

White Paper Pandemic Crisis

Trade-Related Response



United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the challenges of facing a health crisis and its impact on society. In an effort to slow down and ultimately stop the spread of the disease, many countries have instituted lockdowns, restrictions on movement, curfews, additional sanitary measures, among others. However, such measures have negatively impacted the global economy.

The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic could potentially leave a lasting scar on the global economy. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization's Index of Industrial Production has shown a 20 per cent decrease for at least a third of United Nations member States. Such gloomy forecasts are the result of an overall decrease in investment flows, an erosion of human capital through lost work and schooling, and a fragmentation of global trade and supply linkages.

There are ways to ensure that trade can continue to flow despite such a pandemic. For example, an increased use of electronic information exchange through internationally agreed upon e-business standards can reduce, and in some cases eliminate, human contact, while allowing smoother trade flows. Consultation with all stakeholders, from both the public and private sectors, can also help achieve mutually agreeable solutions; this could be achieved through National Trade Facilitation Bodies.

In an effort to ensure that global supply chains remain functional despite the pandemic, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) has developed this White Paper to outline measures to mitigate the adverse impact of the pandemic on trade flows. The White Paper has been developed in partnership with several international organizations from both the public and private sectors. It has also benefitted from the experience and input of several United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

This White Paper is part of a larger effort within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to assist countries in containing and mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the three pillars of: facilitating connectivity, addressing transboundary and other risks, and promoting a resilient, sustainable and inclusive recovery. Among others, UNECE's COVID-19 response includes a series of reports on the pandemic's impact on trade, with the findings of these studies relating in many ways to the guidance provided in this White Paper. Moreover, additional electronic business standards have been developed to help countries and companies with their efforts to dematerialize their cross-border data exchange. A platform has been created to allow national statistical offices to share their data on COVID-19 responses. Statistics have been compiled and shared on the impact of this pandemic on transport.

As the situation evolves, the UNECE secretariat will be monitoring the effectiveness of the measures proposed in this White Paper. In the meantime, I invite all concerned actors to make effective use of this and other UNECE resources.



Olga Algayerova
Executive Secretary

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

Simple, transparent and effective processes for global commerce

The mission of UN/CEFACT is to improve the ability of business, trade, and administrative organizations from developed, developing and transitional economies to exchange products and relevant services effectively. Its principal focus is on facilitating national and international transactions through the simplification and harmonization of processes, procedures, and information flows, and to contribute to the growth of global commerce.

Through the open and free participation of government and business representatives from around the world, UN/CEFACT has developed a range of trade facilitation and e-business standards, recommendations and tools that are approved within a broad intergovernmental process and implemented globally. White Papers are developed as a tool to consider a specific topic and provide guidance on how to address it. It differs from a recommendation in that the guidance is less prescriptive. Key principles that have been developed by UN/CEFACT are capitalized in this document and refer back to the relevant recommendations and guidelines on these topics (such a Single Window and National Trade Facilitation Bodies).

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