A project by Swiss Agency
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Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

In partnership with:

MINISTRIA E EKONOMISË,
KULTURËS DHE INOVACIONIT

Implemented by:

HELVETAS

PARTNERSALBANIA
FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

GUIDANCE

E-COMMERCE & DIGITAL PAYMENTS FOR ALBANIA BUSINESSES INTERESTED IN BUILDING AN ONLINE PRESENCE

This document has been produced by RisiAlbania. Risi is a youth employment project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, implemented by Helvetas and Partners Albania for Change and Development. The views and conclusions contained here do not necessarily reflect neither those of the Swiss Government nor the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperataion SDC.

RISIALBANIA PROJECT
CASE STUDY #1

GUIDANCE

E-commerce & digital payments for Albania businesses interested in building an online presence

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ABOUT US

RisiAlbania promotes youth employment in Albania. The project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Helvetas and Partners Albania for Change and Development.

RisiAlbania supports the creation of quality jobs in the local IT sector. The project has supported the **growth of e-commerce** in Albania by assisting businesses in adopting digital payment solutions and enhancing their online presence. To enhance competitiveness and access to higher-value markets, RisiAlbania has facilitated the **certification** of local companies with international standards such as ISO 27001 (Information Security Management) and ISO 27701 (Privacy Information Management). Recognising the potential of the **business processing outsourcing (BPO) sector**, the project has worked to position Albania as a value-added destination for outsourcing services.

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PART I - THE BASICS

WHAT IS E-COMMERCE?

E-commerce is the buying and selling of goods and services online over the internet. As set out in this guide this can include using a website, an online marketplace such as Amazon or social media to transact online. Retail shopping, everything from clothing to electronics items, is the most common form of e-commerce globally and in Albania.

Table 1: E-commerce versus traditional commerce

	E-COMMERCE	TRADITIONAL COMMERCE
Mode of Transaction	Conducted entirely over the internet	Involves a physical location such as a store, office or market
Accessibility	Accessible anywhere 24/7 with an internet connection	Limited by store hours and geographical location
Access	Potential to reach a global customer base as relatively low-cost.	Typically, limited to local or regional market
Cost	Typically, lower initial and operating costs due to reduced need for staff and physical infrastructure	Significant up-front investment and operational costs linked to physical stores, staff and utilities
Customer Interaction	Digital communication & interaction with customers	Face to face interactions with customers

More and more Albanian businesses and consumers are transacting online. About 40% of the population in Albania made an online purchase in 2023, the most popular purchases were clothing and footwear, food deliveries and cosmetics[1].

WHAT ARE DIGITAL PAYMENTS?

A digital payment is a financial transaction conducted electronically using a computer or mobile phone, with no exchange of hard cash. Digital payments use computer networks, the internet, and electronic devices like smartphones, tablets, or computers to facilitate the transfer of funds. Examples of digital payment methods include digital wallets, online banking transfers, and credit or debit card transactions (see below).

Without using digital payments Albania businesses trading online limit their ability to reach domestic markets - where more and more consumers are using digital payment methods and want to avoid the inconvenience of physically meeting the parcel delivery and settling payment in cash - and consumers in international markets reluctant to buy from webshops which do not offer digital payment options.

[1] Source: INSTAT Survey on ICT usage in Households and by Individuals

Table 2: Cash payments versus digital payments

PAYMENT METHOD		PROS & CONS
CASH	Cash on Delivery customers make their purchases online and pay for them in cash when the products are delivered to their doorstep.	convenient option for buyers who do not have acces to credit cards or digital payment methods, or those who prefer to inspect the product before paying. high risk for seller (due to potential non-payment); high processing and handling costs (particularly compared to digital payment options)
DIGITAL PAYMENTS	Credit & Debit Cards most widely accepted and used e-commerce payment method, facilitated by Visa, Mastercard and American Express	widely accepted; quick & convenient. transaction fees for merchants, risk of fraud.
	Online Bank Transfer involves customer signing into their online banking app and manually making the payment	secure & reliable; suitable for large transactions requires customer to have bank account (accessible online); may involve high transaction fees
	Digital Wallets services like PayPal, Apple Pay, Google Pay, and Samsung Pay which allow customers to store (and pay with) multiple payment options (including cards and bank transfer)	Fast transactions; convenient (call store & pay with multiple cards); enhanced security features Dependency on mobile device; transaction fees can be high
	Mobile Payments Mobile-specific payment methods such as QR code payments (see OpenPay example).	Quick and easy; immediate payment; customer doesn't require access to credit/debit card Security can be an issue; requires compatible mobile device & internet access

