

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

MAKING THE MOST OF THE WTO TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT



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Facilitation Agreement

About the paper

Implementing the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement is a unique opportunity for developing countries and least developed countries to simplify and modernize their trade and border procedures.

This report assists policymakers and traders to understand the benefits, legal obligations and key factors for successful implementation of each measure in the Agreement. It provides technical notes and guidelines for step-by-step national implementation plans and checklists to ensure compliance for each measure.

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Foreword

There are many steps involved in the successful operationalization of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). The ratification process continues to show progress with the WTO reporting that of February 2020, 91% of the membership had ratified. We also see growing advances in the notification process and in the implementation of measures in the Agreement.

However, true success will be measured by the realization of significant trade gains for developing countries on the ground, by reducing cumbersome documentation, harmonization of regulations across borders and simplification of border procedures. Progress will also be measured by how micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are able to reap the benefits through reduced time and cost of trading their goods and services.

An essential component of sustained and sustainable implementation of the WTO TFA is partnership and collaboration between policymakers and business. This will happen by discussing – together – the necessary reforms and amendments of domestic rules; and by identifying where current border regulatory practices in WTO Member countries need to be better aligned to meet the requirements of the Agreement. A meaningful implementation of the TFA hence goes hand in hand with proper preparatory planning, and a robust architecture of comprehensive reform programmes.

We are proud to present this guide, developed with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. For each and every article of the Agreement – whether it is a binding obligation or a best-endeavour measure – this guide explains the legal nature of the measure in an easily and understandable manner, and sets out how the measure should be transposed into the national legal framework of WTO Members to take effect.

This guide goes beyond mere legal compliance, and supports trade facilitation reforms that anchor national development priorities. Accordingly, the guide provides practical step-by-step roadmaps for the monitoring of implementation of each measure using checklists and national action plans that take into account a country's financial and human resources as well as priorities of the business community.

The ratification of the TFA remains a landmark of recent multilateral trade negotiations. For it to realize its full potential as a tool for easing trade across borders, implementation must begin at home. This guide *Getting down to business: Making the Most of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement* can be a lodestar in that journey.



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Contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Acronyms	vii
Executive summary	viii
CHAPTER 1 INFORMATION AVAILABILITY	1
Publication: Article 1.1	1
Information available through internet: Article 1.2	4
Enquiry points: Article 1.3	7
Notification: Article 1.4	11
CHAPTER 2 CONSULTATIONS, AND ENTRY INTO FORCE	13
Opportunity to comment and information before entry into force: Article 2.1	13
Consultations: Article 2.2	17
CHAPTER 3 ADVANCE RULINGS	21
Advance rulings: Article 3	21
CHAPTER 4 APPEAL OR REVIEW PROCEDURES	27
Procedures for appeal or review: Article 4	27
CHAPTER 5 IMPARTIALITY AND TRANSPARENCY MEASURES	31
Notification for enhanced controls and inspections: Article 5.1	31
Detention: Article 5.2	34
Test procedures: Article 5.3	36
CHAPTER 6 DISCIPLINES ON FEES AND CHARGES	39
General disciplines on fees and charges imposed on or in connection with importation and exportation: Article 6.1	39
Specific disciplines on fees and charges for Customs processing imposed on or in connection with importation and exportation: Article 6.2	42
Penalty disciplines: Article 6.3	45
CHAPTER 7 MAKING RELEASE OF GOODS MORE EFFICIENT	49
Pre-arrival processing: Article 7.1	49
Electronic payment: Article 7.2	53
Separation of release from final determination of customs duties, taxes, fees and charges: Article 7.3	56
Risk management: Article 7.4	59
Post-clearance audit: Article 7.5	64
Establishment and publication of average release times: Article 7.6	67
Trade facilitation measures for authorized operators: Article 7.7	70
Expedited shipments: Article 7.8	76
Perishable goods: Article 7.9	80

CHAPTER 8 BORDER AGENCY COOPERATION	84
Border agency cooperation: Article 8	84
CHAPTER 9 GOODS UNDER CUSTOMS CONTROL	87
Movement of goods intended for import under customs control: Article 9	87
CHAPTER 10 SIMPLIFYING FORMALITIES FOR IMPORTS, EXPORTS, AND TRANSIT	90
Formalities and documentation requirements: Article 10.1	90
Acceptance of copies: Article 10.2	94
Use of international standards: Article 10.3	97
Single Window: Article 10.4	100
Pre-shipment inspection: Article 10.5	106
Use of customs brokers: Article 10.6	109
Common border procedures and uniform documentation requirements: Article 10.7	112
Rejected goods: Article 10.8	115
Temporary admission of goods and inward and outward processing: Article 10.9	118
CHAPTER 11 FREEDOM OF TRANSIT	122
Freedom of transit: Article 11	122
CHAPTER 12 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS	128
Customs cooperation: Article 12	128
National Trade Facilitation Committee: Article 23.2	138
ANNEX 1: RATIFICATION, CATEGORIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	128
REFERENCES	128
BOXES AND FIGURES	
Box 1: International best practices for pre-arrival processing of goods	52
Box 2: International best practices for customs risk management systems	63
Box 3: International best practices for authorized operator schemes	75
Box 4: International best practices for single window systems	104

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