

Continental guidelines

on trade and transport facilitation
for the movement of persons, goods
and services across Africa during the
COVID-19 pandemic



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



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CONTINENTAL GUIDELINES ON TRADE AND TRANSPORT FACILITATION FOR THE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS, GOODS AND SERVICES ACROSS AFRICA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

DEFINITIONS

- a. “Abuja Treaty” means the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community of 1991;
- b. “Africa CDC” means the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention of the African Union;
- c. “AfCFTA” means the African Continental Free Trade Area;
- d. “AfCFTA Agreement” means the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area;
- e. “Annex” means an instrument attached to these guidelines that forms an integral part of the guidelines;
- f. “AU” means the African Union;
- g. “CART” means the Aviation Recovery Task Force of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization;
- h. “COVID-19” means the coronavirus disease, the contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, or SARS-CoV-2;
- i. “CTTFC” means continental transport and trade facilitation committee;
- j. “ECA” means the Economic Commission for Africa of the United Nations;
- k. “GEWE” means the Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment of the African Union;
- l. “IATA” means the International Air Transport Association;
- m. “ICAO” means the International Civil Aviation Organization;
- n. “ICT” means information and communications technology;
- o. “IMO” means the International Maritime Organization;
- p. “IOM” means the International Organization for Migration;
- q. “IPC” means infection prevention and control products;
- r. “NTTFC” means national transport and trade facilitation committee;
- s. “OCHA” means the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations;

- t. “PCR test” means real-time polymerase chain reaction test, which is used to detect COVID-19 infection;
- u. “PPE” means personal protective equipment, such as face masks and gloves, which are used to slow the spread of disease;
- v. “REC” means one of the eight regional economic communities that are recognized by the African Union;
- w. “REC guidelines” means a currently existing set of trade facilitation guidelines issued by one of the regional economic communities;
- x. “SAATM” means single African air transport market;
- y. “SMART corridor” means the concept of a “safety, mobility, automated, real-time traffic-management corridor”, developed by the African Union;
- z. “SOPs” means standard operating procedures;
- aa. “STR” means simplified trade regime;
- ab. “UNCTAD” means the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development;
- ac. “WCO” means the World Customs Organization;
- ad. “WHO” means the World Health Organization;
- ae. “WTO” means the World Trade Organization.

The Member States of the African Union,

1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1. Taking cognizance of several statements by ministers responsible for health and other relevant ministers in Africa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- 1.2. Aware that Member States are taking a number of measures at the national and REC levels to contain the COVID-19 pandemic;
- 1.3. Recognizing that WHO, WCO, WTO, UNCTAD, and other international organizations continue to provide guidance on measures that need to be taken during the pandemic period and to facilitate the movement of goods to contain the COVID-19 pandemic;
- 1.4. Noting that domestic, inter-State and international travel by persons and the movement of goods have proved to be some of the main ways that COVID-19 is spreading among communities, nations and globally, and noting also the need to facilitate safe trade and transport for economic growth while containing the spread of COVID-19;
- 1.5. Aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the usual movement of persons, goods and services in Africa;
- 1.6. Acknowledging that, to sustain lives of Africa’s peoples, the movement of persons, goods and services has to continue uninterrupted;

- 1.7. Considering the need to facilitate the inter-State movement of persons, goods and services in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic period;
- 1.8. Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic is a serious global crisis affecting Member States that has brought to the fore the challenge of protecting the health of population, while avoiding undue disruption to the inter-State movement of persons and the delivery of goods and services across Africa;
- 1.9. Recognizing also that, despite the incidence of the pandemic, the implementation of regional and continental regimes for the movement of goods, services and persons, including AfCFTA and SAATM, should continue to be governed by the principles of market integration and regional cooperation among Member States;
- 1.10. Acknowledging that, in their responses to combat COVID-19, Member States should continue to be guided by a collective commitment to maintaining open and connected supply chains and to working collaboratively to identify and address trade disruptions that have ramifications for the flow of goods and services within Africa;
- 1.11. Recognizing that it is in the collective interest of all Member States to ensure that all trade routes (road, rail, air and sea) remain open to facilitate the flow of persons, goods and services, including but not limited to essential supplies, to support economic recovery and the transition to a new “safe” trading environment;
- 1.12. Noting that, to mitigate any negative impact from COVID-19 on the movement of goods and services within Africa under AfCFTA, it is important that Member States adopt common measures to safely and efficiently maintain the flow of goods and services within Africa, taking into account the guidelines issued by Africa CDC, the African high-level task force on the recovery of air transport, ICAO, IMO, IOM, UNCTAD, OCHA, WCO, WHO and WTO on measures to be taken during the COVID-19 pandemic period;
- 1.13. Recognizing the unique situations of island States and landlocked States in terms of facilitating the movement of goods and services;
- 1.14. Noting the need for Member States to conform to minimum uniform procedures, regulations and standards in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to minimize disruptions in the supply chains for goods and services across Africa;
- 1.15. Recognizing the importance of small-scale, cross-border trade in supporting the attainment of food security, gender equality, income generation and poverty reduction goals in Africa;
- 1.16. Recognizing also that gender equality is a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development, in line with the Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment of the African Union (GEWE);
- 1.17. Acknowledging that the pandemic has magnified challenges related to border operations, customs cooperation and trade facilitation, and the urgency to implement annex 3 (on customs cooperation and mutual administrative assistance), annex 4 (on trade facilitation) and annex 8 (on transit) of the AfCFTA Agreement, to ensure that Member States are prepared to manage cross-border operations during any future crisis in a safe and efficient way, with minimal disruption to cross-border trade;
- 1.18. Continuing to keep human rights and privacy laws at the forefront, while conducting surveillance and tracing contacts in an effort to manage the public health crisis.

Hereby adopt the following guidelines as minimum uniform regulations, procedures and standards in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, minimize disruptions in the supply chain, and facilitate the movement of goods and services across the continent during the COVID-19 pandemic period.¹

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE GUIDELINES

2.1. The main objectives of the guidelines are to:

- 2.1.1. Mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other such threats from a public health perspective, by containing the spread of such threats until a treatment or a vaccine is made widely available;
- 2.1.2. Mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic from an economic perspective, through the safe facilitation of cross-border trade in goods and services amid the public health crisis, while not exacerbating the spread of the disease;
- 2.1.3. Facilitate the movement of essential goods, such as food products, energy products, and medical supplies, and facilitate essential travel (including for the provision of essential goods), to guarantee the attainment of basic human rights amid any economic or public health crisis;
- 2.1.3. Ensure a harmonized continental approach to facilitating trade during the COVID-19 pandemic and advance coordination and implementation of common guidelines.

Secondary objectives of the guidelines include:

- 2.1. Building on currently existing REC guidelines and expanding their scope to offer a harmonized approach to trade facilitation on the continent, while adopting “best practices” from within and outside the continent to optimize trade flow across borders, all while limiting the spread of COVID-19;
- 2.2. Encouraging local production and the creation of regional value chains in Africa, particularly for essential goods (e.g., personal protective equipment, medical equipment, and pharmaceutical products), to increase their availability in the region, with a view to managing future health crises and supporting local job creation;
- 2.3. Opening safe and sanitary pathways for cross-border travel and encouraging essential workers to implement “best practices”, to limit the spread of COVID-19 at ports of entry and exit and to preserve their health and well-being while transporting goods between Member States;

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