

An aerial night photograph of a busy port. A large cargo ship is docked at a pier, with its deck illuminated. The ship is surrounded by numerous stacks of colorful shipping containers in various colors like red, blue, green, and yellow. Several yellow cranes are visible, some with their lights on. The water is dark, and the sky is a deep blue. The overall scene is brightly lit by the port's lights, creating a high-contrast image.

Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

in United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) 2021

Based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing trade costs is essential in enabling economies to participate in regional and global value chains effectively and continue using trade as an important engine of growth and sustainable development. The recent surge in shipping costs and the subsequent disruption of the international supply chain has put additional pressure on already high trade costs in Asia and the Pacific. Trade facilitation plays a significant role in avoiding unnecessary costs and enhancing efficiency through streamlined and digitalized trade. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and regional trade digitalization initiatives such as the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA) provides guidance on measures that should be considered for implementation.

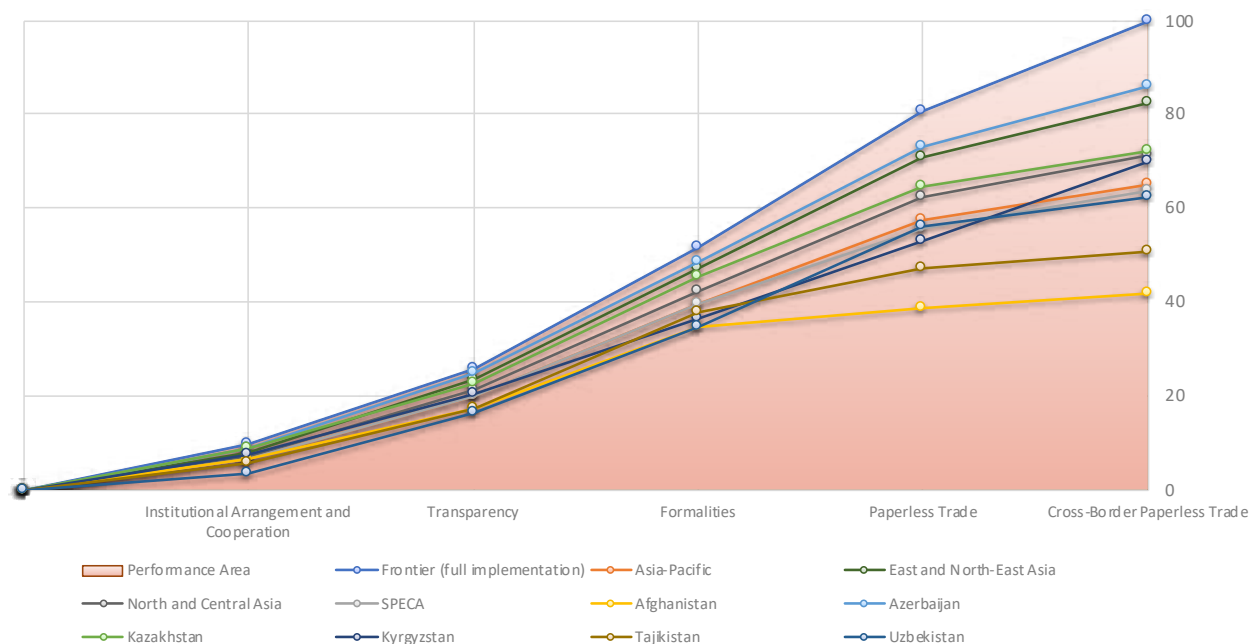
In this context, this report presents results of the 2021 United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for six participants in United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, reviewing the progress of trade facilitation reforms and provides a detailed analysis based on 58 trade facilitation measures that are classified into four groups (“General Trade Facilitation”, “Digital Trade Facilitation”, “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” and “Other Trade Facilitation”) and a further 11 sub-groups covering both binding and non-binding WTO TFA measures, as well as measures beyond the scope of WTO TFA. The report reveals that:

- SPECA implementation rate of the trade facilitation measures stands at 63.8%, slightly lower than the regional average (64.9%). The implementation rate of trade facilitation and paper-less trade in SPECA countries comes after Australia and New Zealand, East and North-East Asia, South-East Asia, North and Central Asia and South and South-West Asia.
- Implementation in SPECA is quite heterogeneous. Azerbaijan achieved high levels of implementation, standing at 86%. The implementation rate of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan achieve approximately 70%, higher than the sub-regional average. In contrast, Afghanistan stands at only 42%, followed by Tajikistan with an implementation rate of 51%.
- SPECA economies made the most progress in implementing ‘Cross-border Paperless Trade’ re-lated measures between 2019 and 2021, standing at 44%, with a twenty percentage points increase. This reveals the active work in SPECA region over the past two years despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent supply chain disruptions. Afghanistan has made significant progress over the past two years, revealing a 27 percentage points increase. However, the implementation rate is still low at 42%.
- SPECA countries have implemented many of the WTO TFA related measures, in particular transparency and transit related measures. However, cross-border paperless trade implementation remains relatively low compared to the implementation levels of the other measures.
- Measures under the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” category are least implemented, particularly those targeted at women and SMEs. For example, implementing measures to enhance gender balance in national trade facilitation face considerable challenges with average implementation rates of 55%, suggesting room for improvement. Implementation of SMEs in the AEO scheme stands at 53%.
- Data on the implementation of measures related to trade facilitation in times of crisis were collected for the first time this year and does not provide a complete picture. The implementation of this sub-group is 60%, higher than the regional average level. It suggests, however, a serious lack of awareness about the long-term strategies to deal with emergencies.

The analysis presented in this report, based on the latest data available, confirms that digital trade facilitation measures can result in significant benefits to the countries in the subregion. Full Implementation of binding and non-binding WTO TFA measures could decrease trade costs by more than 11%. On the other hand, digital trade facilitation measures enabling the seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents across borders will help significantly reduce trade costs by more than 20% for SPECA in a full implementation scenario.

Moving forward, trade facilitation implementation may be seen as a step-by-step process, based on the groups of measures included in the survey i.e., enhancing the institutional arrangement; establishing transparency; implementing efficient trade formalities; development of paperless trade systems, followed by enabling trade data and documents within these systems, including national Single Windows, to be safely and securely used and reused by authorized stakeholders along the international supply chain (see figure). Especially in the case of paperless and cross-border paperless trade, countries need to work together to develop and implement the legal and technical protocols needed for the seamless exchange of regulatory and commercial data and documents within and between countries. In this regard, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA) could support countries in gradually moving to “less-paper” and then to paperless and cross-border paperless trade by providing a dedicated, inclusive and capacity-building focused intergovernmental platform. Also, the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and the Roadmap for its implementation could support countries in the SPECA region and its partners to simplify and harmonize international trade procedures and increase the efficiency of border crossing and other trade-related processes.

Figure. Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



Note: the figure shows cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores of Asia-Pacific sub-regions for 31 common trade facilitation measures included in the survey. Full implementation of all measures =100.

Source: UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2021, untfsurvey.org.

This SPECA report should be read in conjunction with the upcoming Global and Asia-Pacific report on the results of the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2021, which will be available at <https://untfsurvey.org/>.

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