

# 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.



Dorothy Tembo  
Acting Executive Director  
International Trade Centre

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