

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown its brutal impact particularly on Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), as these countries are particularly vulnerable to cross-border restrictions and border closures, given their dependency on transit transport to access international markets. Even in normal times, functioning and efficient transport networks and transit procedures are particularly critical in increasing connectivity and integration of the LLDCs into world markets. During the COVID-19 crisis, there is an even more urgent need to ensure smooth transport of goods to and from these countries, by ensuring the delivery of much-needed medical equipment and basic goods, and in the long-term perspective, in order to facilitate trade and access to global markets, spurring economic pick-up post COVID-19.

Although most of the transport measures introduced in response to COVID-19 have exempted movement of essential commodities, border closures, travel restrictions and heightened screenings have resulted in long queues at land borders and congestions at ports and airports across the world. In some countries, this situation has been exacerbated by the lack of adequate infrastructure at inland border-crossing points, which not only poses additional challenges to the processes at borders, but also exposes staff to higher contagion risks. The decreased operation of port services, as a consequence of the pandemic, has also generated substantive increases in maritime logistics costs, impacting the costs of land transportation and, ultimately, affecting the cost of products to the final consumers. Given that LLDCs already face higher costs when compared to other countries, the consequences of COVID-19 are even more detrimental to their competitiveness in international markets. Facilitating smooth movement of goods and keeping borders open for trade in these countries is therefore fundamental.

In a “ [Joint UN call for smooth transit and transport facilitation to and from landlocked developing countries](#) ”, heads of major UN agencies urgently call national governments and regional organisations for decisive action to help LLDCs now, inviting them to collaborate with each other in order to keep cross-border transport corridors and regional transport networks open as much as possible, while protecting public health.

Governments are asked to refrain from any unjustified restraints on traffic and goods in transit to make sure that goods can depart from and reach the LLDCs when needed, without any delay or hinderance. Moreover, it is critical that border clearance procedures for medical equipment and basic goods and commodities to LLDCs are simplified and fast-tracked. Ensuring transparency and information availability about import, export and transit procedures is essential in order to secure the smooth flow of goods. LLDCs and transit partner countries are encouraged to make trade and transit related information available on the internet, including by making use of centralized online Trade Information Portals.

Secondly, LLDCs and neighbouring countries are invited to make greater use of trade facilitation standards and digital technologies that limit physical checks in transit, physical contact at borders and protect the health of workers, such as electronic exchange of information and other solutions based on the [dematerialisation of trade documents](#) so to reduce direct contacts with documents and human-to-human contacts in the international supply chain.

Other solutions recommended by the joint Statement are the implementation of the eTIR International System; the use of electronic consignment notes such as eCMR (allowing electronic tracking and tracing of goods and vehicles); the automation of customs procedures; and the implementation of digital freight corridors. Policies and procedures that prevent unnecessary and systematic stopping of trucks at all borders also need to be implemented. The implementation of international conventions such as the Revised Kyoto Convention, the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, the TIR Convention, the Harmonization Convention and other relevant legal instruments are of utmost importance in these times to facilitate transit transport.

The joint statement sees the crisis as an opportunity to reorient international freight transport operations towards a more sustainable path. In doing so, they should capitalize on the strengths of more safe modes of transport, like railway transport, that should be further encouraged and facilitated.