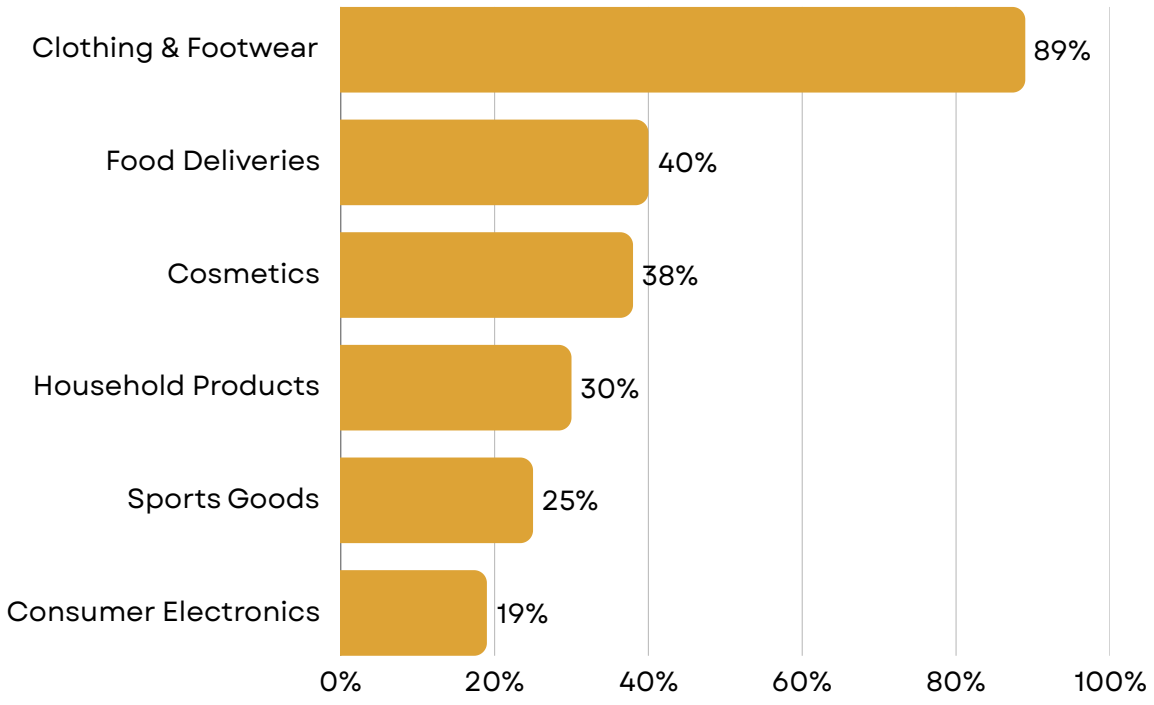
96.7 % of Albanian households have access to the internet

99.8 % of individuals access internet through mobile/smart phones

38.5 % of the population made an online purchase in 2023

Source: INSTAT Survey on ICT usage in Households and by Individuals

Graph 1: Most popular online purchases by Albanian consumers in 2023 & local e-commerce retailers in Albania



PART II - MAKING IT HAPPEN

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO START SELLING ONLINE?

