



Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in ASEAN

SUB-REGIONAL REPORT 2019

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



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing trade costs is essential for developing economies to effectively use trade as an engine of growth and sustainable development. Trade facilitation and digitalization have taken increasing importance as evidenced by the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), as well as the growing number of regional and sub-regional initiatives for facilitating the electronic exchange of information along international supply chains, including the ASEAN Single Window (ASW) Agreement and the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

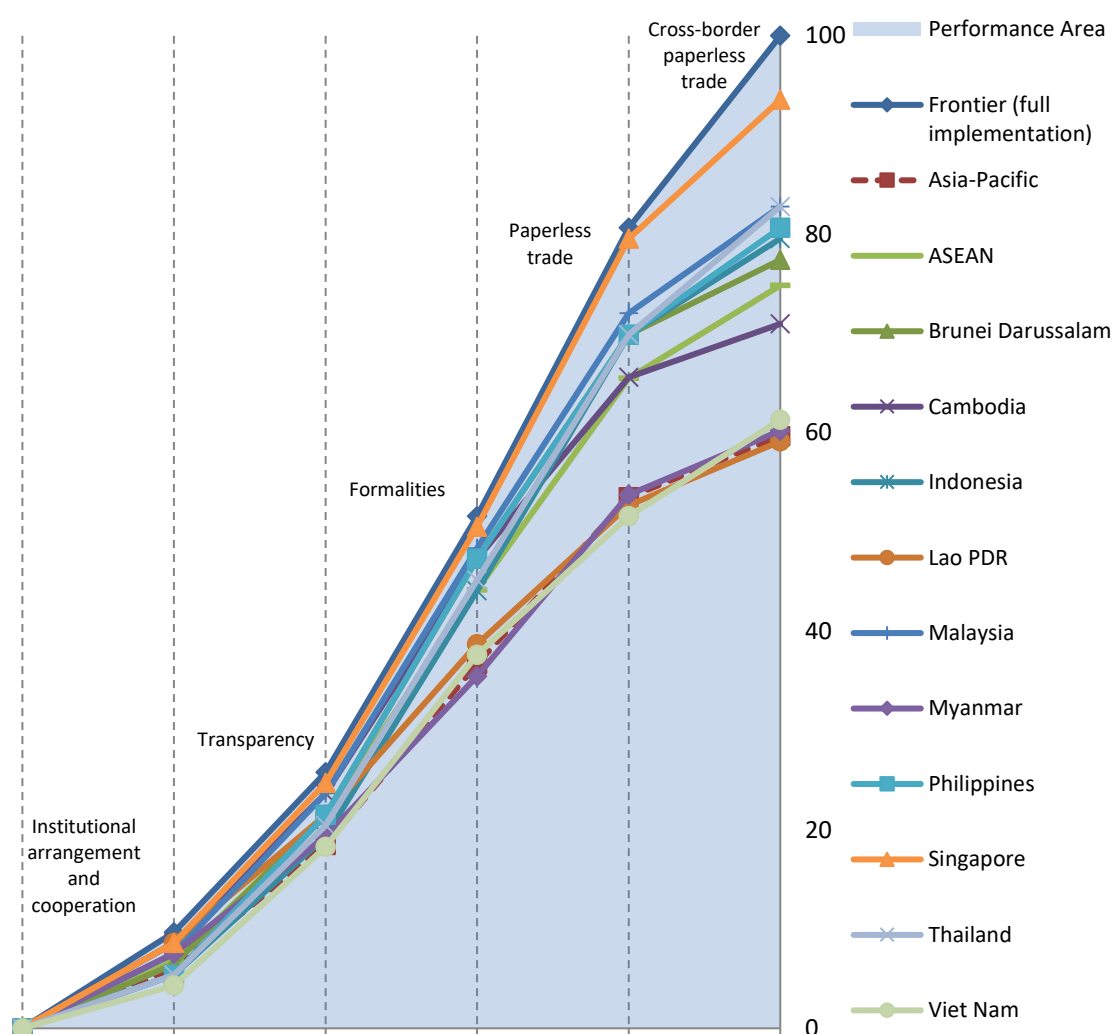
This report presents an analysis of the results of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for 10 ASEAN countries. The WTO TFA+ Survey was conducted during the first half of 2019 and covered 53 trade facilitation measures categorized under four categories: “General Trade Facilitation”, “Digital Trade Facilitation”, “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” and “Trade Finance Facilitation”. The report reveals that:

- ASEAN implementation rate of the measures stands at 75%, well above the Asia-Pacific regional average (59.7%). Within the Asia-Pacific region, implementation of trade facilitation and paperless trade is only behind Australia-New Zealand (93%) and, East and Northeast Asia (79.3%).
- Implementation in ASEAN remains quite heterogeneous. Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand achieve world-leading implementation rates of over 80%. Implementation in Myanmar and Lao PDR increased significantly, both standing now at about 60%. Cambodia is the best performing among the ASEAN Least Developed Countries.
- ASEAN has made faster progress in implementation than both the world and the rest of the Asia-Pacific region over the past two years. Implementation rate of ASEAN as a group improved from 64% to 75% between the first and second Global Surveys conducted in 2017 and 2019. Brunei Darussalam and Myanmar made the most rapid progress in advancing implementation, with implementation rates increasing by nearly 25 and 20 percentage points during that period, respectively.
- ASEAN countries have already implemented many of the WTO TFA related measures, in particular transparency measures. However, cross-border paperless trade implementation remains low despite ASEAN having taken an early global lead in this area with the ASW.¹
- Measures under the “sustainable trade facilitation” category are least implemented, particularly those targeted at women and SMEs. These measures are typically not specified in multilateral and/or regional agreements but need to be further emphasized to ensure trade facilitation benefits a wider range of stakeholders.
- Data on implementation of “trade finance” facilitation measures were collected for the first time this year and does not provide a complete picture. It suggests, however, a serious lack of awareness about the importance of these measures and how they could be integrated in trade facilitation strategies.

¹ The *Agreement to Establish and Implement the ASEAN Single Window* was signed in December 2005. However, live ASW operations started in 2018 among five members. See: <https://asw.asean.org>

The report finds that achieving basic ASEAN-wide compliance with the WTO TFA may reduce trade costs of the group by only about 5-6% going forward. In contrast, a more ambitious strategy involving digital trade facilitation and cross-border paperless trade could reduce trade costs by close to 13%. This would involve accelerating implementation of the ASW and leveraging ASW solutions and lessons learned to develop cross-border paperless trade with other partners. The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, a homegrown UN treaty that many ASEAN countries actively contributed to develop, provides the ideal platform for ASEAN to further develop its leadership in this area.²

Figure 1: Trade facilitation implementation in Asia-Pacific sub-regions including ASEAN



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: ESCAP, based on the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, unfjsurvey.org, 2019

² Among ASEAN countries, only Cambodia has signed the Framework Agreement. More ASEAN countries acceding would ensure the group is able to shape work priorities under this enabling treaty.

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/framework-agreement-facilitation-cross-border-paperless-trade-asia-and-pacific>

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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
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
WTO	World Trade Organization

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