

The [2019 UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation](#) is a biannual initiative led by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), aimed at monitoring progress on trade facilitation in 128 economies, sharing best practices and identifying capacity building and technical assistance needs in the countries where the survey is carried out.

As trade an important engine of growth and sustainable development, reducing trade costs can allow economies to effectively participate in regional and global value chains.

In countertendency with the past, where much attention was given to the removal or reduction of tariffs, to date, all economies are focusing their efforts toward the reduction of non-tariff barriers that raise trade costs, such as inefficient transport and logistics infrastructure and services, cumbersome regulatory procedures and documentation.

The relevant activities put in place are known, in their complex, as “trade facilitation measures”, and have been grouped in the report in the following 5 main categories:

- Transparency: publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet, stakeholder consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization), advance publication/notification of new regulations before their implementation (e.g. 30 days prior); advance ruling (on tariff classification); independent appeal mechanism (for traders to appeal customs rulings and the rulings of other relevant trade control agencies)
- Formalities: risk management (as a basis for deciding whether a shipment will be physically inspected or not), pre-arrival processing, post-clearance audit, separation of release from final determination of customs duties, taxes, fees and charges, establishment and publication of average release times, trade facilitation measures for authorised operators, expedited shipments, acceptance of paper or electronic copies of supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities.
- Institutional Arrangement and Cooperation: establishment of a national trade facilitation committee or similar body, cooperation between agencies on the ground at the national level, government agencies delegating controls to customs authorities, alignment of working days and hours with neighboring countries at border crossings, alignment of formalities and procedures with neighboring countries at border crossings. Such measures also include transit facilitation, namely: transit facilitation agreements with neighboring countries, customs authorities limit the physical inspection of transit goods and use risk assessment, supporting pre-arrival processing

for transit facilitation; cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit

- Paperless trade: electronic/automated customs system established (e.g. ASYCUDA), internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies at border-crossings, electronic Single Window System, electronic submission of customs declarations, electronic application and issuance of Import and Export Permit, electronic submission of sea cargo manifests; electronic submission of air cargo manifests, electronic application and issuance of preferential certificate of origin, e-payment of customs duties and fees; electronic application for customs refunds.

- Cross-Border Paperless Trade: laws and regulations for electronic transactions are in place (e.g. e-commerce law, e-transaction law), recognized certification authority issuing digital certificates to traders to conduct electronic transactions, customs declaration electronically exchanged between your country and other countries, certificate of origins electronically exchanged between countries; sanitary & phytosanitary certificates electronically exchanged between countries; banks and insurers retrieving letters of credit electronically without lodging paper-based documents.

For all the above trade facilitation measures, the 2019 UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation analyses their rates of implementation in the different economies of the world. In addition, the report also explores the following areas:

- Digital Trade Facilitation: an assessment is made of innovative, technology-driven measures aimed at enabling the use and exchange of electronic trade data and documents;

- Sustainable Trade Facilitation: analysis of trade facilitation measures addressed to specific groups, like SMEs and women, or sectors (ex. trade facilitation measures aimed to promote the development of the agricultural sector);

- Trade Finance: analysis of initiatives aimed to facilitate trade-related financial services (ex. electronic exchange of data between trading partners or with banks in other countries to reduce dependence on paper documentation and advance digital trade).

The report points out that in less developed countries the status of implementation of trade facilitation measures is not sufficient, and this is seriously jeopardising their economic growth efforts, because of the higher impact of non-tariff barriers on trade costs. For instance, in the

ASEAN region (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) such costs can represent up to 76% of the total value of goods traded within this area, while the overall cost of trading goods among the three largest European Union (EU) economies is equivalent to 42% of their value.

The average implementation rates of trade facilitation in the different areas of the world is also measured. In sub-Saharan Africa, these rates are labeled as particularly low, if compared with other Regions, the best achievers being Sudan, Malawi, Mauritius and Senegal, that made significant progress in terms of cross-border paperless trade, paperless trade, institutional arrangement and cooperation, formalities and transparency. Conversely, Gabon and South Sudan are considered the countries that made less progress in terms of trade facilitation. Countries like Ethiopia, Madagascar, Comoros and Somalia are rated as middle performers, but with little or no progress in the area of transparency.

The report concludes by stating that while efforts in enhancing transparency and streamlining formalities at the national level should continue, more attention will need to be paid to cross-border cooperation and interoperability issues among paperless trade systems, so as to enable the safe and seamless flow of electronic data and documents along international supply chains.