Table 3: Steps to start selling online

STEP	WHAT'S INVOLVED IN THIS?	WHO CAN HELP ME TO DO THIS?
1) INITIAL BUSINESS SET-UP	For businesses not already established, preliminary activities including market research and business plan development and business and tax registration procedures will need to be completed.	
2)ONLINE STORE SET-UP	**Select online sales channel** One or a combination of online sales channel can be used: 1) Design your **own website** and use it to directly sell your product or service. Online tools particularly e-commerce platforms such as Shopify (https://www.shopify.com/) offer pre-packaged web store solutions including pre-designed website templates and themes allow businesses to create a professional-looking website without needing extensive design skills. 2) Sell your product or service through **online marketplaces,** such as Amazon and eBay, which offer a quick and relatively low-cost way for small businesses to transition to online trading. Many of these marketplaces offer a pre-packaged and user-friendly service combining basic features such as product placement with more advanced features such as digital payment processing and logistics handling. 3) Sell your product or service through **social media** – platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp can be used not only to build awareness or your product/service but also to sell directly to customers (the payment method is typically cash on delivery though as these platforms do not offer digital payment/checkout solutions).	• **AECA** (https://aeca.al/), the local e-commerce association in Albania, provides advice to support local businesses interested in trading online (see next section below for more details). AECA can also connect businesses with local e-commerce support service providers such as Evolve Studio Albania (https://evolve.al/) and DM Consulting (https://dm-consulting.biz/). • **International online e-ecommerce marketplaces** regularly used by Albanian consumers include Amazon - (https://sell.amazon.co.com/build-an-online-store), AliExpress - (https://www.aliexpress.com/). The functionality for businesses based in Albania or intending to sell in Albania is often limited on these platforms though. Amazon for example is not available in the Albania language and does not allow payment in Albania lek. • Shopify (https://www.shopify.com/), • WooCommerce (https://woocommerce.com/ • PrestaShop (https://prestashop.com/) are international platforms which provide pre-packaged webshop solutions.

	Complete product/service listings create detailed product listings with high-quality images, descriptions, and pricing information. E-commerce platforms and marketplaces have built in functionality which makes this process quick and easy.	Again, the functionality offered to Albanian businesses may be limited, with few if any offer Albania language functionality.
3) ONLINE PAYMENT SET-UP	**Decide on preferred payment method** choose between cash and various digital payment options outlined above. One or a combination of these payment methods can be used. A mobile payment method is a good option in Albania where most of the population now use smartphones to access the internet and make online purchases. **Select a digital payment processing provider** online payment processing is the sequence of steps involved in transferring funds, safely and securely, from the customer's bank account to the business's bank account when completing an online transaction. A payment processor is a service provider that facilitates this process, making it easier for businesses to integrate electronic payments into their webshops and alleviating customer concerns about fraud. **Open merchant bank account** an account opened by e-commerce store where funds will be received after they have been processed (typically required when paying online with a card). **Ensure you have SSL certificate** an SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) certificate authenticates the identity of a website, encrypts the data it uses enabling secure transaction and ensuring user trust. E-commerce platforms like Shopify typically handle SSL certificates for online businesses, making it easy for these businesses to secure their websites without needing to manage the technical details themselves.	• **The major international online payment** processors include: Stripe - (https://stripe.com/), PayPal - (https://www.paypal.com/) & Square - (https://squareup.com/). The services of these businesses are accessible to Albanian businesses and consumers, the functionality they offer to Albania market may be limited though. For example, PayPal does not process Albanian lek - businesses can still make and receive payments through PayPal but these have to be converted (typically from USD or Euro) into led, incurring additional transaction fees. Local digital payment solution providers offering tailored solutions to Albanian businesses trading online are emerging, examples include: OpenPay - (https://openpay.al/), EasyPay - (https://easypay.al/), Rpay - (https://pokpay.io), Paysera Albania - (https://www.paysera.al) • **All local banks offer merchant accounts.**

4) SET UP ORDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM	**Set up inventory system** an inventory management system tracks stock levels and managed orders. Again, most e-commerce platforms have this functionality built to their platforms making it quick and easy for a business to track and manage stock levels. **Establish shipping and fulfilment process** the process of ensuring that products are delivered efficiently and satisfactorily to customers and involves everything from receiving and processing orders, to shipping and handling returns. Most e-commerce businesses use third party postal or courier operators to manage deliveries and returns.	• **Delivery service providers in** Albania include: Adex - (https://adex.al/), Albania Courier - (https://albaniancourier.al/), Bipex - (https://bipex.co/), DHL Albania -https://www.dhl.com/al), FedEx Albania (https://www.fedex.com/en-al), GED (https://globalexpress.al/), IntexCourier (https://www.intexcourier.al/), Posta THT (https://tntexpress.al/home/), Ultra (https://u-cep.com/) and UPS (https://www.ups.com/al)

WHAT ABOUT CONSUMER PROTECTION AND CYBERSECURITY?

