

SUPPORTING SMEs THROUGH TRADE FACILITATION REFORMS

TOOLKIT FOR POLICYMAKERS



International
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Centre

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Supporting SMEs through trade facilitation reforms

Toolkit for policymakers

About this report

Policymakers now have an SME-friendly toolkit to guide national reforms when implementing the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement. Addressing reforms from the perspective of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will spread benefits across the whole business community.

By examining the 19 provisions in the agreement that most help SMEs, hurt SMEs or help big business, the report offers insights that help national policymakers to boost the backbone of their own economies.

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Foreword

Trade-related transaction costs are highest in least developed economies, especially in landlocked developing countries and in small island states. These costs affect small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) the greatest, because they often lack the capacity to comply with complex rules. This can make them less competitive as suppliers and hamper their integration into regional and international value chains.

The World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement is an important tool for governments to ease the cost and time of trade and support reforms in the business environment. This is fundamental to increase the competitiveness of an economy and attract investment.

The agreement, which entered into force in February 2017, promises greater efficiency by targeting administrative barriers to trade – unnecessary inspections, excessive document and data requirements, manual processes, lack of coordination among border authorities, and complex, inefficient rules and procedures.

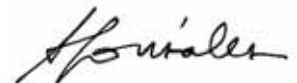
By tackling procedural inefficiencies, the agreement holds great potential for SMEs. It offers them a path to internationalization that will enable them to access and move up value chains at lower cost and greater speeds.

Yet for these enterprises, which grapple with the most challenges in cross-border commerce, the usefulness of initiatives to streamline trade depends on the extent to which they have been involved in developing and implementing those initiatives. Discussions with SMEs to understand their particular needs and problems are therefore crucial to ensure that facilitative measures actually help them and have real impact on the ground.

By analysing 19 provisions of the agreement from the SME perspective, this report guides policymakers on how to better incorporate the views of small business into the design of trade facilitation reforms which can benefit the whole business community.

This report joins a collection of ITC publications that help various segments of the trade community use the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement to unleash the full potential of its business communities.

ITC will continue working with policymakers as well as SMEs in developing and least developed countries to increase their knowledge about the new rules and help them to take full advantage of the opportunities and benefits which the agreement offers.



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