



Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in Asia and the Pacific **2019**

Based on the United Nations Global Survey
on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

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FOREWORD

The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation is jointly conducted by five United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs) for Africa (ECA), Europe (ECE), Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and West Asia (ESCWA). Led by ESCAP, it aims to gather information from countries worldwide on implementation of digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures. The results of the survey will enable countries and development partners to better understand and monitor progress on trade facilitation, support evidence-based public policies, share best practices and identify capacity building and technical assistance needs.

The first and second global surveys were conducted in 2015 and 2017 as part of the Joint UNRCs Approach to Trade Facilitation agreed in 2010 by the Executive Secretaries of all five UNRCs. The joint approach was designed to enable the Regional Commissions to present a joint and global view on trade facilitation issues in the context of the negotiations of the Doha Round at the World Trade Organization (WTO). This initiative has benefitted from the input of many partners such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) Secretariat, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC).

This third survey builds upon the earlier surveys and include new forward-looking measures related to trade digitalization, trade finance and sustainable development. Indeed, the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development recognizes international trade – along with science, technology and innovation – as one of the key means of implementation of the agreed Sustainable Development Goals.

Against this background, we hope that this report further supports the economies around the region in their efforts to make trade simpler, cheaper and more sustainable through the use and application of technology and innovations in international trade procedures.

The regional report should be read together with the global report, subregional and country notes. The underlying dataset, available upon request, can be used by researchers and analysts for any further analysis. More information is available at <https://untfsurvey.org/>



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The regional report is part of a global survey effort on the implementation of trade facilitation and paperless trade measures, undertaken jointly by the five UNRCs for Africa (ECA), Europe (ECE), Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and West Asia (ESCWA). The report was prepared by Jiangyuan Fu and Chorthip Utoktham under the guidance of Yann Duval and the overall supervision of Mia Mikic, all from the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division (TIID) of ESCAP.

Akhmad Bayhaqi from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Policy Support Unit, Cuong Ba Tran and Anki Agustrin from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, Roy Lagolago and Kalei Billings-Dugu of the Oceania Customs Organization (OCO), Patrick Goettner from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and Maria-Theresa Pisani and Salehin Khan of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), as well as Yuhua Zhang and Sangwon Lim from ESCAP also contributed to the survey efforts, in particular by facilitating data collection from relevant experts as well as data validation in several countries. The active participation of the participants to the Asia-Pacific Forum on Trade Digitalization for Sustainable Regional Integration and the interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation, held on 12-15 March 2019, in the initial data collection effort is gratefully acknowledged. The United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT), a knowledge community supported by ESCAP and ECE, also greatly facilitated data collection.

Comments and suggestions received from participants at the UNRCs side event to the seventh Global Review on Aid for Trade (Geneva, July 2019), where the preliminary findings from the global survey were presented, are gratefully acknowledged. Authors are also grateful to Alexander Malaket, Doina Buruiana and Olivier Paul from the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Banking Commission for their inputs and suggestions on the trade finance component of the 2019 Survey. The research assistance provided by Danijel Bajt and Vasan Narang, TIID, ESCAP in finalizing the report is appreciated. Tony Oliver edited the report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing trade costs is essential in enabling economies to effectively participate in regional and global value chains and for them to continue to use trade as an important engine of growth and sustainable development. In turn, streamlining cumbersome regulatory trade procedures and documentation, is essential to lower trade costs and make trade more inclusive. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and new regional trade digitalization initiatives provide guidance on measures that should be considered for implementation.¹

In this context, this report presents results of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for 46 countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The survey was conducted during the first half of 2019 and covered 53 trade facilitation measures categorized under four groups: General trade facilitation, Digital trade facilitation, Sustainable trade facilitation and Trade finance. As such, the scope of the survey is “TFA+”, i.e., it includes measures specified in the WTO TFA as well as complementary digital, sustainable and other measures not specifically included in that agreement.

The regional implementation rate increased by more than 10 percentage points since the last survey was conducted in 2017, reaching nearly 60% in 2019. All countries and subregions have made progress. The highest progress is observed in North and Central Asia, followed by South-East Asia, and South and South-West Asia.

Trade facilitation implementation levels vary greatly across subregions. Apart from Australia and New Zealand, East and North-East Asia achieved the highest average level of implementation at 79.3%, followed by South-East Asia, North and Central Asia, and South and South-West Asia. Pacific Island Developing Economies lag far behind other subregions. At the country level, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand achieved scores in excess of 90%.

