing domestic digital capacities. Many countries around the world have development strategies for the digital economy. Yet most of these strategies fail to adequately address investment issues. And those that do tend to focus exclusively on investment in telecommunication infrastructure. The investment policy dimension of digital development strategies should be broadened to enabling domestic firms to reap the benefits of digitalization and easier access to global markets.

The *World Investment Report 2017* makes a cogent argument for a comprehensive investment policy framework for the digital economy. It demonstrates how aligning investment policies with digital development strategies will play a pivotal role in the gainful integration of developing countries into the global economy and in a more inclusive and sustainable globalization in the years to come. This is an indelible contribution to the discourse on how to narrow the digital divide and meet the enormous investment challenges of the 2030 agenda on sustainable development. I commend this report to the SDG policy community.



Mukhisa Kituyi
Secretary-General of UNCTAD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *World Investment Report 2017 (WIR17)* was prepared by a team led by James X. Zhan. The team members included Richard Bolwijn, Bruno Casella, Hamed El-Kady, Kumi Endo, Thomas van Giffen, Michael Hanni, Kálmán Kalotay, Joachim Karl, Hee Jae Kim, Ventsislav Kotetzov, Isya Kresnadi, Guoyong Liang, Hafiz Mirza, Shin Ohinata, Diana Rosert, Astrit Sulstarova, Claudia Trentini, Elisabeth Tuerk, Joerg Weber and Kee Hwee Wee.

Research support and inputs were provided by Jorun Baumgartner, Lorenzo Formenti, Mark Huber, Malvika Monga and Linli Yu. Contributions were also made by Dafina Atanasova, Charalampos Giannakopoulos, Natalia Guerra, Mathabo Le Roux, Anthony Miller, Abraham Negash, Moritz Obst, Sergey Ripinsky, Jacqueline Salguero Human, Ilan Strauss as well as interns Anastasia Bessonova, Mohamed Mrad Namji and Armando Pascale.

Statistical assistance was provided by Bradley Boicourt, Mohamed Chiraz Baly and Lizanne Martinez.

The manuscript was edited with the assistance of Caroline Lambert and copy-edited by Lise Lingo. Pablo Cortizo was responsible for the design of charts, maps and infographics; he and Laurence Duchemin typeset the report. Production of *WIR17* was supported by Elisabeth Anodeau-Mareschal, Anne Bouchet, Nathalie Eulaerts, Rosalina Goyena, Peter Navarrette, Sivanla Sikounnavong and Katia Vieu.

WIR17 benefited from the advice of Michael Kende. At various stages of preparation, in particular during the expert meetings organized to discuss drafts, the team received comments and inputs from these experts: Azar Aliyev, Robert Atkinson, Nathalie Bernasconi, Philippa Biggs, Lisa Borgatti, Jansen Calamita, Patrice Chazerand, Silvia Constain, Christopher Foster, Torbjörn Fredriksson, Xiaolan Fu, Masataka Fujita, Ambika Khurana, Markus Krajewski, Simon Lacey, James Lockett, Fernando Loureiro, Erik van der Marel, Makane Moïse Mbengue, Teresa Moreira, Jan Mischke, Ghislain Nkeramugaba, Davide Rigo, Cristián Rodríguez Chiffelle, Stephan Schill, Jagjit Singh Srail, Leonard Stiegeler, Alykhan Vira and Eric White.

Also acknowledged are comments received from other UNCTAD divisions as part of the internal peer review process, as well as comments from the Office of the Secretary-General. The United Nations Cartographic Section provided advice for the regional maps.

Numerous officials of central banks, government agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations also contributed to *WIR17*. In addition, UNCTAD appreciates the support of all the MNE and IPA executives who responded to its 2017 World Investment Prospects and Investment Promotion Agencies surveys. The financial support of the Government of Sweden is gratefully acknowledged.

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