

Presentation of Recommendations from the U.S.-EU Trade & Technology Council Working Group on Promoting SME Access to and Use of Digital Tools

The Trade and Technology Council (TTC) Working Group 9, “Promoting SME Access To and Use of Digital Tools,” is focused on promoting the digital tools that enable SMEs to innovate, grow, and compete. Beyond training, education gaps, and market access barriers, SMEs face challenges regarding access to technologies, data, and finance. This Working Group is committed to ensuring that SMEs in the European Union and the United States (especially those in underserved communities) have access to digital tools and technologies to spur their growth, innovation, and competitiveness.

The Working Group has the strong support of Secretary Raimondo to create actionable recommendations to help SMEs. In 2022, it began by launching stakeholder outreach sessions to give SMEs, particularly those in underserved communities, the opportunity to provide policymakers a better understanding of SMEs’ digital empowerment needs. The Working Group also organized a series of best practice webinars with U.S. and EU SMEs on the topics of cyber security, digital marketing, intellectual property, and standards. The result of these outreach sessions and webinars served, in part, as the basis for detailed reports by the U.S. Small Business Administration (a Working Group member) and the European Union, which analyzed SMEs’ needs with respect to digital tools.

Based on these reports, the Working Group has proposed the following recommendations to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs and to ensure that they are at the forefront of the next phase of digital transformation.

1. Building digital skills for SMEs through trainings. SMEs can significantly strengthen their online presence and connect with new customers through trainings on digital issues, such as on cybersecurity, digital marketing, intellectual property protection, and standards-related issues.

2. Recommendation on transatlantic exchange programs. Transatlantic cooperation can give a fresh impetus to raising awareness of digital opportunities, especially for the least digitalized sectors. Transatlantic exchange programs for entrepreneurs should be encouraged to allow innovation and digital ecosystems to be showcased and to spur SME interest in the digital transformation process.

3. Recommendations on sharing of information on cyber security, intellectual property, and standards. A public awareness campaign should be launched by the EU and the United States to ensure that government resources for SMEs are widely available. As part of this campaign, links to government resources should be placed on public-facing U.S. and EU sites for easy access by SMEs, entrepreneurs, and others.

4. Recommendation on access to finance. Recognizing the long business cycles associated with developing and using digital tools, and the need to improve financing opportunities for SMEs, policymakers could consider expanding access to resources on financing opportunities for SMEs and financial innovations that help address digitalization challenges.