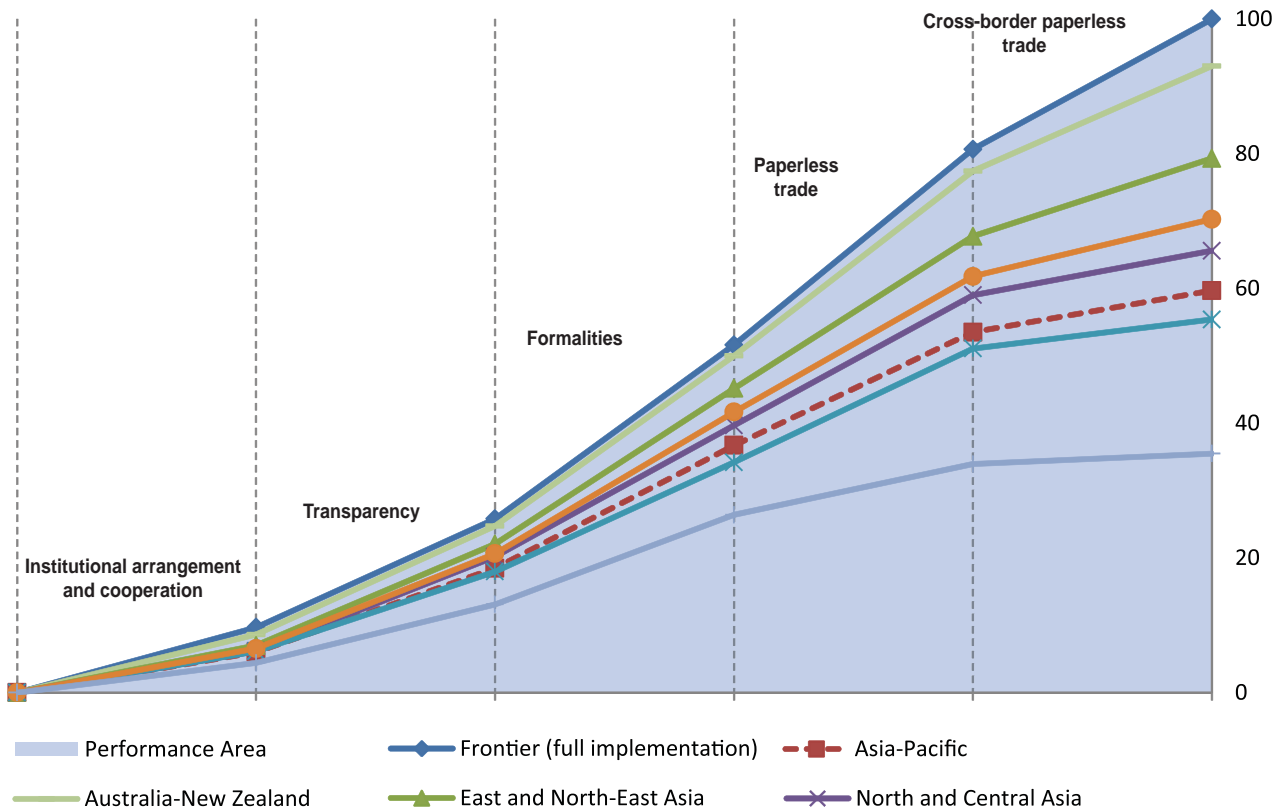
Trade facilitation implementation levels also vary across groups of measures. The region’s implementation of WTO TFA-related measures is relatively high, at 60-80%. Implementation of national paperless trade measures is also relatively high, as many countries are endeavouring, to develop e-payment systems for duties and fees, and to initiate development electronic single window facilities. However, implementation of cross-border paperless trade remains very low, given the difficulties involved in achieving consensus on technical and legal issues associated with exchanging electronic data and documents across borders. In this regard, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific provides a unique platform for ESCAP member States to accelerate progress.

Measures under the “Sustainable trade facilitation” group are the least implemented, particularly those aimed at women and SMEs. These measures are not specified in multilateral and/or regional agreements but need to be further emphasized to ensure trade facilitation benefits a wider range of stakeholders. Data on implementation of “Trade Finance” facilitation measures were collected for the first time this year and do not provide a complete picture. It suggests, however, a serious lack of awareness about the importance of these measures and how they could be integrated in trade facilitation strategies.

¹ For example, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific was signed or acceded to by seven countries, i.e., Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Azerbaijan and the Philippines. About 20 other States are at various stages of the treaty accession process and participate annually in the interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation, a body that spearheaded the negotiation of the treaty and is now supporting its implementation.

The report also includes an analysis of the impact on trade cost from increasing implementation of trade facilitation and paperless trade measures in Asia and the Pacific. Full implementation of binding measures in the WTO TFA results in a decrease of trade costs of 5.8%, while full implementation of all WTO TFA measures results in a 9.4% reduction. In contrast, digital implementation of the TFA, together with enabling the seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents across borders, results in much larger trade costs reductions that average nearly 17% for the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. Acceding to the Framework Agreement, an enabling United Nations treaty open to all 53 ESCAP member States, regardless of their current level of development, may help participating countries to accelerate progress in this area once it enters into force.

Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



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