



Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation in Asia and the Pacific

Regional Report 2017



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Preface

This report analyses the results of the second United Nations Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation. The Survey was jointly conducted in 2017 by the United Nations Regional Commissions, namely the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the Economic and Social Commission for Europe (UNECE), and led by Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The aim of the Survey is to gather information from countries worldwide on implementation of trade facilitation and paperless trade measures. The results of the survey will enable countries and development partners to better understand and monitor progress on trade facilitation, support evidence-based public policies, share best practices and identify capacity building and technical assistance needs.

The second global survey builds upon the first one conducted in 2015, which served as a key initiative under the *Joint UNRC Approach to Trade Facilitation* by all five United Nations Regional Commissions in 2010. The Approach was designed to present a joint and global view on trade facilitation issues in the context of the negotiations of the Doha Round at the World Trade Organization (WTO). The survey represents collective efforts of many partners such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Oceania Customs Organization Secretariat (OCO) and Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC).

In the context of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which recognizes international trade - along with science, technology and innovation - as one of the key means of implementing sustainable development goals, the current report provides a useful stock-take for the countries in the region to further streamline trade procedures and advance trade facilitation.

The regional report should be read together with global report, subregional and country notes. The underlying dataset can be used by researchers and analysts for any further analysis. Further information is available at <https://unnex.unescap.org/content/global-survey-trade-facilitation-and-paperless-trade-implementation-2017>.

Executive Summary

Reducing trade costs is essential for developing economies to participate in international production networks and effectively use trade as an engine of growth and sustainable development. This can be accomplished by tackling non-tariff sources of trade costs and addressing cumbersome regulatory procedures and documentation requirements. Indeed, trade facilitation including paperless trade has taken increasing importance as evidenced by the entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), as well as the growing number of regional and subregional initiatives for facilitating the electronic exchange of information along international supply chains¹.

This report presents key results of the second global survey on trade facilitation and paperless trade implementation, covering 44 countries in Asia and the Pacific. The survey questionnaire includes 47 trade facilitation measures under seven groups—(i) general trade facilitation measures; (ii) paperless trade; (iii) cross-border paperless trade; (iv) transit facilitation; (v) trade facilitation for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); (vi) agricultural trade facilitation; and (vii) women and trade facilitation.

Trade facilitation implementation rates vary widely across and within subregions. Apart from Australia and New Zealand, average implementation is highest in East and Northeast Asia (73.7%), followed by Southeast Asia (60.1%), North and Central Asia (51.8%), and South and Southwest Asia (46.5%). The Pacific lags at 28.2%. The region's implementation rates on the WTO TFA related measures are relatively high, at 50–70%. However, paperless trade and, in particular, cross-border paperless trade implementation remain limited. Average implementation rates for measures aimed at facilitating trade for SMEs and facilitating women participation in trade are low, at 39% and 23% respectively.

Average implementation rates of general trade facilitation as well as paperless trade measures increased by approximately 5.6 percentage points between 2015 and 2017, from 44.8% to 50.4%. The largest progress is observed in Central Asia where the implementation rate rises by 10.2 percentage points during that period. Substantial progress is also observed in South and South-West Asia and the implementation rate improves by 7.1 percentage points. Implementation rates of other subregions rise by 3 to 5 percentage points. Limited human resource capacity seems to be the key challenge for Asia-Pacific Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries (LDCs and LLDCs) in making further progress, while Lack of coordination between Government agencies seems to be the most important challenge in other developing countries.

Going forward, digitalization offers immense potential to enhance trade facilitation implementation and further reduce trade costs in Asia and the Pacific. The *Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific*, which complements the WTO TFA by facilitating paperless trade, provides a unique opportunity for participating countries to accelerate electronic exchange of trade-related data and documents across borders and to overcome challenges on cross-border paperless trade.

¹ For example, the *Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific* was signed by Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Armenia, and Iran (Islamic Republic of) as of 30 September 2017, and the ratification process has been started on 1 October 2017 in these members.

Acknowledgements

The second global survey was jointly conducted by five United Nations Regional Commissions for Africa (ECA), Europe (ECE), Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Western Asia (ESCWA). The initiative was led and coordinated by ESCAP.

The regional report is part of this global survey effort. It was prepared by Tengfei Wang, Yann Duval, Chorthip Utoktham and Yuhua ZHANG, from Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, ESCAP. Critical review by Mohammad Farhad from Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute and contribution from Ying Liu and Luca Stanus-Ghib during their internship at ESCAP are gratefully acknowledged.

Support from the following organizations and individuals is gratefully acknowledged: Bismark Sitorus from UNCTAD, Mohammad Saeed from ITC; Evdokia Moise from OECD, Laisiana Tugaga from Oceania Customs Organization Secretariat (OCO), Dinara Sekerbaeva and Aleksei Bondarenko from Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC).

The United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT),² a knowledge community supported by ESCAP and ECE, greatly facilitated data collection. Comments and suggestions received from participants to the United Nations Regional Commission (UNRC) side event to the 6th Global Review on Aid for Trade (Geneva, 12 July 2017),³ where the preliminary findings from the global survey were presented, are gratefully acknowledged.

² <http://unnex.t.unescap.org>

³ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/aid4trade_e.htm

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEO	Authorized economic operator
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ENEA	East and North-East Asia
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
ICT	Information and communications technology
ITC	International Trade Centre
LDC	Least developed country
LLDC	Landlocked developing country
NCA	North and Central Asia
NTFC	National trade facilitation committee
OCO	Oceania Customs Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIDE	Pacific Island Developing Economies
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	South-East Asia
SELA	Latin American and Caribbean Economic System
SIDS	Small island developing states
SSWA	South and South-West Asia
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNNExT	United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport for Asia and the Pacific
UNRC	United Nations Regional Commission
USA	United States of America

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