

So far, the actions adopted by governments worldwide to curb the COVID-19 diffusion have severely affected international trade, provoking shutdowns and disruptions to the global supply (the Institute for Supply Management, in a [survey](#) dated March 10 2020, with respondents largely representing U.S. manufacturing, points out that nearly 75 percent of companies report supply chain disruptions in some capacity due to coronavirus-related transportation restrictions), interrupting many manufacturing activities and shipments. However, keeping goods moving across borders is essential to the economic growth and to mitigate the immediate and longer-term socio-economic consequences of the crisis.

The [Interpol guidelines for law enforcement](#) dated 26 March 2020, in accordance with international best practices and the WHO, recommend – among other things - to avoid or limit as much as possible direct manual handling of paper documents, as well as human interactions, in particular at border crossing points, as they can be a vehicle for the transmission of COVID-19.

In order to reduce direct contacts with documents and human-to-human contacts in the international supply chain, UNECE and its United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) have developed a series of [recommendations and standards for international trade](#) reflecting best practices in trade procedures and data and documentary requirements which are used worldwide to simplify and harmonise international trade procedures and information flows. A recent [article](#) published on the UNECE website describes the main tools developed by such organisation in this regard.

The UN/CEFACT recommendations basically encourage governments to invest in solutions aimed to standardise and dematerialise trade, customs and transport data exchange flows and documentation. Hereunder is a list of the main ones.

**UN/EDIFACT:** UN/EDIFACT is a standard for the electronic exchange of data widely used in international supply chains, transport and logistics (see the [UN/CEFACT Recommendation No 25](#)), which removes human interactions in each transaction, by dematerialising signatures and ink-seals to the actual paper documents, so that they do not need to be passed from hand to hand. UN/CEFACT calculates that shipping companies and terminals remotely exchange more than 1 billion UN/EDIFACT messages per year covering more than 75% of sea freight worldwide.

**Single Window (SW):** based on the UN/CEFACT Recommendations No 33 (Recommendation and Guidelines on establishing a Single Window), No 34 (on Data Simplification and Standardization for Single Windows), No 35 (Establishing a legal framework for international trade Single Window) and No 36 (on Cross-Border Interoperability of Single Windows), the Single Window is an electronic interface where exporters and importers can submit regulatory and commercial documents to Ministries and other cross-border regulatory agencies with trade-related functions, as well as to private stakeholders like banks, insurances, Chambers of Commerce, etc., that allows paperless customs clearance processes, eliminating person-to-person interactions. SW systems also give, in many case, the possibility to traders to pay customs duties, taxes and other levies or fees associated with a given import, export or transit transaction in a single payment across all border agencies, thus accelerating the release process.

**Port Community Systems (PCSs):** PCSs are Single Submission Portals (SSPs) described in the UN/CEFACT Recommendation No 37 (Single Submission Portals - SSPs) that automate and streamline all the information flow gravitating around a particular kind of transport infrastructure, like a seaport, inland shipping docks, rail terminals, truck terminals, dry ports or air transport facilities, and are another solution that helps to limit human interactions as they avoid drivers, customs brokers and other customs and transport intermediaries to present manually cargo documents to inspection officers, as the entire paperwork can be submitted electronically through the platform (with regard to the difference between SWs and PCSs read our [article](#) ).