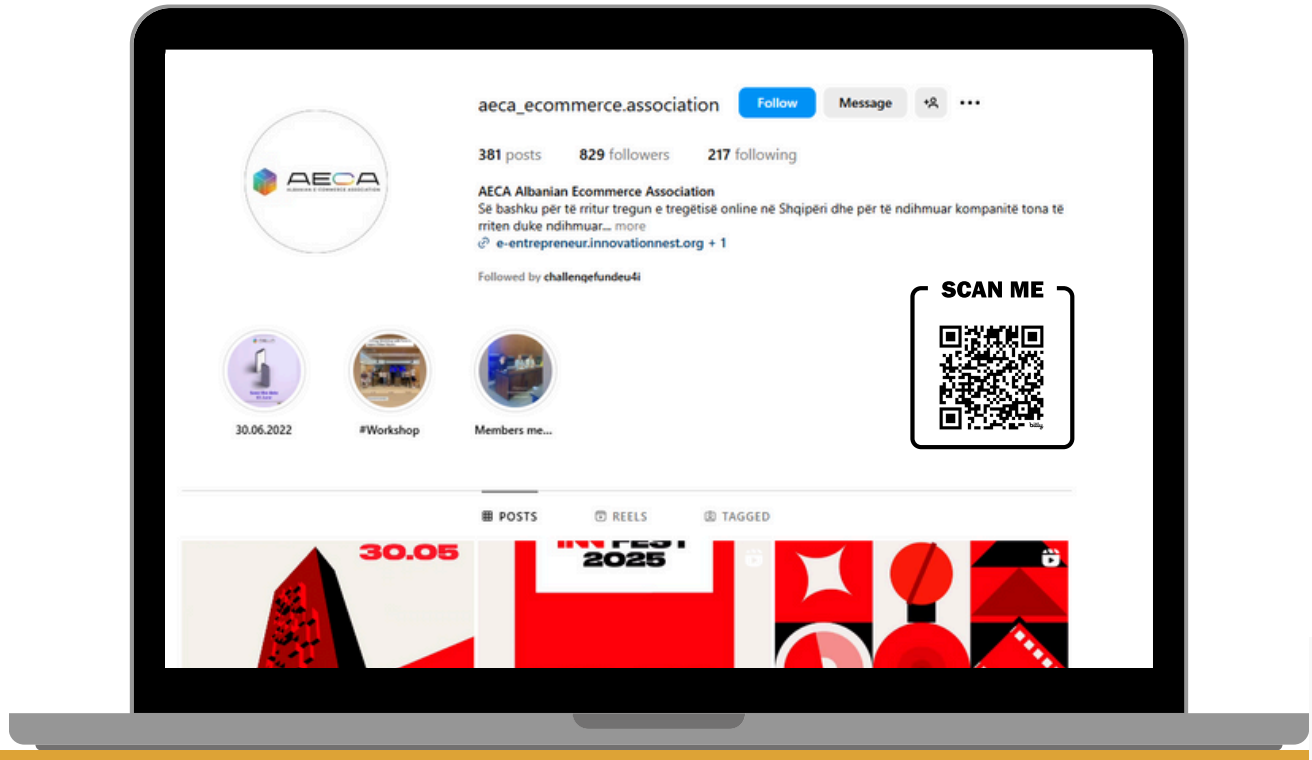
See case study/guidance note on cybersecurity

PART III - ALBANIA E-COMMERCE ASSOCIATION (AECA)

HOW AECA PROMOTE E-COMMERCE IN ALBANIA?

