

The World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH) jointly released the [Guidelines on Cooperation between Customs and Port Authorities](#) on the occasion of the IAPH 2023 World Ports Conference which opened on 31 October in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

The Guidelines mainly focus on digitalization of data flows between the two authorities, but also outline methods to institutionalize cooperation, establish a data governance policy and ensure a mutual understanding of each other's business, given the fact that these two administrations share common areas of responsibility and risks.

Indeed, port authorities must provide support to Customs and other control bodies so that these agencies can act in a coordinated and preferably simultaneous way in conducting regulatory inspections, by adopting a one-stop-shop approach, where controls are carried out at the same time and in a single place. The concept of controls carried out at the same time implies the need to conduct joint inspections so to reduce the time needed for handling and clearance of the goods, with evident benefits also for the holders of the cargo, who can minimize disruptions to their operations and, therefore, reduce costs.

The WCO-IAPH guidelines offer an overview of business processes, supporting IT systems and innovative technologies allowing interoperability between Customs' and ports' automated systems and the exchange of information between these two authorities. In this regard, the guidelines promote the interconnection between Single Windows with other similar systems developed at ports, such as Maritime Single Windows and Port Community Systems (PCSs), in attempt to reduce the phenomenon – observed in several countries - of creation of a multitude of national Single Window platforms.

The main recommendation is that instead of insisting on building separate Single Windows, it is better to promote the development of a 'Single Window Environment' where all the communication flows among all organizations present at the border, both public and private, are centralized through an intelligent collaboration platform that receives and disseminates standardized information among such organizations, including Customs and Port Authorities. The benefits of such environment are obvious. It can promote the reduction in the number of documentary submission, optimization of processes, efficiency improvement and cost reduction in ports and international trade, which is beneficial to both private sector and government regulators, thus contributing to the overall improvement of trade facilitation.

Lastly, the document clarifies the differences between PCSs, Single Windows, Port

Management Information Systems (PMIS) and Terminal Operating Systems and Vessel Traffic Management Information System (VTMIS), describing the key port business processes on the vessel side, the port terminal side, and the hinterland side, with recommendations on how to automate them.