

There are no translations available.

With 21 member countries, trade within the COMESA region can be challenging, as traders are confronted with extensive and duplicated documentation transmissions, to both the export and the import country, in different data formats and data types. To overcome this challenge, COMESA is working with its member States to launch a Regional Electronic Single Window (called "COMSW") that will enable trade and customs documents transmitted by exporters to the country of exit of goods to be used as entry documentation in other COMESA countries where they are imported, so to avoid duplications in the transmission of such information. This is the first experience of such type in Africa. Electronic documents that will be exchanged through the COMSW will include import and export licenses, permits and various types of certificates required for completing cross-border trade transactions.

A Single Window as a trade facilitation tool that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single-entry point to fulfill all import, export, and transit related-related regulatory requirements.

The decision to develop a regional platform to ensure the interoperability between the electronic single windows of COMESA member States was adopted by the COMESA Council of Ministers in 2017, which identified the development of a regional Single Window (SW) as a solution able to improve intra-regional trade and enhance the economic integration between COMESA member States. Accordingly, the Council mandated the COMESA Secretariat to coordinate the development of a regional single window strategy with an implementation roadmap. Subsequently, a Technical Working Group of Customs experts was established.

Delegates comprising of IT and legal experts from the COMESA Member States and cooperating partners started on April 17, 2023 in Nairobi a four-day session to discuss plans for the implementation of the COMESA SW, by analysing the status of implementation of National Single Windows by COMESA member states. This work should lead to the approval of draft Terms of Reference to engage a consultant to assist in developing and implementing the COMSW. [According to COMESA](#), to date, 14 member States have in place National Single Windows. These are: Burundi, Comoros, DRC, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. It must be noted however, that Djibouti, more precisely, has in place a Port Community System (PCS) that

currently does not cover the full range of documents and formalities related to the import, export and transit operations in the country (on the difference between SWs and PCSs, read our [article](#) ).

In December 2017, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) published the [Recommendation 36](#) on Single Window Interoperability which provides details on the preparations needed, including the models for information sharing that need to be developed, before implementing bilateral and regional Single Windows, with some best practices.

Pioneer work in the development of a regional SW has been done by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a regional economic forum established in 1989 to promote free trade between 21 countries of the Asia-Pacific region. In [August 2018](#) and [November 2019](#) , APEC published two studies to assess the different options for interconnecting the national SW systems of its members, also exploring the possibilities offered by new technologies like the blockchain. On November 30, 2018, three of its members (United States, Mexico and Canada) replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with a new Agreement called USMCA that entered into force on 1st July 2020. This Agreement for the first time introduces a legal provision (Article 7.6, Chapter 7 on Customs administration and trade facilitation), that urges the Parties to “work towards a harmonization, to the extent possible, of data elements and customs processes that facilitate use of a single transmission of information to both the exporting and importing Party”.

Last year, a [joint report](#) of the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) raised again the importance of ensuring interoperability between national SWs in order to accelerate transmission of electronic data and documents related to international transactions.