- **Public Awareness and Industry Representation:** AECA maintain an active presence on social media, engage in monthly media appearances, and participate in key industry events to advocate for the growth of the sector.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Business Support:** AECA continuously share insights, trends, and best practices with businesses and policymakers to foster a more supportive e-commerce environment.
- **Regional Integration and Policy Advocacy:** As part of the Balkan e-commerce Alliance (BECA), AECA collaborate with counterparts in the region to address common challenges and push for regulatory alignment that enhances cross-border e-commerce.
- **Public-Private Collaboration:** AECA have signed an Action Plan with the Albanian Government (2024-2027) to tackle barriers to the growth of e-commerce in Albania, including digital payments, logistics, and regulatory improvements.
- **CEFTA and EU Digital Market Alignment:** AECA support efforts under the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) Joint Committee Decision

AECA on Instagram



aeca.al/historiku-trustmark/

PROCESI I PAJISJES ME TRUSTMARK

Kush mund të pajiset me Vulën Digjitale Trustmark

Cdo biznes që ushtron aktivitetin në Republikën e Shqipërisë dhe që realizon një pjesë ose të gjithë aktivitetin e tij të shitjes së mallrave dhe/ose shërbimeve duke përdorur internetin dhe mundësitë që ofron ambjenti elektronik, ka të drejtën të aplikojë pranë AECA për t'u pakisur me Vulën Digjitale të Besimit të Konsumatorit Trustmark.

Aplikimi

Aplkimi për t'u pajisur me Vulën Digjitale Trustmark realizohet nga biznesi Aplikant pranë AECA nëpërmjet:

- Faqes së internetit të dedikuar
- Emailit të posacëm
- Me shkresë zyrtare.

Pagesa

- Pagesa bëhet nga Aplikanti në mënyrën e përcaktuar nga AECA
- Pagesa bëhet nga aplikanti në formë elektronike (xhirim mes llogarive)
- Cilido qoftë rezultati i testimit, AECA nuk e rimburson pagesën.

Kostoja

AECA nuk diskriminon asnjë subjekt që ushtron aktivitetin në sektorin e tregtisë online dhe që shpreh dëshirën për t'u pajisur me Vulën Digjitale të Besimit të Konsumatorit Trustmark. AECA rezervon të drejtën që për anëtarët e saj të aplikojë vetëm koston e procesit.

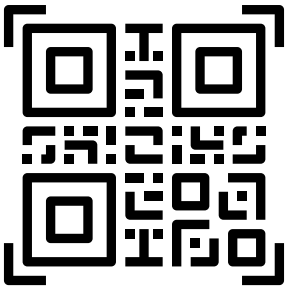
Shërbimi i Ofruar nga AECA	Anëtarët e AECA kosto*	Jo-Anëtarët kosto*
Çertifikimi për herë të 1-rë**	50 EUR	200 EUR
Ri-Çertifikimi në vijimësi	50 EUR	100 EUR

*Kostot janë për një periudhë vlefshmërie 1 vjeçare. **Nëse për Aplikantin nuk është emetuar një Vulë Digjitale Trustmark për 2 vite të njëpasnjëshme, atëherë aplikimi do të konsiderohet si Çertifikim për herë të 1-rë. Humbja e anëtarësisë, nëse nuk shoqërohet me mos vazhdim të procesit të pajisjes me Trustmark, konsiderohet Ri-Çertifikim në vijimësi.

Dëshironi të pajiseni me Vulën Digjitale TRUSTMARK?

Apliko

SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED BY AECA TO LOCAL BUSINESSES

- **Business Readiness Assessments:** Through a tool developed in collaboration with RisiAlbania, AECA assesses companies interested in trading online and provides tailored recommendations to improve their digital presence.
- **oStrategic Introductions:** AECA connects local businesses with service providers who can help them build their e-commerce capabilities, particularly ones providing logistics, payments and digital marketing services.
- **Roundtables and Advocacy Platforms:** AECA engages businesses in discussions with policy makers to ensure their needs are reflected in the evolving regulatory landscape.
- **Capacity Building and Trust Enhancement:** AECA promotes trust-building initiatives, including the regional Trustmark program (see below), aimed at ensuring consumer protection and boosting confidence in online transactions.

AECA Trustmark Program